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THE *QUESTIO*, THE *METAURA*, AND *PURGATORIO XXI*:  
METEOROLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*Abstract*

An introduction connects the *Questio* with *Purgatorio XXI* on the basis of the influence of Aristotle's *Meteorologica* or *Metaura* in both works. The focus thereafter is on three points in the *Purgatorio*: Dante's thirst to know the cause of the trembling of Mount Purgatory («La sete natural», *Purg.* XXI 1); Statius's explanation that the upper part of the mountain experiences nothing that is «without order» («sanza / ordine», *Purg.* XXI 40-41), a phrase that seems to echo *Meteorologica* I 1 338b20; and the distinction between the 'natural' or 'Aristotelian' meteorology on the lower part of the mountain and the 'supernaturally' calm meteorology of the enormously high upper part.

*Keywords*

*Meteorologica*, *Purgatorio XXI*, Mount Purgatory

The title of Aristotle's *Meteorologica* was translated into Latin as *Metheora*, and from there into Italian as *Metaura*.<sup>1</sup> Dante wrote the *Questio de aqua et terra* in Latin, but in it he refers to Aristotle's *Meteorologica* by its Italian name, treating it as a Latin term. He knew the *Metaura* in both Latin translations: the twelfth-century *vetus translatio* by Gerard of Cremona, based on an Arabic translation, and the thirteenth-century *nova translatio* by William of Moerbeke, based on the original Greek text. He also knew Albert the Great's commentary on the *vetus* and Thomas Aquinas's commentary on the *nova*. He often seems to have relied on Albert's commentary for his knowledge of the *Metaura*.<sup>2</sup>

The *Metaura* is a principal source of the doctrine of concentrically arranged elements that is the basis of the *Questio de aqua et terra*. The earth is surrounded by water, Aristotle says, as water is by the sphere of air, and air by the «so-called» sphere of fire – so-called because it is not the flame that we call fire, but rather a highly inflammable element (II 2 354b24-25). The *Metaura* adds to the theory of four sublunary elements a theory of two exhalations.

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1 LIBRANDI 1995, p. 26.

2 BERTI 1970. See ALBERTUS MAGNUS *Metheora*, ARISTOTLE *Meteorologica*, AQUINAS *Meteorologica*.