

The prophets' Cry in Limbo: Origin and History of a Special Scene in Medieval Plays

In the late fifteenth century Low-German play of Arnold Immessen, known under the title *Sündenfall* there is a very long and complicated story of the Old Testament prophets narrated.¹ The scene takes place after the depiction of the Fall and death of Adam, which is followed by some Old Testament scenes as the episode of Seth, Noah, Abraham and Isaac and finally the dialogue of Moses and God and the sacrifice of Melchisedech which directly precedes the discourse of the prophets. After a short pause, marked by the recitation of an antiphon (*Sacerdos in aeternum*), there follows the scene itself starting with a lyric lament of Adam and Eve introduced as *clamor de profundis in limbo*. As a response to this penitential cry there come the Old Testament prophets David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and so on consoling the parents of mankind with their foretellings of future Salvation (vv. 2157-2318).

Later, when Salomo's turn comes, he invites them all to a banquet where the famous scene of the judgement of the two women and the visitation of the Queen of Sabah is represented (vv. 2319-2803). It is in this context that a new and more detailed series of prophecies come, where all the prophets and Sybills are called forth to foretell about Christ (vv. 2805-3249).

After getting encouragement of the sequence of some thirty prophecies, the forefathers decide to send a delegation to God to ask for his salvation. After the selection of Isaiah, Jeremiah and David as deputies, the three prophets ascend to God to pray him with the words of their own books for the deliverance of mankind. As a response God rebukes all with other selected passages from their prophecies and they disappointedly go back to the fathers in the netherworld (vv. 3250-3467).

Here, after a short pause, the wedding of Joachim and Anne is told (vv. 3468-3539) and then we are again in the netherworld where the prophets decide to acquire the mercy of God by choosing a virgin for him as a bride. Then it is again David who is being sent as a garcon to God and is introduced by the archangel Michael (vv. 3540-3639). Later as a

¹ The play was edited twice, first in 1855 by Schönemann (*Der Sündenfall und Marienklage. Zwei niederdeutsche Schauspiele aus Handschriften der Wolfenbütteler Bibliothek*, Hannover 1855) and later in 1913 by Friedrich Krage (*Arnold Immessen Der Sündenfall* (Germanische Bibliothek II/8) Heidelberg 1913). In the following the edition of Krage will be used and cited.

reaction to David's words the famous debate of Mercy and Justice takes place (vv. 3640-3755) as a result of which the archangel Gabriel is sent to Anne to inform her on the birth of her daughter (vv. 3756-3857) and David returns joyfully to the prophets to assure them about the coming of the Saviour (vv. 3858-3962).

As is obvious even from this short summary of the content of Arnold's play, it is the different scenes of the prophets which occupy almost the half of the 4000 lines of the German text which refers to the high importance of the prophets in the play. For this very cause it is surprising that scholars investigating the sources of the play paid so little attention to the role of the prophets.

Generally, it is the apocryphal legends of Adam's death and the origin of the Cross which they usually recognize as sources and sometimes they manage to find some motifs borrowed from late medieval exegesis or humanist literature. However, what is far more striking, is that the long and complicated story of the Old Testament fathers is usually considered as a simple *Prophetenszene*² known in several other medieval plays but sometimes only as a direct but expanded derivation of the well known *Ordo prophetarum*.³

However, after a closer look at the structure of the prophetic scenes in the play, one has the impression that there are at least three different types of the so-called *Prophetenszenen* used and put together by Arnold Immessen. The first is the lament of the foreparents and the consolations given them by the prophets in the limbo which is interrupted by the Salomo-scene. The second is the thirty prophecies of the Old Testament prophets and the Sybills told at the banquet of Salomo and thirdly the council and delegation of the prophets, their ascension and prayers to God, which was interrupted by the debate of Grace and Justice, the wedding of Joachim and Anne and the Annunciation to Anne, respectively.

It seems likely, then, that Arnold combined several different prophets-scenes into his narrative which all seem to have different origin. Nevertheless, the scenes as a whole have one peculiar feature in common, that is Arnold Immessen's forefathers are all situated in the netherworld, and it is from there that they cry, pray and ascend to God to ask him to send the Saviour for them. This special feature, then, seems to separate these scenes from the tradition marked by the *Ordo prophetarum*, where the prophets are not situated in the underworld and it is not their crying and longing for salvation which is depicted.

What, then, could be the background of Arnold's three different prophet-scenes situated in the limbo, what could be the source for the prophets' cry and for their curious

² Creizenach 1911, 235

³ Sepet, M., *Les Prophètes du Christ. Étude sur les origines du théâtre au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1878, 177: 'forme singulièrement développée'.

council and delegation to God? Is it only Immessen himself who combines the different traditions and put the whole situation into the underworld or is there an earlier tradition for the forfeathers' lament in the limbo and Immessen's play is only a stage of a long development? An answer to these problems can only be found after a closer examination of the tradition and later development of the prophets' scene in medieval plays and a comparison with the scene itself with medieval liturgical and theological tradition. In the following an attempt will be made to investigate the background of Arnold Immessen's curious prophets scenes which hopefully brings us to a better understanding of the later development and literary usage of the *Prophetenszenen* in medieval drama and may give an answer to the question where the tradition of a lament and prayer of the prophets in the underworld originates from.

1. A Special Type of the Ordo Prophetarum

At first, as the most obvious solution a comparison should be made between Arnold's prophets and the best known and most wide spread prophetic scene of medieval plays, the so-called *Processus* or *Ordo Prophetarum*. This 'process' is originally a quite simple performance where the Old Testament Prophets are called forth to recite their prophecies about Christ, his Nativity and / or Passion, that is the future Salvation of Mankind. The first analysis of the scene which was carried out by Maurice Sepet in the 1870's counts ever since as one of the most important classics of research on medieval drama and theatre. In his book, published originally in parts and later as a separate monograph, Sepet puts forward a twofold theory concerning the Prophets Play. At the one hand, he argues that the first occurrences of the Prophets scene in the liturgy derive from a 6th century Latin sermon attributed to St. Augustine. While, at the other, he tried to prove that it was the liturgical phenomenon of the *Ordo Prophetarum* which gave birth **to all the other Old Testament scenes** found in later mystery plays written in the vernacular. Consequently, in his audacious sketch about the further development of the *Ordo prophetarum* from the sermon to the complicated Old Testament cycles, he lists also Immessen's play as a 'singularly developed' stage of this 'evolution'.⁴

However, if one compares the German play with most characteristic pieces of the prophetic process, such as the Limoges and Laon *Ordo*, there are considerable differences to be found. Beside the above mentioned special feature of Immessen's play that the whole situation is placed in the netherworld, even the word of the prophets are absolutely different.

⁴ Sepet, *Prophetes du Christ*, 177.

While the prophecies recited by the liturgical plays concentrate on the coming of the Saviour, the two series in Immessen's text, that of the first part with text put into the mouth of Adam, Eve and the prophets and that of the third, i. e. the delegation of the forefathers to God contain other citations mainly of lamentational and penitential character. It is only the second series of the thirty prophecies, recited at the banquet of Salomon which could be paralleled with the liturgical plays.

Some slight similarity occurs only between the long series of prophets in the so-called *Ordo of Rouen* and the second prophetic scene of Arnold Immessen's text presented as a part of Salomon's banquet. This similarity as comes out from the following table stands mainly in the sequence of the prophets called forth and in a small part of the foretellings, namely that of the minor prophets, there is also textual similarity to observe.

