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Bede's Eschatology and the Natural Philosophy of His Time*

Abstract | The article treats eschatological views of the Venerable Bede that bear a distinct shade of natural philosophical theories originating in Antiquity. These views are shown to be consistent with the spirit of Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* and the Irish anonymous treatise *De ordine creaturarum* which focus on the four elements and their explanatory role in the theories concerning the nature of the world and the soul. The theory of "aerial purgatory fire" is under consideration. The fact itself that the discussion of the Last Judgment is placed by Bede in the final chapter of that natural philosophical treatise *De temporum ratione* confirms the suggestion that the eschatological events were considered by him within the framework of the teachings on the nature of the world, its origin and its end.

.....

It can be shown that the basis of Bede's eschatological teaching indirectly goes back to the principles of natural philosophy of Antiquity. A number of them were borrowed from physics and cosmography. According to ancient tradition, which was accepted in the Middle Ages as well the visible world is composed of the four elements: earth, water, air and fire. Above the moon's orbit is the place of ether. Various authors identified the ether with pure air or a mixture of air and fire. The lower space below the moon is filled with a turbulent and cloudy atmosphere. It was assumed that each region is inhabited with its own creatures connatural to the prevailing element¹.

Another important principle was taken from psychology, which depended heavily on physics and physiology. The "physics" considered the soul as something composed of condensed air and fire. This assumption made psychology a part of ancient natural philosophy². Not by chance, Cicero stated: "If we are not ignorant in physics, then, without doubt, we are able to know what the soul is"³.

Already the Platonists and the Stoics placed the souls detached from their earthly bodies not beneath the earth but in the air region between the moon and the earth. The arguments to justify this point of view were taken from physics as well.

* The article presents results of a research project "The works of the Venerable Bede and the contemporary humanities (studies and translations)" supported by Russian Foundation for the Humanities (project 11-01-00025a).

¹ Valery V. Petroff, "Theoriae of the Return in John Scottus' Eschatology", in: *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time. Proceedings of the 10th International Conference of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Maynooth — Dublin, August 16–20, 2000*, eds. James McEvoy and Michael Dunne, Leuven 2002, pp. 527–579.

² Aristoteles, *De anima* I, 1, 402 a 4–6; Idem., *De partibus animalium* 641 a 21–31.

³ Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* I, 71, 1–2: in animi autem cognitione dubitare non possumus, nisi plane in physicis plumbei sumus.

If all things have their “natural places” to which they aspire, then the aerial or ethereal soul after separation from the body tends to its “natural” place which is the lower atmosphere (air) or a higher region (aether)⁴.

Thus, in learned circles the theory of the “aerial purgatory” emerged, which combined: traditional religion (according to which the soul must go to Hades after death) and a physical doctrine (in accordance with which the elements that make up the soul’s body must seek for connatural areas themselves). Thus, Hades became the elevated area.

Christian theology added to this set of ideas the notion that the apostate angels, thrust down from the superior and purer realm of ether, are imprisoned up to Judgment Day in the lower atmosphere. Indeed, according to such New Testament pseudepigraph [the end of the 1st c. CE] as 2nd Epistle of Peter (2 Peter 2:4) “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (σιραῖς ζόφου⁵ ταρταρώσας παρέδωκεν εἰς κρίσιν τηρουμένου)»⁶. In conjunction with Ephesians 2:2, which speaks of “the prince of the power of the air” (τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος), it began to be interpreted in the sense that the fallen angels, along with their prince, had been thrust down from the superior and ethereal heaven to the lower turbid layer of ground air, where they were held in prison, awaiting Judgment Day. Similar theories are present in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Augustine, and John Cassian⁷.

⁴ Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 1, 18-19 (42-43). Remarkably, the author of the *Book of Wisdom*, a Hellenized Jew (2nd half of the 1st c. BC), share the same view on the nature of the soul: “therefore, when it is extinguished, our body will be ashes, and our spirit will be diffused like a soft breeze, and our life will pass away like the wisp of a cloud, just as mist is dissolved when it is driven away by the rays of the sun and overpowered by its heat”; “quia extincta cinis erit corpus et spiritus diffundetur tamquam mollis aer et transiet vita nostra tamquam vestigium nubis et sicut nebula dissolvetur quae fugata est a radiis solis et a calore illius adgravata” (*Wisdom* 2:3 VUL).

