



Elementa* as a Subject of Discussion with Heresies in Philastrius of Brescia's *Diversarum hereseon liber

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Abstract: The aim of the research is to determine the semantic field of the term *elementa* in one of the oldest Latin catalogs of heresies – Philastrius' *Diversarum hereseon liber* (after 381), and to display the philosophical and theological issues linked with this concept, discussed about in early Christianity, which was reflected in the work of the Bishop of Brescia. Analysis of the source text leads to the following conclusions: 1) the term *elementum* occurs in the treatise in the plural in a cosmological context, both in the general sense of the components of the world and in the specific sense of the four elements; 2) the views of heretics are dominated by meanings inspired by various currents of ancient philosophy, while for Philastrius, the main determinant of the content of the term *elementa* is the biblical message; 3) the main topics addressed by the term oscillate around protology and eschatology, and are triggered by ideas that Philastrius considers heretical, such as views that regard the elements as rational entities, or beliefs in the immutability and eternal persistence of the elements or in their ultimate disappearance; 4) among the cosmological heresies criticized by Philastrius, Gnostic movements dominate, as well as unnamed groups that give the divine worship to particular elements; 5) the position of the Bishop of Brescia, which is opposed to these views, is characterized by: faithfulness to the descriptions of creation from the Book of Genesis, comprehended literally; the conviction that the elements pertain exclusively to material reality and have a connection with the created world; an approach to the fate of the elements after the end of the present world that is devoid of spiritualistic extreme, assuming their continued existence, but in an altered form.

Keywords: *elementa*; Philastrius of Brescia; *Diversarum hereseon liber*; elements; cosmology; heresies

Philastrius, Bishop of Brescia, is known as the author of the treatise *Diversarum hereseon liber*, written after 381, one of the oldest Latin catalogues of early Christian heresies². Ever since Augustine, Bishop of

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² Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber*, ed. F. Heylen, CCL 9, Turnhout 1957, p. 217-324; Filastriusz z Brescii, *Księga różnych herezji*, tr. and ed. M. Szram, Kraków 2021. The treatise of Philastrius is the oldest typical large

Hippo, expressed an unflattering opinion about Philastrius' education, drawing on the above treatise for his work *De haeresibus*, he has been regarded as a writer who is far from erudite when it comes to ancient culture³. This is to be evidenced, as contemporary researchers of his work emphasise, by his not too sophisticated language and style and his infrequent references to Greek philosophy, which he considered, above all, a threat to the Christian faith and one of the main sources of heresies⁴. A detailed study of the theological and philosophical terminology used by the Bishop of Brescia, at least partly necessitated by the author's need to respond to the views criticised in his work, allows the above opinion to be verified and, in a way, tempered. An example is the frequency and context of the occurrence and semantic range of the cosmologically related term *elementum*, used in *Diversarum hereseon liber* mostly in the plural.

catalogue of heresies written in Latin. On the other hand, the prototype of Latin-language lists of heresies is considered to be the small work of a dozen or so pages under the ambitious title *Adversus omnes haereses*, counted among the writings erroneously attributed to Tertullian. Cf. Tertullianus [dubium], *Adversus omnes haereses*, ed. E. Kroymann, CCL 2, Turnhout 1954, p. 1399-1410. See J. Quasten, *Patrology*, v. 2: *The Ante-Nicene Literature After Irenaeus*, Westminster 1986, p. 412-413. Philastrius was probably familiar with this text, as evidenced by the similarities in the descriptions of some heresies. However, the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis and the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* of Hippolytus and the *Adversus haereses* of Irenaeus of Lyons are considered the main sources of the treatise of the Bishop of Brescia, despite many differences. See M. Szram, *Wstęp*, in: Filastriusz z Brescii, *Księga różnych herezji*, tr. and ed. M. Szram, Kraków 2021, p. 13.

³ Cf. Augustine, *Ep.* 222, 2. See Szram, *Wstęp*, p. 13. Jerome did not consider Philastrius worthy of inclusion in the collection of early Christian writers *De viris illustribus*. Instead, a biographic note on the Bishop of Brescia appears in the *De viris illustribus* of Isidore of Seville, but not in the shorter version of this work, considered by the contemporary publisher Carmen Codoñer Merino to be unquestionably from Isidore, but in the longer version published in the 83rd volume of Jacques Paul Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, supplemented with 13 biographic notes probably originating in the Middle Ages. Cf. Isidorus Hispalensis, *De viris illustribus* 3, PL 83, 1084C.