Pseudo-Augustinian Sermon	Ordo of Limoges	Ordo of Laon	Ordo of Rouen	Arnold Immessen's II. Prophetic Scene
Isaiah (Is 7,14)	Israel	Isaiah (Is 7,14)	Moses (Gen 18,15;	Solomo
Jeremiah (Bar 3,36-38)	Moses (Gen 18,15; 18-19)	Jeremiah (Bar 3,36-38)	18-19)	Isaiah (61,1-3; 62,5)
Daniel (Dn 9,24)	Isaiah (Is 9,1-2)	Daniel (Dn 9,24)	Amos (Am 8,11)	Jeremiah (2,2)
Moses (Gen 18, 15; 18-19)	Jeremiah (Bar 3,36-38)	Moses (Gen 18, 15; 18-19)	Isaiah (Is 9,1-2)	Sibylls
David (Ps 21,28-29)	Daniel (Dn 9,24)	David (Ps 21,28-29)	Aaron (Num 18,5-8)	Daniel (7,12)
Habacuc (Hb 3,2)	Habacuc (Hb 3,2)	Habacuc (Hb 3,2)	Jeremiah (Bar 3,36)	Hoseah (13,14)
Simeon	David (Ps 21,28-29)	Simeon	Daniel (Dn 9,24)	<i>Joel</i> (4,18)
Zacariah	Simeon	Balaam (Num 24,17)	Habacuc (3,2)	Amos (9,13)
Elisabeth	Elisabeth		Balaam (Num 24,17)	<i>Abdiah</i> (1; 2)
John the Baptist	John the Baptist		Samuel (1Kings 3,11)	<i>Jonah</i> (3,9)
Vergil	Vergil		David (Ps 21,28-29)	<i>Miceah</i> (1,3)
Nabuchadnezzar	Nabuchadnezzar		Hoseah (Hos 3,5)	<i>Nahum</i> (1,12 ; 15)
Sibyl	Sibyl		<i>Joel</i> (2,28)	Habacuc (3,13)
			<i>Abdias</i> (17.)	<i>Zephaniah</i> (3,17)
			<i>Jonah</i> (Mt 12,39-40)	<i>Aggeus</i> (2,8)
			<i>Miceah</i> (1,3)	<i>Zacariah</i> (9,9)
			<i>Nahum</i> (1,15)	<i>Malaciah</i> (3,1)
			<i>Zephaniah</i> (3,14)	
			<i>Aggeus</i> (2,8)	
			<i>Zacariah</i> (9,9)	
			Ezechiel (44,1-3)	
			<i>Malaciah</i> (3,1)	
			Zacariah	

			Elisabeth John the Baptist Simeon Vergil Nabuchadnezzar Sibyl	
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As is evident from the above list, then, it is only the expanded Rouen version of the *Ordo* which alone exhibits some parallel to Arnold Immessen's text. Even more interesting is the fact that the differences between the Rouen version of the prophets and Arnold's text consist mainly in those parts which the Rouen type of the *Ordo* shares with the more ancient and general form of the Prophets deriving from the Sermon. While the differing passages generally coincide with the series of the prophets in *Sündenfall* at least in its sequence but more than once even in the texts put into the mouth of the prophets. It seems probable, then, that in the background of the long list of prophets in *Sündenfall* there lies a similar, basically chronologically arranged list of prophecies concerning Christ's coming to the world. So it is only the second scene of Arnold Immessen's prophets which might stand in connection with wide-spread tradition of the *Ordo Prophetarum* deriving from the Pseudo-Augustinian sermon, and the other two, the laments in and the delegation from the netherworld could be of other origin. That is highlighted also by the fact that the first three prophecies of the long second series in *Sündenfall* differs considerably from those traditionally present in the tradition of the *Ordo* containing also prayers for or foretellings of deliverance from death and darkness and not prophecies. So these citations seem to serve as introduction or bridge between the context of the whole scene placed in the netherworld at the one hand and the series of citations foretelling the advent of Christ.

If, then, the above observations on the origin of the second *Prophetenszene* are correct, for a better understanding of the whole structure of *Sündenfall* and for further investigation of the origin of the prophets' lament in the netherworld it is the first scene of Arnold Immessen's prophets which needs to be examined. It is this very motif which gives the main character of the whole sequence of prophetic scenes putting it into the limbo. So probably it is because of this passage represented as a lament of the forefathers captivated by the demons and devils in the limbo that the following scenes – even that of Salamon's judgement put in an extraordinary manner also in the underworld – are situated as events passing by in the

netherworld. So it is this particular scene which may give the key for the whole tradition of the prophets' cry in limbo.

2. The Lament of the Old Testament Fathers in Limbo

Maurice Sepet's above mentioned findings, as being the first systematical source-analysis of medieval plays, had a great impact on further scholarship, and his hypothesis concerning the origin of the *Ordo Prophetarum* in the Pseudo Augustinian sermon remained ever since accepted. However, his other view about the crucial importance of the *Ordo Prophetarum* – and consequently also of the sermon itself – in the further evolution of medieval mystery plays, though being taken up by several later experts and manuals of medieval theatre, has raised serious doubts. Some twenty years after the publication of Sepet's book Wilhelm Meyer has already expressed his doubts about the conjectures concerning the later developments of the Prophets' Play as presented by Sepet. Later in 1913 Hardin Craig has devoted a whole article to the critique of Sepet's view on the origin of Old Testament scenes in later vernacular plays as deriving from the 'Prophètes du Christ'. His paper was followed by other important contributions. So, for example, Karl Young's comprehensive analysis of the liturgical forms of the *Ordo Prophetarum*, where he – in his usual modest manner – also criticized Sepet's 'tenuous and more ambitious conjectures' about the origin of later Old Testament scenes from the Prophets.⁵

However, despite of the critical remarks presented from the 1910's onwards continually, Sepet's thesis about the derivation of *all the medieval prophets' scenes* from the Pseudo-Augustinian sermon remained a commonplace of medieval theatre-history. Even such renowned experts as Wilhelm Creizenach, William Chambers or Rolf Bergmann⁶ seem to agree with him that the monologues and dialogues containing prophecies on Christ's coming, passion and resurrection and put into the mouth of the prophets themselves generally go back to the homily of the Pseudo-Augustine.

This unanimous conformity of research is even more surprising when one considers that from the 1970's there have been several important contributions published which were to take a stand against Sepet's theory and draw the attention that beside the tradition of the *Ordo Prophetarum* there were several different uses of the prophets-motif in medieval plays not necessarily deriving from the sermon. Already in 1915 Adeline Jenney has noticed that

⁵ Young, *Ordo prophetarum*, 82.