⁵ Hesiodus, *Theogonia* 658: ὑπὸ ζόφου ἡερόεντος; 730–731: ἔνθα θεοὶ Τίτηνες ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἡερόεντι κεκρύφαται βουλῆσι Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο; *Hymni Homerici*. In *Cereres* 482: ὑπὸ ζόφῳ εὐρώεντι; Homerus, *Ilias* XXI, 56: ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἡερόεντος.

⁶ Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1, 2, 1-4: “...having tied them, he threw them down to Tartarus (δήσας εἰς Τάρταρον ἔρριψε), the dark place located in Hades; its distance from earth is the same as the distance of the earth from heaven”.

⁷ Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* IV, 26; Tertullianus, *De anima* 54, PL 2, 742AB: apud illum (Platonem) in aetherem sublimantur animae sapientes; apud Arium, in aerem; apud Stoicos, sub lunam... Reliquas animas ad inferos deiiciunt. Hos Plato uelut gremium terrae describit in *Phaedone*...; Origenes (Hieronymi translatio): *Homiliae in Ezechielem* IV, PL 25, 721BC: Aer quoque animalibus plenus est, secundum eiusdem Apostoli testimonium praedicantis: *In quibus aliquando ambulastis secundum saeculum mundi huius, secundum principem potestatis et aeris spiritus, qui nunc operatur in filiis diffidentiae* (Eph 2:1–2); Hieronymus, *In Epistolam ad Ephesios* I, PL 26, 466A: Princeps quippe aeris, et spiritus potestatis, qui in aere isto est, diabolus intelligitur, qui nunc operatur in filiis diffidentiae; Hieronymus, *In Epistolam ad Ephesios* III, PL 26, 546BC: de daemonibus quod in aere isto uagentur, Apostolus ait: “... (Eph 2:2). Haec autem omnium doctorum opinio est, quod aer iste qui coelum et terram medius diuidens, inane appellatur, plenus sit contrariis fortitudinibus; Joannes Cassianus, *Collatio* 8, 12, PL 49, 740–741: Tanta uero spirituum densitate constipatus est aer iste, qui inter coelum terramque diffunditur, in quo non quieti nec otiosi peruolitant, ut satis utiliter humanis aspectibus eos Providentia diuina absconderit atque subtraxerit; Augustinus, *Epistolae. Sex quaestiones contra paganos expositae* I, Ep. 102, PL 33, 378: daemoniis, hoc est iniquae spirituali creaturae, quae in hoc proximo et caliginoso coelo habitans, tanquam in aereo carcere suo, praedestinata est supplicio sempiterno!; Augustinus, *Sermones de tempore* 222, PL 38, 1091: Sunt ergo ista spiritualia nequitiae in coelestibus; non ubi sidera disposita effulgent, et sancti Angeli commorantur; sed in huius aeris infimi caliginoso habitaculo, *ubi et nebula conglobatur*: et tamen scriptum est...; Augustinus *De civitate Dei* X, 11 (PL 41, 288–289): “iste Porphyrius, cum ad Anebonem scripsit Aegyptium... [daemones] dicit ob imprudentiam trahere humidum vaporem, et ideo non in aethere, sed in aere esse sub luna, atque in ipso lunae globo”.