⁴ Cf. Filastrius Brixianus, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 99, 3: "Illud itaque filosoforum inanes sententiae adserunt, non scriptura divina ita praedicat". See P.C. Juret, *Étude grammaticale sur le latin de S. Filastrius*, Erlangen 1904, p. 2-5; Szram, *Wstęp*, p. 13, 15. This position was similar to that of Tertullian, representing a group of apologists who feared the threats of ancient philosophical thought. Cf. Tertullianus, *Apologeticum* 46, 18. See C. Moreschini, *Storia della filosofia patristica*, Brescia 2004, p. 181-187; M. Szram, *Geneza herezji wczesnochrześcijańskich w ujęciu Filastriusza z Brescii*, *VoxP* 65 (2016) p. 641-642.

The above term appears in the work of Philastrius when polemicising against erroneous views concerning the origin, structure and fate of the visible world. Interestingly, it occurs much more frequently in the treatise of the Bishop of Brescia than in the analogous catalogue of Augustine, who was, after all, decidedly more interested in philosophy. In *Diversarum hereseon liber* it is used 20 times: once in the singular⁵ and 19 times in the plural, whereas in Augustine's *De haeresibus* it is used only 7 times, exclusively in the plural⁶. This may be partly due to the fact that Augustine only discussed heretical movements identified by name in his catalogue, whereas Philastrius devoted a large part of his work additionally to erroneous views not attributed to specific individuals. Regarding heresies known by name, both authors used the term *elementa* in the context of the same movements: the Gnosticism of Apelles and the views of the little-known heresiarchs Seleucius and Hermias of Galatia⁷. Philastrius, unlike Augustine, also used the term *elementa* in describing the Nicolaitan heresy⁸. The Bishop of Hippo, on the other hand, presented in detail the original Manichaean theory of the five evil elements (smoke, darkness, fire, water, wind) fighting against the five good ones (air, light, good fire, good water, good wind), which was not mentioned at all by the Bishop of Brescia, who included only a perfunctory mention in his treatise that Manichaeans adore the elements⁹.

⁵ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 33, 4; 43; 47, 5 (2 times); 55, 1; 61, 3; 80, 2.3.7 (2 times).8 (2 times); 94, 1; 96, 1; 102, 1.2; 109, 6; 123, 2; 126, 1; 155, 6.

⁶ Cf. Augustinus, *De haeresibus* 23; 46, 5.7 (4 times); 59.

⁷ The Bishop of Hippo's inspiration from the Bishop of Brescia is evident, as attested in particular by the description of the views of the heretics of Galatia, which is almost identical in both writers, known, after all, only from these two sources and absent from the catalogues of Epiphanius and other early Christian heresiographers. Cf. Filastriusz z Brescii, *Księga różnych herezji*, p. 97, fn. 161. It should be emphasised that Augustine, despite his inclinations towards philosophical themes, did not add any new information from himself or develop the issues raised. Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 55; Augustinus, *De haeresibus* 59.

⁸ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 33, 4; Augustinus, *De haeresibus* 5.

⁹ Cf. Augustinus, *De haeresibus* 46: "Quinque enim elementa quae genuerunt principes proprios, genti tribuunt tenebrarum: eaque elementa his nominibus nuncupant, fumum, tenebras, ignem, aquam, ventum. In fumo nata animalia bipedia, unde homines ducere originem censent; in tenebris, serpentina; in igne, quadrupedia; in aquis, natatilia; in vento, volatilia. His quinque elementis malis debellandis alia quinque elementa de regno et substantia Dei missa esse, et in illa pugna fuisse permixta; fumo aera, tenebris lucem, igni malo ignem bonum, aquae malae aquam bonam, vento

In the historical-biographical section of Philastrius' treatise (Chapters 29 to 92), which discusses specific heresies defined by name, the concept of the *elementa* is mainly associated with issues raised by Gnostic movements. In a further part (Chapters 93 to 156), which is more related to ideas and presents doctrinal and exegetical views that have not been linked to any individuals or groups, it occurs on the occasion of questionable doctrines related to the structure of the world. The meaning of the term *elementa* oscillates in the *Diversarum hereseon* liber around the cosmological meaning of the essential components of the material world, but it does not always refer to the same elements. The research problem undertaken in this article is to establish the precise semantic field of the term *elementa* in Philastrius' catalogue of heresies and to show the interconnecting philosophical and theological issues around which there was discussion in early Christianity, as reflected in the treatise of the Bishop of Brescia.