⁶ Bergmann, R.: *Die Prophetenszene der Frankfurter Dirigierrolle*, in, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 94 (1975), 22-29.

sometimes the *Processus Prophetarum* serves only as a kind of interlude to bridge the time-space between the Fall of Man and the Incarnation of Christ usually called the period of law (*tempus legis*) and of the prophets (*tempus prophetarum*) in medieval historiography.⁷ This view was taken up some sixty years later by Robert Brawer who already considered prophetic procession as means of presenting the conception of time and history in Middle English plays.⁸ It was also in this manner that Vaughan has analysed the prophetic section of the 12th century *Jeu d'Adam* coming to the result that the procession of the prophets in the Norman-French play can be best interpreted as a bridge between Adam and the Incarnation or the Birth of Mary while it places mainly Marian prophecies into the mouth of the single prophets.⁹

Even these important findings about the function of the medieval prophets' play have hardly found their way to the public, but the fact that there exist another, quite different type of the medieval prophets' scene, the one observed in the case of the *Sündenfall*, has remained virtually unnoticed and uninvestigated.

Although even Sepet, Creizenach or Petit de Juleville in the 19th century and Hardin Craig in the beginning of the 20th century have observed that there existed a curious type of the prophets where they appear as patriarchs awaiting redemption, they had nothing to say about the scene. It was only Craig who has one single remark on the problem, that 'it is not their original or their commonest function in the religious drama', but he also failed to give any explanation for this new and uncommon function.

2. 1. *The Adventsspiel*

It was only in German scholarship that some critics, dealing with the late 13th century St. Galler Weihnachtsspiel, have realized that the German play exhibits a particular type of the prophets' scene which cannot be explained by the tradition of the *Ordo*. It was noticed even by Joseph Klapper, the first editor of the St. Gallen play, that both the sequence of the prophets coming forth in the German text and the prophecies foretold by them differ reasonably from the tradition represented in the most important sources of the *Ordo*.

As an explanation for this divergence Klapper put forward a theory that the *Prophetenszenen* of the St. Gallen play derive from the antiphons of the Advent period

⁷ Aug. De civ. Dei XVII. 1.

⁸ Brawer, Robert, *Form and Function of the Prophetic Procession in Middle English Cycle Play*, in *Annuaire Mediaevale* 13 (1972), 88-104.

⁹ M. F. Vaughan, *The Prophets of the Anglo-Norman 'Adam'*, in, *Traditio* 39 (1983), 81-114.

depicting the desire of the church and the faithful for the upcoming nativity of the Saviour. According to his observations, it was these antiphons that were put into the mouth of the prophets whose books they originally derive from.¹⁰ So in the light of the coincidence of the prophecies in the play with the antiphons of the breviary he considered the whole scene as an *Adventsspiel* which except for the prophets themselves has nothing to do with the *Ordo Prophetarum* at all.¹¹ This important finding, although it was taken up by the later popular edition of the St Gallen play by Emilia Batschamnn who described the scene also as an *Adventsspiel*, has not found its way to international scholarship. However, it is this aspect, the use of the Advent antiphons as prophecies which may help us to identify the sources of the prophets's cry in the Limbo.

In his analysis of the prophetic texts of the St Gallen play, Klapper seems to overlook the expansion of the antiphons put into the mouths of the prophets which – if one examines them – give a new context for the whole situation of the scene. Even in the first prophecy, recited by Moses, we find some interesting allusions for the exact situation in which the prophet cries to God. In his prayer-like prophecy, Moses asks God to 'come down *here*' and 'loose the people' because it 'lies in great pains'.¹² David has already a detailed lament given where he complains that 'we all have fallen into the eternal death' and that 'the devil's power bids us'.¹³ So prays also Solomon while Isaiah again complains along with Jeremiah who prays for salvation from the great danger and the bitter death.¹⁴

All these scenes, then, give the impression that – in addition to the use of the Advent antiphons instead of prophecies about Nativity – the whole situation of the *Prophetenszene* is imagined to be in the 'bitter death' and the prophets were crying unto God from the captivity of 'the devil's power', that is from the netherworld.

Therefore, the St Gallen play implies that at the end of the 13th century, when the play was presumably written, the old Advent antiphons of the liturgy, which are originally excerpted and adapted from the prophets themselves, were interpreted as words of the Old Testament fathers suffering in the netherworld.

However, this phenomenon may not have been a unique innovation of the compiler of the St Gallen play. At the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century we find numerous texts which speak about the desire and prayers of the forefathers for the salvation

¹⁰ Klapper, J., *Das St. Galler Spiel von der Kindheit Jesu*, Breslau 1904, 53-58.

¹¹ Klapper, *Das St. Galler*, 53: 'das St. Galler Prophetenspiel ausser der Propheten nicht mit jener Reihe (sc. that of the *Processus*) gemein hat'.

¹² Klapper, *Das St. Galler*, lines 13-15: 'nun nimm har nider, herre, war; din volc in grossem jammer lit, das loese, herre, es ist zit'.

¹³ Kapper *Das St. Galler*, 79: 'dass in der ewigen tot wir alle sint gefallen... des tieufels kraft uns oblit'.

¹⁴ Kapper *Das St. Galler*, 84: 'nun mag min herze spalten von der jamerlichen not ums seinen bitterlichen tot'.

promised them by God. It is mainly in sermons, especially in those written for different days of the Advent period or for the feast of Nativity, that this motif occurs. The preachers depict in a highly dramatic manner how the Old Testament justs had waited and longed for the advent of the Saviour. As, for example, in a sermon of Hildebertus Cenomanensis¹⁵ used later by Nicholas of Clairvaux or in an anonymous late 12th century sermon attributed to Augustine¹⁶ where they argue that the multitude of the Old Testament justs now by requests, now by complaints, and sometimes even with hortatory or indignant words, prayed God for salvation.¹⁷ The same view is reflected also in theological treatises of the late 12th century. So, for example in the *Speculum ecclesiae* of Honorius Augustodunensis¹⁸ or in the Instruction of Catholic Faith written by Pope Alexander III.,¹⁹ but it occurs also in an anonymous 12th century manual of theology, the so-called *Liber Quare*.

Obviously, all of these texts are to illustrate the close relationship, the so-called typological link, between the Old and the New Testaments, one of the most important theological doctrines of Christian tradition. That is why the words of the prophets are interpreted as direct prayers and requests for the coming of the Saviour, the Son of God, whose coming they were absolutely sure about, so they only wanted to know its exact time.

Therefore, the personification of the antiphons by putting them into the mouths of the prophets, whose books they are originally deriving from, is not a unique phenomenon in 12th century literary tradition. It is only the situation itself, the placement of the whole scene into the netherworld, which seems to be a kind of innovation. because the above mentioned textual sources do not contain direct allusion to an interpretation of these prophetic prayers as being recited in the netherworld. They generally speak about the desire of the fathers to see the Saviour or at least their complaining prayers but not their captivity or bitter pains suffered in the limbo.

There is only one text I managed to find where there is a slight hint which suggests that the author interpreted the prophets' words as being prayed in the netherworld. This is a letter by the late 12th century archdeacon of London, Peter of Blois. In his Epistle 243 the archdeacon, being asked to explain the exact meaning of the famous *O-antiphons* recited in

¹⁵ Hildebertus Cenomanensis: Sermo in Epiphania Domini: PL 171, 410.

¹⁶ Caillau, A.: *Collectio selecta SS: Ecclesiae Patrum*. 131. Roma 1836, 420-424. Cf. CPPM 1428.

¹⁷ Nicolaus Clarevallensis: Sermo de Nativitate Domini: PL 184, 839-840: '*nunc rogando, nunc conquerendo variat orationem, et plerumque sermonibus exorativis indignatorios intermiscet*'.

¹⁸ Honorius Augustodunensis: *Speculum Ecclesiae*: PL 172, 1073.