Finally, another element of eschatological ideas, dating back to ancient philosophy, is the idea of a purifying fire or flood, in which the world will plunge at its end⁸. The notion that the end of the world will come in fire was extremely common. Heraclites was often quoted: the fire gave birth to everything, and everything will be resolved in a fire, the fire is the beginning and end of all⁹. At regular intervals the world turns into the fire, and then is formed out of the fire again. The Stoics associated the periodic conflagration of the world with repeated astrological cycles¹⁰. Elements are not destroyed, but transformed into each other during these cycles. Fire, condensing and cooling, successively turns into the air, water, earth, after which the reverse process of heating and dilution of the elements begins, in which everything returns into fire¹¹. Clement of Alexandria wrote about this in detail¹². The Stoics put forward the idea that some souls should perish in this conflagration while some should survive it¹³. Similar views on the death of the world by fire and water are present in the 1st-century Judaism. So Flavius Josephus (37–ca. 100) consequently reports that “Adam had predicted the death of the world partly from the fire, and partly from the abundance of water”¹⁴. Gnostic and Manichaean literature also relates to the eschatological fire. A New Testament pseudepigraph¹⁵ speaks of the fire of Judgment Day (2 Peter 3:5–12). Early theologians pointed out the continuity between Christian and pagan eschatology¹⁶. Christians explained these parallels by the fact that the Greeks had stolen their ancient wisdom from the Jews¹⁷.

If we are talking about the Venerable Bede, mention should be made that his thinking was also influenced by Irish sources. Starting from the 7th century, the interest in the physical world and cosmological issues had become a hallmark of Irish scientific thought (as opposed to continental scholarship which in general is characterized by higher spiritualism, which suppressed the natural science approach)¹⁸. According to the anonymous Irish treatise *De ordine creaturarum* (680–700)¹⁹, the space between the heavenly firmament and the earth is divided into two parts. The upper region (*excelsum spatium*) is the purest and finest; the reprobate angels with their prince had dwelled there before their fall. The Scriptures calls this region the heavenly paradise²⁰.

⁸ Plato, *Timaeus* 22cd; Seneca, *Quaestiones naturales* III, 38, 7.

⁹ Ps.-Plutarchus, *Placita philosophorum* 877CD.

¹⁰ Nemesius, *De natura hominis* XXXVIII, 37, 76–91 Einarson; Seneca, *Quaestiones naturales* III, 39, 1.

¹¹ This notion was ususally ascribed to Heraclitus (Frs. 30, 31, 60 Diels-kranz). It is repeated by Chrysippus, Diogenes Laertius, Clement of Alexandria, Arius Didymus, Stobeus, Cicero, Plinius, Martianus Capella and others.

¹² Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* V, 14, 103, 6, 1 – 105, 2, 1; Origenes, *De principiis* IV, 4, 6, (33), 236–238: ignem, aerem, aquam terramque mutari in semet ipsa inuicem ac resolui aliud in aliud elementum mutua quadam consanguinatione docuimus.

¹³ Diogenes Laertius VII, 157; Ps.-Plutarchus, *Placita philosophorum* 899 C 3–6; Olympiodorus, *In Platonis Phaedonem commentaria* 10, 2, p. 57, 27.

¹⁴ Josephus Flavius, *Antiquitates Judaicae* I, 70, 3–5.

¹⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, New York/Oxford 1997, pp. 394–396.

¹⁶ Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* V, 1; V, 9, 3; V, 14: “Empedocles speaks about turning of all things into the substance of fire”.

¹⁷ Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* I, 17; Tertullianus, *Apologeticus adversus gentes* 47, PL 1, 519B – 520B); 23, PL 1, 415A.

¹⁸ M. Smyth, “The Physical World in Seventh-Century Hiberno-Latin Texts”, *Peritia* 5 (1986) 233; Ibid., “The Body, Death, and Resurrection: Perspectives of an Early Irish Theologian”, *Speculum* 83/3 (2008) 531–571.

¹⁹ M. C. Diaz Y Diaz, *Liber de ordine creaturarum. Un anónimo irlandés del siglo VII*. Monografías de la universidad de Santiago de Compostela 10, Santiago de Compostela 1972. Furthermore — *De ordine*.

²⁰ *De ordine* VI, 5, 37–38: illud spatium primitus angelis qui lapsi sunt cum suo principe adserunt ad habitandum fuisse destinatum; VI, 6, 42–44: hunc locum... paradisum caelestem scriptura pronuntiat.