¹⁹ Alexander III: *Instructio catholicae fidei*: PL 207, 1073: '*Ejus adventum desideraverant patriarchae, praedixerant prophetae, atque illius dilationem impatientius sustinentes querela continua dicebant*'.

the church at the Advent offices,²⁰ writes that these are originally 'the words of the patriarchs and prophets who desired and requested God to accelerate his coming in order to save them from the power of the enemy and the bitterness of their prison'.²¹ Later on Peter, who originally delivered his interpretation only verbally, and his letter was written as a detailed explanation supported with the testimonies of the Fathers' books, writes expressly that the patriarchs were affectively crying unto God for him 'to come and save them from the exterior prison of the hell'.²²

Although this interpretation could be a kind of novelty for Peter's audience, as he is often obliged to apologize that it is not fictitious and conforms completely to the teaching of the church fathers,²³ Peter's letter attests to the fact that at the beginning of the 13th century, when Peter wrote his letter about the antiphons, these liturgical chants were already considered as the words of the patriarchs and prophets suffering in the netherworld. So it could be this very tradition which is manifested also in the St Gallen Christmay play, where the patriarchs and prophets are also complaining for deliverance of the suffering and darkness and of the bonds of the enemy with prophetic texts apparently borrowed not directly from the Scripture but from liturgical chants.

However, the series of the prophets alluded to in the antiphons and explained by Peter and, what is most important, exhibited in the St Gallen play do not conform completely to the sequence found in the first prophets's scene of Arnold Immessen's *Sündenfall*. The main difference between the two texts, beside the different prophetic words used, stands in the presence of a complaint by Adam and Eve which is not recorded neither in the Advent-sermons and in treatises about the fathers' prayer for salvation, nor in the St Gallen play. They occur, however, in a very similar form in some French plays, as, for example, in the mid-15th century Passion of Arnoul Gréban²⁴ and in the *Mystere de Passion de Troyes*.²⁵ Both of these pieces have a scene of the forefathers who stand in the limbo and pray God for salvation just as we found in Immessen's play and it is after this very scene that the famous debate of Mercy and Justice and the council of the Trinity about sending Gabriel to Mary takes place. So there could exist an independent tradition for presenting the fathers's complaint in limbo

²⁰ On the origin and date of these antiphons, see: Caballis, A.: *A Note on the Date of the Great Advent Antiphons*, in, *Speculum* 22 (1947), 440-442 and Caballis, A.: *A Jewish Provenience of the Advent Antiphons?*, in, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 66 (1975), 39-56.

²¹ Petrus Blesensis: Epistola 243: PL 207, 556: '*praedicta antiphonae, quasi voces patriarcharum et prophetarum erant, desiderantium et petentium ut Deus adventum suum accelerans eos de potestate inimici et de angustia carcerali eriperet*'.

²² Epistola 243: PL 207, 559: '*veniat et eos de carcere exterioribus inferni deducat*'.

²³ Epistola 243: PL 207, 556: '*Responsum quod vobis verbo feceram, sanctorum Patrum auctoritatibus confirmarem. Quod ego sine fictione didici, sine invidia vobis communico*'.

²⁴ Jodogne, O.: *Le Mystere de la Passion*, Bruxelles 1965, 32-37.

²⁵ Bibolet, J.-C.: *Le „Mystere de la Passion de Troyes"*. I. Paris-Geneve, 1987, 139-145.

in this very form, featuring Adam, Eve along with the prophecies of the fathers and patriarchs recited as a consolation for the foreparents. This tradition, although differing in form from the one presented in the *Adventsspiel* of the St. Gallen play, still has something common with it as the Latin 'theme' of the prologue in Gréban's Passion (*Veniveni ad liberandum nos Domine Deus virtutum*) was borrowed from the famous Advent O-antiphon (*O radix Jesse*). Moreover, while this passage in the *Mystere de Troyes* is even inserted in the French words of the prophets in its original Latin.

This verse, then, apparently links the whole situation described in the French plays and consequently also the very similar scene in Arnold Immessen's *Sündenfall*, with the above mentioned tradition of the *Adventsspiel*, manifested first in the St Gallen Christmas play which also opens the prophets' series with this verse. While, at the other hand, the scene featuring the laments and penitential words of Adam and Eve seems to give hint at another source. This source, in my view, is to be found in the famous scene known as the *Harrowing of Hell*, coming originally from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.

2.2 The Harrowing of Hell

In the version A of the *Evangelium Nicodemi* there are originally three scenes recorded which depicts the prophets deeds in the netherworld. One at the beginning of Christ's descent into the limbo, which describe the conversation of the Old Testament justs on the sudden appearance of the light of the Godhead in the darkness.²⁶ The participants of this council are Adam, Isaiah, Simeon and John the Baptist, later there comes also Seth called forth by Adam to tell his visit to and the promise he was given in the Paradise. Then there follows the second prophetic scene when Christ comes to the gates of the underworld and David and Isaiah tell their prophecies about Christ's upcoming descent to the demonic powers.²⁷ While the third one takes place when Christ arrives to the prophets to save them and the patriarchs recognize and welcome him and rejoice over their salvation.²⁸ In this latter scene it is Adam, David, Habacuc and Micheah who are given some prophecies.

A slightly different version of the story is narrated in the other (B) version of the apocryphal gospel. Here it is the first prophetic scene which a more detailed narration is given. Beside Adam, Seth, Isaiah and John the Baptist there appear even David and Jeremiah along with other, unnamed prophets to recall their prophecies about Christ's descent, while

²⁶ *Evangelium Nicodemi* (A), capp. 18-19: Tischendorf, C.: *Evangelia apocrypha*. Lipsiae 1876, 392-394.

²⁷ *Evangelium Nicodemi* (A), cap. 21: Tischendorf, C.: *Evangelia apocrypha*. Lipsiae 1876, 397-398.

²⁸ *Evangelium Nicodemi* (A), cap. 24: Tischendorf, C.: *Evangelia apocrypha*. Lipsiae 1876, 402-403.

the other two prophetic scenes are not so fully developed as in version A.²⁹ The only distinctive feature of version B is that in the depiction of Christ's encounter with Adam and the patriarchs there appears also Eve, although without any words recorded.³⁰

The story related by the two versions of the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus was re-told and adapted by several different ways. It was borrowed by sermons for the feast of the Resurrection which were – even at a very early date – inserted in the liturgical lectionaries and recited regularly at the Paschal offices of the church.³¹ The most important of these sermons is a very colorful adaptation of the descent by an anonymous translator who conflated and compiled two Greek homilies attributed to Eusebius of Alexandria in his Latin text.³² The peculiarity of this version is that the prophetic scenes dispersed in the Gospel of Nicodemus were combined to one single sequence of prophecies by John the Baptist and David and some unnamed prophets.³³

There exist yet another adaptation of the *Descensus* in a Latin sermon attributed to St. Augustine and known in several different recensions where the encounter of Christ and the prophets is re-told in a very lyrical manner.³⁴ This latter text is important because some passages of this particular homily were borrowed as antiphons into the liturgy of Holy Saturday.³⁵

In a short text preserved in an 8th century manuscript of English origin, the so-called *Book of Cerne*, there are even more detailed descriptions of the words and prayers of Adam and Eve to Christ.³⁶ In this version of the encounter between the Saviour and the foreparents it is apparent that the short text given to Adam in the Gospel of Nicodemus was expanded by several new elements deriving mainly from psalms or liturgical chants (such as the doxology etc.).³⁷ Moreover, it is also an innovation that Eve – whom the Gospel of Nicodemus left in obscurity – also recites a long lament which consists of similar psalm-verses as that of Adam.

²⁹ *Evangelium Nicodemi (B)*, capp. 20-22: Tischendorf, C.: *Evangelia apocrypha*. Lipsiae 1876, 424-427.

³⁰ *Evangelium Nicodemi (B)*, cap. 25: Tischendorf, C.: *Evangelia apocrypha*. Lipsiae 1876, 429-430.

³¹ Young, K.: *The Harrowing of Hell in Liturgical Drama*, in, *Proceedings of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences Arts and Letters* 16 (1909), 889-947: 935-941.

³² It is the famous *Sermo de confusione diaboli* edited by Rand, see: Rand, E. K.: *Sermo de confusione diaboli*, in, *Modern Philology* 2 (1904), 261-278 conflated from CPG 5524 and CPG 5526.

³³ Rand, *Sermo de confusione diaboli*, 17.

³⁴ PL 39, 2059-2061. Reedited by Ozimic, D: *Der Pseudo-ugustinische Sermo CLX*. Graz 1979, 19-36. CPPM 945.

³⁵ It is the famous *canticum triumphale (Cum rex gloriae Christus)*. On this chant, see: Pressacco, G.: *L'antifona „Cum rex gloriae Christus” del Processionale Aquileiese*, in, Dobszay L. (ed.): *Cantus Planus. Paper Read at the 6th Meeting*, 2. Budapest, 1995, 561-572. with further literature.

³⁶ Dumville, A.: *Liturgical Drama and Panegyric Responsory from the Eight Century*, in, *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972), 374-406: 376-377.

³⁷ Dumville, *Liturgical Drama*, 376-377: It is Ps 50, 118 etc which are cited.

However, this innovation might not have been a unique phenomenon, manifested only in the *Book of Cerne*, as a very similar text is to be found in the tenth century Old English homiliar, called *The Blickling Homilies*, where the laments of Adam and Eve are disposed in almost the same manner as in the Latin text of the *Book of Cerne*.³⁸

The evolution of the *Harrowing of hell* scene, then, even at a very early date has apparently gone in the direction, that the words of the patriarchs and foreparents were expanded and filled with several additional elements deriving mainly from psalms and chant of liturgical origin. This hypothesis becomes even more confirmed, if one examines the motif of the *Harrowing of Hell* in medieval plays. Here the sujet was expanded and developed obviously in this very manner. In addition to the prophets listed above, there were new persons, such as Moses, Abraham, Daniel, Noah, Job etc. added and in some German plays there occurs also a long lament or prayer of Adam and also of Eve addressed to the approaching Christ.³⁹

Nevertheless, important is the fact, that in all the scenes deriving from the *Harrowing Hell* as described in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* it is generally only Adam and Eve who are crying and lamenting while the patriarchs and prophets are depicted as rejoicing and welcoming the Saviour and generally they do not recite complaints and laments.

In my opinion, then, the tradition of the prophetic lament in the limbo is the result of a combination of two different traditions: that of the *Adventsspiel* with laments and prayers of the patriarchs consisting of the liturgical Advent-antiphons, on the one hand and the laments and prayers of Adam and Eve in the limbo and the consolation they were given by the prophets as described by the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and its later prose or dramatic adaptations, at the other. It is these two traditions which are melted and their combination results at the lamentation of the prophets in the netherworld. This twofold origin of the scene is attested by the occurrence of some verses borrowed from Advent antiphons, as for example in the above mentioned French texts, and also by the presence of Adam and Eve lamenting and sometimes even quarrelling with the Satan, which apparently derives from the *harrowing of Hell tradition*, as is present in the French plays as well as in Arnold Immessen's *Sündenfall*.

³⁸ Morris, R.: *The Blickling Homilies*. (EETS OS 58; 63; 73), Millwood 1990, 87-89. On the subject, see: Scragg, D., *A late Old English Harrowing of Hell homily from Worcester and Blickling Homily VII*, in, O'Keefe, K. –Orchard, A. (edd.), *Latin Learning and English Lore, II: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*. (Toronto Old English Series, 14). Toronto, 2005, 197-211.

³⁹ So, for example, in *Wiener Osterspiel*, lines 268-273 for Adam, and, 280-285 for Eve or in *Rheinisches Osterspiel* lines 205-220 and *Erlauer Wächterspiel*, lines 428-441 starting with an interesting Latin version of the lament: *Serpens dirum me reiecitmeum corpus sic decepit*. On the whole subject, see: Thoran, B, *Studien zu den österlichen Spielen des deutschen Mittelalters*, Berlin, 1969, 131-232.

If, then, the above thesis concerning the prophetic lament in the netherworld is correct, it attests also to a relatively late date for the origin of the whole tradition. So we are to believe that when the lamentation-scene itself was created both of the traditions it is deriving from, that of the Adventsspiel – which is first attested in the late 13th century St Gallen play – and of the *Harrowing of Hell*, which occurs mainly in vernacular plays of the 13th and 15th centuries, should have already been in existence. This all, then, suggest the late 14th-early 15th century as a possible date for the creation of the lament-tradition.

3. The Delegation of the Prophets to God

After analysing the origin and possible date for the tradition of the patriarchs' lament in limbo as manifested in Arnold Immessen's play there is only one, but very strange and interesting prophetic scene of the *Sündenfall* remained for further investigation. It is the third episode of the prophets in Immessen's drama, which may be best called the delegation of the prophets to God to ask for salvation.

The peculiarity of this scene stands in the curious story that the prophets, after a short council about how to reconcile God with the fallen mankind, decide to send delegation to Him to awaken His compassion towards mankind with choosing a bride for Him. This curious narrative seems to stand without parallel among medieval religious plays, and – as far as I am aware – there wasn't any solution proposed for the question of its sources yet.

At the first outset, one would incline to seek its origin also in the tradition of the *Harrowing of Hell*, where there is also a council of the prophets described,⁴⁰ but fortunately the solution is a bit more simple. In a sermon by the late fifteenth century Hungarian friar, Pelbartus of Themeshwar († 1504) there occurs a very similar narrative about the delegation of the prophets which makes clear that it is not the *Descensus* which stands in the background of this curious motif, but this or a very similar story as told by the Hungarian preacher.

In his famous Marian collection, entitled *Stellarium Coronae Beatae Mariae Virginis*, which is a series of homilies for the different feasts of Mary compiled sometime before 1498, there is a narrative about the fathers' council and their delegation which consists of Isaiah, Jeremy, Job and David.⁴¹ Although David's part is missing in the sermon, the words of the other two deputees, Isaiah and Jeremy consist of the same prophecies as in Immessen's play

⁴⁰ It is the dispute of the fathers on the sudden light of the descent of Christ: *Evangelium Nicodemi* (A), capp. 18-19: Tischendorf, C.: *Evangelia apocrypha*. Lipsiae 1876, 392-394.