The souls of the saints awaiting the future resurrection, received temporary rest here²¹. The angels who sinned in this high and pure air, had been cast into the lower part of the air near the earth. They now had aerial bodies and lived in a turbulent and cloudy atmosphere²². The author of the anonymous treatise believed that certain crimes can be purified in the fire of the Judgment Day, and some should be subject to punishment by eternal fire²³. The Eternal Flame is a corporeal place where bodies of sinners are tormented²⁴. The Irish author situates this place, however, not into the air but under the ground, calling it '*infernus inferior*'²⁵.

Let us look at how these ideas are formulated in the writings of the Venerable Bede. Similarly to his predecessors, Bede convinced that there are a higher and lower heavens. When the Book of Genesis speaks of the firmament, the ethereal region, where the stars are placed, is assumed, but when it is spoken about heaven simply – it is the air area where the birds fly²⁶. In the natural philosophical treatise *On the nature of things* Bede wrote:

"Air is everything resembling empty space that pours forth the breath of life beneath the moon²⁷. It is capable of sustaining the flight of birds, and clouds and tempests²⁸. It is also where the aerial powers, which have been hurled down in torment from their celestial seat, await the Day of Judgment in order that they may be condemned more harshly.²⁹ From it, when they appear to men, they take for themselves aerial bodies which resemble their just deserts. For above the moon, which runs along the boundary between the air and the ether, the vicinity of which Mount Olympus is said to reach up and touch, all things are pure and filled with the light of day...³⁰ But the clear upper air is assigned to heaven, while the lower air, which assumes bodily shape with moist vapors, is assigned to the earth, where there are fire, hail, snow, ice, and stormy winds, which are ordered to praise the Lord from the earth.³¹ But sometimes this lower air is also called heaven: hence Peter says that the heavens perished in the Flood, when the tempestuous air was

²¹ Ibid. VI, 9, 71–74: humano generi eundem locum animarum sanctarum interim quieti, dum resurrectionem expectant futuram idem putatores opinantur, quem etiam caelestem paradysum autumant esse nominatum.

²² Ibid. VI, 7, 51–58: angelos, qui in superiore etiam aeris ipsius puriore spatio pecasse putantur, in inferiorem et ipsi aeris huius obscurioris et turbulentioris locum deturbati de superni et puri aeris suaeque dignitatis fellicissima sede... dum aerea corpora habent et in aere nunc commorantur, non inconuenienter aestimantur etiam priorem suae beatitudinis sedem in aere sed puriore et subtiliore pridem habuisse; VI, 8, 52–53: [Satana] deiectus, in inferioris spatii, hoc est nebulosi ac brumosi aeris huius, infelicem ac miseram habitationem destinatus est.

²³ Ibid. XIII, 1, 1–3: sunt quaedam crimina quae igne iudicii purgari possunt, quaedam uero aeterni ignis poena complectenda sunt.

²⁴ Ibid. XIII, 7, 47–49: De illius autem aeterni ignis loco, id est inferni ergastulo, multi dixerunt ut corporalis locus sit, ubi peccatorum corpora cruciabuntur.

²⁵ Ibid. XIII, 8, 61–63: perspicue patet hunc locum qualemcumque sub terra esse, qui infernus inferior et terra obliuionis uocatur.

²⁶ Bede, *Hexaemeron* I, PL 91, 26CD: firmamentum coeli... hoc nomine etiam aether indicetur, hoc est, superius illud aeris spatium quod a turbulento hoc et caliginoso loco in quo aues uolant usque ad astra pertingit, et esse tranquillum prorsus ac luce plenum non immerito creditur. Nam et errantia sidera septem, quae in hoc aetheris spatio uaga ferri perhibentur, Scriptura in firmamento coeli esse posita dixit... Nec mirandum si aether firmamentum coeli nominetur, cum aer appellatur coelum, ut supra docuimus.

²⁷ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 2.38.102.

²⁸ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 3.2, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 28.1, 64, 16.

²⁹ *De ordine* VI 7, 124; PL 83, 927.