⁴¹ Pelbartus de Themeshwar, *Stellarium coronae beatae Mariae virginis*, Lib. I. Pars 2. Articulus 1. Capp. 1-3. Basel: Jacobus Wolff, de Pforzheim, 1497-1500].

and even the sequence of the prophecies and the structure of the whole narrative is extremely similar. The only difference lies in the lack of Job's words in the version of Arnold Immessen and an addition in Pelbart's sermon by inserting a first delegation to God by Adam alone.

This all makes clear that the two narratives about the prophets' delegation are probably two different renderings of one source-text, which was recasted and adapted in different ways by the two, the compiler of the sermon and the German playwright. This is attested also by the dates, because the sermon, which was first published around 1498 in Basel, could hardly be the source of Arnold Immessen's play because even its single manuscript seems to be earlier *zweite Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts* as Krage gives.⁴²

So for a better understanding of Immessen's prophetic delegation, the source of Pelbartus' sermon should be first found and it is on the basis of this text that we should examine the origin of this particular motif.

Although the question of Pelbartus' sources is still very obscure and there were only few attempts made, even in Hungarian scholarship, to identify the literary background and compilation-technique of the Hungarian friar,⁴³ the source of this very passage was fortunately found. A little booklet, printed first in 1475 in Köln and later again in Cologne about 1480 and once more about 1500 in Leipzig, contains a detailed story about the delegation of the fathers which seems to be the source for both of Pelbartus' sermon and also of Immessen's play.⁴⁴

This small book is a complete story of the Salvation of mankind from the fall of Adam through the incarnation up to the last judgment consisting of a multitude of citations borrowed mainly from the Scripture and from different homilies of the Church fathers and compiled into a homogenous story. Its author is not known as the booklet was printed anonymously, but there are also two manuscripts of the text found also in Germany,⁴⁵ one of which, a codex from 1390, gives the name of the author as „*frater Nicolaus de Spina*”.⁴⁶ The identity of this „*frater*” – although there are some persons with the name Nicolaus de Spina recorded in

⁴² Krage, *Sündenfall*, 1.

⁴³ The most important works are all from the 19th century: Szilády Á., *Temesvári Pelbárt élete és munkái [Pelbartus of Themeshwar. His Life and Works]*, Budapest 1880. and Horváth C., *Pomerius*, Budapest 1894 and his *Temesvári pelbárt és beszédei [Pelbartus of Themeshwar and His Sermons]*, Budapest 1899.

⁴⁴ The title of the booklet is *Disputatio Sanctae Trinitatis de redemptione generis humani* and it was published twice by the same printer (Arnold ter Hoernen) in Cologne (GW 8479 and 8480 and some 25 years later also by Wolfgang Stöckel in Leipzig (GW 8481).

⁴⁵ Frankfurt amMain: Stadt- u. UB: Barth. 72, ff. 67v-72r (See: Powitz, G. – H. Buck, *Die Hss. des Bartholomaeusstifts und des Karmeliterklosters in Frankfurt a.M.*, Frankfurt a.M. 1974, 212. and Wolfenbüttel: HAB: 19. 12. Aug. 4°, ff. 247r-258v (See: Heinemann, O.: *Die Handschriften der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel*, VII, Wolfenbüttel, 1900, 266.) which attributes the work to St. Augustine under the title: *Tractatus beati Augustini de incarnatione Christi*.

⁴⁶ It is the Frankfurt manuscript of the work which, as a remark on the margin at the beginning, gives the name of the author.

different sources, one as a skilled dominican⁴⁷ and another as a late 13th century abbot of St Augustine's in Cambridge⁴⁸ – is still obscure. Nevertheless, I am inclined to suppose that his local epitheton *de Spina* suggests that he was probably of Spanish origin and might have been working surely before the manuscript of his work preserved in Frankfurt was made in 1390, some time in the early 14th century or earlier.

The following table shows the structure of the three texts and tries to highlight the dependence of two versions, that of Pelbartus and of Immessen, on the treatise of Nicolaus de Spina and also the fact that they are independent renderings of the text. For a better view of the relations between the three texts the scriptural passages which are the same and stand in the same order were juxtaposed in the table so that similarities stand out better.

⁴⁷ The name was recorded in the 3rd book (*De Dominicis*) of the *Catalogus de vitis peritorum virorum* by Philipp Wolf of Seligenstadt, see: Poole, R.: *Philipp Wolf of Seligenstadt*, in, *The English Historical Review* 33 /132/ (1918), 500-517, here: 516.

⁴⁸ *A History of the County of Kent*, II, London, 1926, 126-33.

Pelbartus of Themeshwar	Nicolaus de Spina	Arnold Immessen
<p>Satan (1 Kg 17,3; Mal 3,14) Fathers (Lam 5,3; 8,15, 16)</p> <p>Delegation of Adam Adam (Ps 71,22) Fathers (Isaiah 39,8) Adam (Ps 118,73) God (Ps 49,21) Adam (Ps 38,2; Ezra 9,6; Ps 50,1) Justice (Ps 68,29; 9,18) Adam (Lam 1,16; Ps 119,15) Fathers (Lam 2,1; 2,7)</p> <p>Council and Delegation of the Prophets David (Ps 49,5) Fathers (Antiphon: <i>Isti sunt viri misericordiae</i>) Fathers (2 Mc 1,5; Ps 66,2)</p> <p>Isaiah (64,2, 5, 8, 9) Justice (Is 65, 5-6)</p> <p>Isaiah (32,12)</p> <p>Jeremy (Lam 5,1, 7, 16; 20,21) Justice (Jer 11,14; 15,1) Jeremy (Lam 2,18; 3,1-2)</p> <p>Job (10,1; 6,8; 7,16, 19-20; 7,6) God (Job 38,1; 40,3; 41,1-2) Job (42,2, 6; 13,3, 16, 24) Justice (Job 8,2-3; 22,3; 41,2) Job (3,3, 20) Fathers (Lam 2,5, 3,6-7, 42, 46)</p> <p>Second Council and Delegation of David Fathers (Lam 4,11, 16) Jeremy (Lam 3,49, 54)</p>	<p>Satan (<i>1Kg 17,3</i>; Deut 32,37-38)</p> <p>Council and Delegation of the Prophets David (Ps 49,5, 10) Fathers (Antiphon <i>Isti sunt viri</i>) Fathers (Ps 66,2; Num 6,26)</p> <p>Isaiah (64,2, 5, 6, 12) God (Is 43,26-27; 65,5-6) Isaiah (57,1) God (Is 57,4) Isaiah (32,12)</p> <p>Jeremy (Lam 5,1, 7, 8, 10, 19) God (Jer 15,1-2) Jeremy (8,18) God (Jer 11,14) Jeremy (Jer 9,1)</p> <p>Job (10,1; 6,8...) God (Job 38,1; 40,3; 41,1-2...) Job (42,2, 6) God (Job 22,3) Job (17,11; 3,3...)</p> <p>Delegation of David David (Ps 27,1; Hab 1,2; Ps 43,22; 88,50; 90,15; 43,23-24; 70,8) God (Ps 88,49; 35,5; 51,6; Job 15,35; Ps 54,16; 108,9) David (Ps 9,14) God (Ps 126,2; 88,35) David (Ps 68,4; 30,13) Fathers (1Mc 1,28)</p> <p>Second Council and Delegation of David</p>	<p>Isaiah Creator Isaiah (64, 1, 2) Creator (Is 43,27; 65,56)</p> <p>Isaiah (32,12)</p> <p>Solomon Jeremy (Lam 5,1, 7, 20) Creator (Lam 3,37)</p> <p>Jeremy (9,1)</p> <p>Delegation of David Solomon David (Ps 55,9; 71,4) Creator (Ps 48,13, 21; 34,4; 108,39) David (Ps 9,14) Creator (Ps 88,35) David (38,3; 119,5) Solomon Adam (Ps 26,7) Lucipher Joachim & Anne Second Council and Delegation of David</p>

David (Ps 9,13; 131, 11)		Adam
Fathers (1Mc 4,10)	Fathers (1Mc 4,10; Ps 72,7; 3Kg 1,2)	David (1Mc 4,10; 3Kg 1,2)
	Solomon (Prov 21,10)	Solomon (Prov 21,10)
	David (Ps 131,11)	David (Ps 77,2; 131,11; 33,4)
	Solomon (Eccl 7,27; Cant 6,9)	
	David (Ps 48,4; 33,4)	
David (Ps 117,19)	Fathers (Ps 19,3)	Fathers (Ps 19,3)
	David (Ps 117,19)	
	Angels (Ps 67,32; 33,12)	Archangel Michael (Ps 33,13)
	David (Ps 36,8)	David
Archangel Michael (Ps 36, 5, 4)	Angel (Ps 36,5; 4)	
David (Ps 44,1)	David (Ps 44,1; 59,111)	
Archangel Michael (Ps 139,12)	Angel (Ps 139,12)	Archangel Michael (Ps 139,12)
David (Ps 44,2)	David (Ps 44, 2)	David (Ps 44,2)
Angels (131,1)	Angels (Ps 131,1)	Michael (Ps 131,1)
God (Ps 88,21, 25)	Allusion to the Debate of Justice and Mercy	Debate of Justice and Mercy and the Mission of Gabriel to St Anne
David (Ps 107,11; 83,2; 66,7)	(Ps 84,11)	Archangel Michael (Ps 34,14; 19,7, 6)
God (2Kg 4,2)	Angels (Ps 34,14; 19,7, 6)	David (Ps 102,17; 10,1)
David (Ps 88,50; 90,15; 27,1; 43,23; 142,7)	David (Ps 37,15; 31,9; 35,22)	Creator (Mal 3,1)
Justice (Ps 10,8)	Angel (Ps 31,8)	David (Ps 29,12; 121,1)
David (Ps 144,9; 118,137, 124; 24,6; 32,22)		<i>Te Deum</i>
Fathers (Antiphon <i>Ne reminiscaris</i> ; Ps 73,1; 84,4)		
Mercy (Ps 101,14)		
David (Ps 88,2)		
Human Race (Ps 123,3; 43,26)		
David (Ps 9,2; 21,23; 21,24)		
Fathers (Dn 3,26 – <i>Benedictus</i>)		

As is illustrated by the above table, it was this interesting, semi-dramatic retelling of the history of salvation which was used, abridged and adapted independently by the two texts: the sermon of Pelbartus and the play of Immessen. So it is clearly in this treatise and not in the sermon of Pelbartus, that the source of Immessen's play should be sought. Nevertheless, the work of Nicolaus de Spina does not seem to be a homogenous and authoritative unity, it could only be something like a guideline for the narration of the whole story which could be easily excerpted, re-worked or expanded.

This method is most conspicuous in the handling of the narrative by Arnold Immessen. The German playwright, although he keeps his text to the original sequence of the story, sometimes inserts new citations in some of the prophetic texts, but at the same time he makes the whole text a bit shorter keeping only one or two scriptural citations of the five or six present by Nicolaus de Spina thus making the whole delegation-story much more simple. Another important change takes place at the place where the treatise has only a slight allusion

to the debate between Justice and Mercy using a short citation of the Scriptural basis of the story, the famous Psalm 84,11 (*Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi Justitia et pax osculate sunt*), here Immessen inserts his own version of the debate into the body of his *Sündenfall* which he combines also with the story of Joachim and Anne. Apart of these he seems to follow the basic sequence of the work by Nicolaus de Spina. The only difference which links him with Pelbartus' version against the text of Nicolaus de Spina is the identification of the angel or angels of Nicolaus de Spina with the Archangel Michael.

As for the structure and the origin of the delegation-story, it is conspicuous that the narrative basically seems to rest on citations borrowed from the Book of Lamentations. Beside the psalms, it is the two books of Jeremy, that of his prophecies and of his Lamentations, which are most frequently used. This feature, then, seems to connect the 'delegation-tradition' with the person of Jeremy and the exile of Israel and it implies us to seek its origin in a special interpretation of the Book of Lamentations.

3.1 Jewish Provenience of the Delegation Motif?

Curiously, I did not manage to find any similar interpretations in the Western exegetical tradition concerning the Book of Lamentations, but in the Jewish exegesis there is a very similar story about the delegation of the patriarchs to God which is adapted and re-worked in several form in the different Midrashim. In the so-called *Lamentations Rabbati*, a 7th century selection of Rabbinic interpretations for different passages of the Book of Lamentations, there is a very interesting scene depicted which takes place after the devastation of the Temple in Jerusalem.⁴⁹ In the course of this curious narrative there appears Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses who come out of their graves and pray for God to have mercy upon Israel and bring them back to Jerusalem. According to this midrash, Abraham tried to melt God's wrath with his weeping and argumentation,⁵⁰ but he did not manage. The same occurred also to Moses who was also not able to change God's decree about his people. Moses, then had to come back to fathers, when suddenly Rachel stood up before God and she awakened his compassion, so that the Lord finally said: „For thy sake, O Rachel, I will lead the children of Israel back to their land”.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Neusner, J., *Lamentations in the Lamentations Rabbati*, in: Neusner, J., *Encyclopaediae of Midrash*, I, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 374-388.

⁵⁰ In the debate between the Lord and Abraham there appear even the personified Thora and the letters of the Alphabet as witnesses against Israel, but they are all ashamed by Abraham. See: Neusner, *Lamentations in Lamentations Rabbati*, 384-385.

⁵¹ Neusner, *Lamentations in Lamentations Rabbati*, 388.

The tradition of this lament could have been quite wide-spread in Jewish exegesis of the Lamentations, because it occurs in several different forms in other midrashim as well. In a liturgical work, which is a part of the famous Mishna and is called *Menahot*, there occurs a very similar story, where it is Abraham alone who argues with God in favour of the exiled Israel.⁵² In another exegetical work it is the patriarch Jacob who leads in the great lament and receives the promise of God to save Israel.⁵³ In a 9th century compilation, entitled *Pesikta Rabbati*, which contains selected commentaries by different rabbis, there is again a new version of the lament recorded.⁵⁴ Here, instead of the patriarchs, it is the prophets themselves who appear, and – similarly to the treatise of Nicolaus de Spina – David, Jeremy, Asaph and the sons of Korah come forth and stand before God one by one praying for the suffering Israel with short passages selected from their books, but the Lord rebukes them all but again with scriptural verses taken from different Old Testament books.⁵⁵

As a further proof for the popularity of the scene, beside the commentary-tradition of the Book of Lamentations, the great lament occurs also in other context. In the rabbinic explanation of the Book of Genesis, the so-called *B-reshit Rabbah*, one finds a very similar story about the lamentations of the patriarchs who appear before the Messiah asking him to come and redeem Israel.⁵⁶ This latter version of the story is important, because it exists even in a Latin translation made by Raimundo Martini († 1278), a Spanish dominican of the 13th century. In this monumental work written against the Jews and Muslims and entitled *The Dagger of Faith (Pugio fidei)*, Martini cites numerous rabbinic sources in original Hebrew along with an annotated Latin translation.⁵⁷ Among these citations we find also this particular passage where the patriarchs are also given some selected scriptural verses to pray before Messiah which serves as an argument for the general resurrection against the Jewish views.⁵⁸

Therefore it seems not improbable that the tradition of the prophets's delegation to God is of Jewish origin, deriving from the rabbinic exegetical tradition, where it generally used in connection with the commentaries on the Book of Lamentations as the great lament of

⁵² Menahot 53b. For an English translation, see: Ginzberg, A., *The Legends of the Jews*, IV. Baltimore & London 1998, 397-398.