³⁰ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 2.7.48; Isidore, *Etymologiae* 14.4.13.

³¹ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 3.10, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 28.1, 73.12–74.2; Ps. 148:7–8.

converted into waves (2 Peter 3:6). And the starry heavens of these aerial regions are called *the heavens of heavens* (Ps 148:4), as if being the superior of the inferior³².

Bede composed this passage from quotations derived from Pliny's *Natural history*, the Second Epistle of Peter, Augustine's *De genesi ad litteram* and *De ordine creaturarum*³³.

As already mentioned, philosophers and theologians resorted to the theory of the interconversion of the elements into one another to explain the mechanism of the world cataclysms: it can be seen in their reasoning about the physical circumstances of Judgment Day. The flood or the fire do not come from outside — it is just one element transforming into another. In the same natural order the lower bodies and the elements pass into the superior ones³⁴.

One of the sources of Bede here is Augustine, who in his book *De Genesi ad litteram* incorporates his angelology into the natural-philosophical framework, stating that this is the two active elements, fire and air, that prevail in angels and demons, and not the two passive ones, earth and water. According to Augustine, the celestial bodies of the punished angels were turned into aerial quality, in order that at the time of the Judgement they may become subject to the effects of fire as an element of the higher nature³⁵.

³² Beda, *De natura rerum* 25 — *De aere*, PL 90, 244A – 246A: Aer est omne quod inani simile uitalem hunc spiritum fundit infra lunam, uolatus auium nubiumque, et tempestatum capax. Vbi etiam potestates aereae superna sede deturbatae cum tormento diem iudicii durius tunc damnandae praestolantur. Ex quo hominibus apparentes, aerea sibi corpora meritis similia sumunt. Nam supra lunam, quae aeris aetherisque confinio currit, omnia pura ac diurnae lucis sunt plena, cuius uicinia tangere fertur Olympus... Sed et ipse aliquando coelum uocatur; unde et Petrus ait coelos in diluuiio periisse, cum aer turbulentus esset conuersus in undas. Et coeli coelorum dicuntur siderei coeli istorum aereorum, tanquam superiores inferiorum. English translation: Bede, *On the Nature of Things and On Times*, translated with introduction, notes and commentary by Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, Liverpool 2010.

³³ See also Beda, *Hexameron* I, PL 91, 26CD; Beda, *De natura rerum* 25, PL 90, 244A – 246A; Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* VIII, 22: daemones... esse spiritus... qui in hoc quidem aere habitant, quia, de coeli superioris sublimitate deiecti, merito irregressibilis transgressionis in hoc sibi congruo uelut carcere praedamnati sunt. Augustinus, *De Trinitate* III, 1, 5, PL 42, 870: Sed fateor excedere vires intentionis meae, utrum angeli manente spiritali sui corporis qualitate per hanc occultius operantes, *assumant ex inferioribus elementis corpulentioribus, quod sibi coaptatum, quasi aliquam vestem mutant et vertant in quaslibet species corporales*, etiam ipsas veras, sicut aqua vera in verum vinum conversa est a domino (Ioh 2:9); *an ipsa propria corpora sua transformant in quod voluerint, accommodate ad id quod agunt*.

³⁴ On the Judgment Day: Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* XX, 24, PL 41, 697–698: aer iste uentosus... conuersus fuerat in humidam qualitatem; Beda, *De natura rerum* 25, PL 90, 246A: aer turbulentus esset conuersus in undas»; Beda, *Commentarii in Pentateuchum*, PL 91, 198BD: in aquarum natura pinguiore huius aeris qualitate conuersa...; On the bodies of human beings and angels: Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* XX, 16, PL 41, 682: ipsa [nostra] substantia eas qualitates habebit, quae corporibus immortalibus mirabili mutatione conueniant; Augustinus, *De Genesi ad litteram* III, 9–10, PL 34, 283–285: coelestia corpora... conuersa sunt ex poena in aeriam qualitatem, ut iam possint ab igne, id est ab elemento naturae superioris aliquid pati.