⁵³ See: Jellinek, A., *Beit h-Midrash*, V. Leipzig 1877, 63-64.

⁵⁴ Braude, W. G., *Pesikta Rabbati. Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*, 2. London 1968, 603-605.

⁵⁵ Braude, W. G., *Pesikta Rabbati*, 604: David uses his Ps 10,1, Jeremy Lam 5,20, Asaph Ps 74,1 and the sons of Korah Ps 44,25, some of which (the verse of Jeremy and of the sons of Korah) are present in the treatise of Nicolaus Spina, as well.

⁵⁶ Ginzberg, A., *The Legends of the Jews*, I. Baltimore & London 1998, 22-23.

⁵⁷ O Martini and his work, see: Robles Sierra, A., *Raimundi Martini Capistrum Iudaeorum*, I. (Corpus Islamo-Christianum Series Latina 3/1), Würzburg 1990, 7-52. with ample bibliography.

⁵⁸ Martini, R., *Pugio fodeiadversus Mauros et Iudaeos*, Lipsiae 1687, 419-420. here it is the Fathers and justs, that is Moses, Aaron, David, Salomon, and other kings and prophets of Israel who appear before the Messiah asking him to tolerate his judgement praying to him using Hos 6,2 and Ps 4,6.

the patriarchs and prophets over Israel's sufferings, but turns up in some different exegetical contexts, too. The structure of the two versions, the great lament of the Jewish tradition at the one hand, and the delegation by Nicolaus de Spina, at the other are apparently quite similar. In both versions it is after their death that the prophets appear before God and they pray for the salvation of the people by selected Biblical passages and they are all refuted with their own or other scriptural verses by the Lord up to the last one – Rachel or Abraham in the midrashim and David by Nicolaus de Spina – whose words manage to awaken the Creator's compassion.

The presence of Jewish exegesis in late medieval theology and by the means of theological literature also in medieval plays is far not an uncommon phenomenon. As for the famous scene of the debate between Justice and Mercy, it stands firm that it derives also from a Rabbinic midrash of the Genesis, the so-called *B-Reshit Rabbah*, where a very similar debate between the two aspects of the Divinity is described.⁵⁹ This particular scene has travelled a long journey to turn up at the end of the 12th century in a sermon of Bernard of Clairvaux and in the commentary on the Psalms written by Hugh of St. Victor.

A similar procedure is possible also in the case of the patriarch's lament over the sufferings of the people. As observed above, the scene counts as a well known and widespread tradition in late-antique and early medieval Jewish exegesis and it occurs in different forms and contexts. So it could be popular enough to reach medieval Western tradition as well and to find its way into its theological literature. One of the focal points of this contact – beside the much alluded monastery of the Victorines in Paris⁶⁰ – was in Spain as marked by the above mentioned monumental work of Raimundo Martini and some other anti-Jewish polemicists.⁶¹

If, then we accept that the second part of the name of our Nicolaus de Spina means really a local epithet and it is best interpreted as Spain, he could have had a very good chance to get acquainted with Jewish exegetical traditions, either in an indirect manner through the works of the polemicists of his age or rather directly and personally coming into contact with Jewish midrashim of the Book of Lamentations. From this very source could he draw the structural and also the Scriptural basis for his interesting treatise which being almost a

⁵⁹ The best presentation of the whole problem is to be found by Mäder, E. J., *Der Streit der "Töchter Gottes"*, Bern 1971, 14-19 and Ohly, Fr., *Die Trinität berät über die Erschaffung des Menschen und über seine Erlösung*, in, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 116 (1994), 242-284. For the direct Jewish origin of the motif, see: Scherer, W., *Die vier Töchter Gottes*, in, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 21 (1877), 414-416, for the Semitic concept of God's Justice and Mercy, see: Kadushin, M., *The Rabbinic Mind*, New York 1952, 195-200.

⁶⁰ Smalley, B., *The School of Andrew of St. Victor*, in, *Revue de Théologie Ascétique et de mystique* 11 (1939), 145-167 and Berndt, R., *André de St-Victor († 1175), exégète et théologien*, Turnhout: Brepols 1991,

⁶¹ Dahan, G., *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs*, Paris 1990, 423-471 and Chazan, R., *The Barcelona Disputation of 1263: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response*, in, *Speculum* 52 (1977), 824-842.

dramatic texts itself – as mirrored even in its printed editions where the names of the speakers are all marked on the margin – served as a direct source for the play of Arnold Immessen. Among his special recasts of the prophetic scenes, then, the 15th century Low German playwright, unwittingly seems to preserve even a popular element of the rabbinic interpretation of the Book of Laments.

4. Conclusions

In the light of the above observations, then, we may have a clearer view of the evolution of this special type of the prophets' play than that offered by Sepet who tried to derivate it from the liturgical *Ordo Prophetarum* and consequently from the 6th century Pseudo-Augustinian sermon. On the basis of the analysis of the prophetic scenes of Arnold Immessen's *Sündenfall* which exhibits a wide range of different types of the scene, we have come to the result, that the curious motif of the fathers' weep in the limbo is an amalgam of several different traditions. It is only the long sequence of prophecies concerning Christ's come and redemption which seems to be a real derivation of the *Ordo prophetarum* as is obvious from its comparison with the long Rouen version of the *Ordo*.

The only important difference between the two stands in that Arnold Immessen describes it as taking place in the netherworld is a direct consequence of its context that is the lamentation of the forefathers and patriarchs in the limbo and the delegation of the fathers from limbo to God between which the long series of prophecies was put as an almost funny interlude linked with the banquet and judgement of Salomon.

The origin of the whole 'prophets-in-limbo tradition', then, was to be found on the basis of this context. The analysis of the first laments-scene brought to light that it was but a special combination of two separate traditions. That of the so-called *Adventsspiel*, deriving from a late 12th century interpretation of the great Advent antiphons (the so-called *O-antiphons*) attributing them to the patriarchs and prophets suffering in the netherworld, at the one hand, and from the prophetic scene of the famous *Harroving of Hell* having its origin in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

While the most curious prophetic scene, the delegation of the fathers from the netherworld to ask God for Salvation, which – apart from the above mentioned scenes – turns up only in Arnold Immessen's *Sündenfall* is a dramatic adaptation of a late medieval treatise written by a certain Nicolaus de Spina and probably roots in rabbinic Jewish exegesis of the Book of Lamentations.