³⁵ Augustinus, *De Genesi ad litteram* III, 9–10, PL 34, 284–285: Nec ignoro, ita quosdam philosophos sua cuiusque elementi distribuissse animalia, ut... dicerent... aeria... animalia daemones esse; coelestia, deos... Quapropter, etsi daemones aeria sunt animalia, quoniam corporum aeriorum natura uigent; et propterea morte non dissoluuntur; quia praeualet in eis elementum, quod ad faciendum quam ad patiendum est aptius; duobus subterpositis, aqua scilicet et terra, uno autem superposito, id est igne sidereo: distribuuntur enim elementa ad patiendum duo, humor et humus; ad faciendum autem alia duo, aer et ignis... Aer autem a confinio luminosi coeli usque ad aquarum fluida et nuda terrarum peruenit... Superior uero pars aeris, propter puram tranquillitatem, coelo... coniungitur... In qua fortassis parte si fuerunt ante transgressionem suam transgressores angeli cum principe suo, nunc diabolo, tunc archangelo... non mirum si post peccatum in istam sunt detrusi caliginem; ubi tamen et aer sit, et humore tenui contextatur, qui commotus uentos, et uehementius concitatus etiam ignes et tonitrua, et contractus nubila, et conspissatus pluuiam, et congelantibus nubilis niuem, et turbulentius congelantibus densioribus nubilis grandinem, et distentus serenum facit, occultis imperiis et opere Dei, a summis ad infima

The so-called “physical” approach is typical for Irish authors. Some 7th-century Irish theologians resorted to the doctrine of four elements as can be seen in *De ordine creaturarum*, in *De miraculibus sacrae scripturae*, and two commentaries on the *Apostolic Epistles*³⁶. It is assumed in these treatises that the structure of the universe as a whole corresponds to the natural order of elements and natural phenomena are explained in terms of possible interconversions of the elements or through the presence of certain element. The *De miraculibus sacrae scripturae* (*On the Wonders of Holy Scripture*) is particularly characterized by a tendency to explain rationally the biblical miracles. It explains, for instance, that when God decided to turn Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt, He just made the salt that is always present in the human body as a small part of it, to spread throughout the body³⁷. A number of other miracles, too, is explained through the interconversion of the elements³⁸.

Bede’s reasoning about the world fire is in line with this tradition as well. He observes that the conflagration will destroy only the two inferior elements (earth and water), but the two superior ones (air and fire) will pass into a better quality:

“*The elements dissolve by the heat. There are four elements of which the world is consisted: fire, air, water, and earth. This great fire will consume all of them (Deu 5:25). But it will consume them not in that degree that they will completely stop to exist: this will be the case for the two of them only. But the other two will be restituted in a better form. That’s why it is said further on: New heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65:17). He did not say: another heaven and another earth, but the old and the ancient ones turned into better state... For as the fashion of this world passes away (1 Cor 7:31) and not its substance, so it is not the substance of our flesh that will perish but only a form when what was sown as animal body, will be raised as a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44)*”³⁹.

Similarly to Augustine, Bede believed that only the aerial heavens will be destroyed by the fire, as once they had been absorbed by the waters of the Flood⁴⁰. It should be noted that Bede’s

uniuersa quae creauit administrantis... Si autem transgressores illi antequam transgrederentur, coelestia corpora gerebant, neque hoc mirum est, si conuersa sunt ex poena in aeriam qualitatem, ut iam possint ab igne, id est ab elemento naturae superioris aliquid pati: nec aeris saltem spatia superiora atque puriora, sed ista caliginosa tenere permissi sunt, qui eis pro suo genere quidam quasi carcer est, usque ad tempus iudicii. The distinction between the active and the passive in application to the elements goes back to the Stoics. Cf. Nemesius, *De natura hominis* V, 126, PG 40, 625B: “The Stoics tell that some of the elements are active (δραστικά) and the other are passive (παθητικά): to the former they attributed the air and the fire, to the latter — the earth and the water”.

³⁶ M. Smyth, “The Physical World in Seventh-Century Hiberno-Latin Texts”, p. 215.

³⁷ *De miraculibus sacrae scripturae* I, 11, PL 35, 2161–62. See also. D. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400–1200*, London 1995, p. 187–188.

³⁸ For the explanation of the water turning into wine see in *De miraculibus sacrae scripturae* I, 18 (2164–65), the discussion of the properties of the elements see *Ibid.*, II, 31 (2189–90).

³⁹ Beda, *Super epistolas Catholicas*, PL 93, 82BD: *Elementa uero calore soluentur. Quatuor sunt elementa, quibus mundus iste consistit: ignis, aer, aqua, et terra, quae cuncta ignis ille maximus absumet. Nec tamen cuncta in tantum consumet, ut funditus non sint, sed duo in tantum consumet, duo uero in meliorem restituet faciem. Vnde in sequentibus dicitur: Nouos uero coelos et nouam terram. Non dixit alios coelos et aliam terram, sed ueteres et antiquos in melius commutandos... Praeteriit enim figura huius mundi, non substantia, sicut et carnis nostrae non substantia perit, sed figura immutabitur, quando quod seminatur corpus animale, surget corpus spirituale (I Cor. XV).*

⁴⁰ Beda, *Commentarii in Pentateuchum*, PL 91, 198BD; Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* XX, 18, PL 41, 684; XX, 24, 697–698.

cosmography is a Christian one, consequently above the corporeal world — above the firmament — the spiritual heavens are located⁴¹.

Bede portrays a comprehensive picture of the Last Judgment, similar to that of Augustine, in his treatise *The Reckoning of Time* (*De temporum ratione*). He states that:

— heaven and earth which exist now shall perish by fire, while the ethereal sky and the firmament will endure;

— the Last Judgment will be held in the air: this is where the saints will meet the Lord, as also those resurrected from the dead and those who at that time will be still living in the flesh on earth (1 Thessalonians 4:17);

— it is not known whether the reprobate will ascend in the air towards the Judge as well, or, in spite of the fact that their bodies will become incorruptible, they will remain on the ground, unable to rise, because of the burden of their sins. It seems, says Bede, that the excluded will wait for the verdict, standing on the ground, covered by a flame, while the righteous, rapt into the air, will not be hurt by the universal conflagration:

“The heavens, [St Peter] says, *shall pass away...* and *the elements shall melt with fervent heat* (2 Peter 3:10). What these heavens are which shall pass away?... Not, therefore, the firmament of heaven in which the fixed stars revolve, nor the ethereal heaven, that is, that great empty space between the starry heaven and our troubled atmosphere, full of pure and tranquil diurnal light, in which it is believed that the seven wandering stars roam, but this heaven of air, the one close to the Earth...which the waters of the Flood once destroyed when they overflowed the annihilated Earth — this [heaven] the fire of the Last Judgment will destroy, extending as far as [this heaven] and battering upon it... At that time the airy heaven will shrivel up in fire, [but the heaven] of the stars will remain undamaged⁴²... There will be a new heaven and a new Earth after the Judgment — which is not one [heaven and earth] replacing another, but these very same ones [which] will shine forth, having been renewed by fire and glorified by the power of the Resurrection...

Whether the sea will be dried up by that mighty heat, or whether it will also be transformed into something better, is not evident...

When the resurrection of all the dead takes place *in the twinkling of the eye* (1 Cor 15:52), at the descent of the Lord to judgment, the saints will be immediately caught up *to meet Him in the air* (1 Thessalonians 4.14–16)... But whether the reprobate as well will be lifted above the earth to meet the Judge when He comes, or whether the deserts of the sinners will weigh so heavily that even though they have immortal bodies they will be incapable of rising on high, it would appear more likely that, with the Lord presiding in judgment, the saints would take their place on high at his right hand, and [the reprobate] lower down on his left. But if at that time that lofty

⁴¹ Bede, *De natura rerum* 8, PL 90, 201A – 202A: *Aquas, firmamento impositas, coelis quidem spiritualibus humiliores, sed tamen omni creatura corporali superiores...*; Ps.-Macarius, *Sermones* 64 [collectio B] (ed. H. Berthold) 33, 3, 1: “In the same way as there exists a visible heaven (οὐρανὸς φαινόμενος) called the firmament (στερέωμα), so above it there exists another heaven which nature is the light (φωτοειδής), where abide the heavenly host and surely God and the angels... All this is divine, ineffable and similar to light, since it is spiritual and substantial (ὑποστατικά), belonging not to this world but to some another... When this firmament convulses then another one, which is invisible (τὰ μὴ φαινόμενα), will receive the elected”; Gregorius Nyssenus, *Apologia in Hexaemeron*, PG 44, 121D: “[Apostle Paul] left the air behind, crossed the paths of orbiting stars that fill up that region, he passed the higher arc of ethereal ambits and, being placed in the **immovable and intelligible nature** (ἐν τῇ στασίμῳ καὶ νοητῇ φύσει), he saw the beauties of **paradise**”; *De vita Mosis* II, 178: “when the apostle was... raptured to the sanctuaries that are **above heaven** (ὑπερουρανίους ἀδύτοις), the Holy Ghost revealed to him the mysteries of paradise”.

⁴² Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XX, 24, 744.15–745.71.

and mighty fire covers the whole surface of the Earth, and if the wicked who rise from the dead cannot be caught up on high, it is understood that, as one might expect, they would await the Judge's verdict standing on earth and surrounded by fire...

But if the fire of the furnace which surrounded them failed to touch the mortal bodies of the three children (Daniel 3.19-94), then it is amply plain that the world-wide conflagration will not harm His perfect servants who are caught up at the sound of the trumpet to meet the Lord in the air⁴³."

As we have seen, the main features of Bede's eschatological views bear a distinct shade of the natural-philosophical theories of his time. In general, they are consistent with the spirit of such of his sources as Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* and the Irish anonymous treatise *De ordine creaturarum*. Ancient theories of the four elements play a significant role in Bede's eschatology including his theory of the "aerial purgatory". The fact itself that the reasoning on the Last Judgment is placed by Bede in the final chapter of his natural-philosophical treatise *De temporum ratione*, supports the suggestion that the eschatological events were perceived by him within the framework of the teachings on the nature of the world, its origin and its end.

⁴³ Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, translated, with introduction, notes and commentary by Faith Wallis, Liverpool 1999, p. 243–246. However, Bede, *De temporum ratione* 70 — *De die iudicii*, PL 90, 575A – 576D: Non ergo firmamentum caeli, in quo sidera fixa circumeunt, non caelum aetherium... sed caelum hoc aerium, id est terrae proximum... quod aqua quondam diluuii deletis terrestribus transcendendo perdidit, hoc ignis extremi iudicii eiusdem mensurae spatio procreescens occupando disperdet... Nunc autem caelum quidem aereum igni marcescet, sidereum manebit inlesum... Cum descendente domino ad iudicium in ictu oculi fuerit omnium resurrectio celebrata mortuorum... Vtrum autem et reprobi tunc sublimius a terra leuentur obuam iudici uenturo, an meritis peccatorum ita praegrauentur ut quamuis immortalia corpora habentes ad altiora nequeant eleuari et praesidente ad iudicandum domino sancti in sublimi a dextris eius, ipsi autem in inferioribus adsistant a sinistris, tunc potius apparebit... [*Iniustos*] utpote in terra positos igni circumdatos iudicis expectare sententiam... Raptis ad uocem tubae obuam domino in aera perfectis seruis illius conflagratio mundana non noceat... Cf. Bede, *Commentarii in Pentateuchum*, PL 91, 198BD; *Super epistolas Catholicas*, PL 93, 82AD; Augustinus Hibernicus, *De mirabilibus sanctae Scripturae* III, 8, PL 35, 2197: resurrectionis corpora in tantum leuigabuntur, ut non solum crassa aqua, sed etiam nubibus et aere sustineantur, ut Apostolus ait, "Rapiemur ad occurrendum Christo in aera" (1 Thes 4:16).