1. The general and specific semantics of the term *elementa*

The term *elementum* in its basic, general sense means a part of a certain whole, a fragment of a complex reality¹⁰. An example of this semantics is Philastrius' assertion that God created a vast world composed of various components, and calling the earth and sky the first elements of this world, created according to the biblical description on the first day of creation¹¹. In his polemic against the Gnostic ideas of Nicolas of Antioch, the author of *Diversarum hereseon liber* identified as *elementa* the entities considered by the heretic with reference to the biblical text of Gen. 1:2 to have existed primordially, namely darkness (*tenebrae*), the abyss (*profundum*) and water (*aqua*)¹². Elsewhere, responding

malo ventum bonum"; Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 61, 3: "[Manichei] elementa adorantes".

¹⁰ Cf. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P.G.W. Glare, Oxford 2012, p. 657.

¹¹ Cf. Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 155, 6: "[Deus] etiam tantam elementorum naturam immensam creando perfecit"; Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 94, 1: "Scriptura enim in primo die caelum et terram factam declarat duo haec elementa".

¹² Cf. Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 33, 4: "Ante, inquit [Nicolaus Antiochenus], erant solum tenebrae et profundum et aqua, atque ex his divisio facta est in medio, et spiritus separavit haec elementa". Philastrius – like Hippolytus, Irenaeus of Lyons, Epiphanius and Pseudo-Tertullian – identified Nicolas with one of the first

critically to views of the immutability of the world, the Bishop of Brescia extended the meaning of the term *elementa* to all components of the created reality, also using this term to refer to human beings together with all visible creation (*elementa, id est homines cum hac ipsa visibili creatura*)¹³. The author of the treatise strongly emphasised that the term *elementa* should be referred only to material and visible reality. It cannot, therefore, be used to refer to spiritual beings, which include, for example, the human soul, nor can it be linked to the attribute of reason¹⁴.

The above general sense of the term *elementa* overlaps in the work of Philastrius with its specific meaning, giving this noun, used in the plural in a cosmological context, the character of a technical term that can be translated as “forces of nature”, “elements”, “basic constituents”¹⁵. In this respect, the Bishop of Brescia was faithful to the tradition originating in Greco-Roman antiquity and continuing into the early Christian period, according to which the term *elementa* referred to the four elements: earth (*terra*), water (*aqua*), fire (*ignis*) and air (*aër*), although nowhere did he specifically list them according to the traditional system known from the time of Empedocles¹⁶. Instead, he pointed out, referring to Aristotle’s views, that the *elementa* are a combination of four qualities – dry (*siccum*), wet (*umidum*), warm (*calidum*) and cold (*frigidum*)¹⁷. Among Christian Latin authors contemporary to Philastrius and personally known

seven deacons. Cf. Hippolytus Romanus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 7, 36; Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* I 26, 3; Epiphanius, *Panarion* I 25, 1; Tertullianus [dubium], *Adversus omnes haereses* 1. See Filastriusz z Brescii, *Księga różnych herezji*, p. 83, fn. 103.

¹³ Cf. Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 80, 7.

¹⁴ Cf. Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 55, 1-2: “materiam quidem elementorum – quae est sine anima, inrationabilis scilicet, quae facta est a Deo Patre per Filium ex nihilo, ut possit esse quae ante non erat”; Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 126, 1: “Alia est heresis quae de censu animae ambigit et ex elementis eam consistere opinatur, ut multi philosophi vanissimi [...] suspicantur”.

¹⁵ Cf. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 657.

¹⁶ Cf. D. Biedrzyński, *Pojęcie harmonii w filozofii Empedoklesa*, “IDEA. Studia nad strukturą i rozwojem pojęć filozoficznych” 26 (2014) p. 5-6; G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, v. 1: *Od początków do Sokratesa*, tr. E.I. Zieliński, Lublin 2005, p. 172. Perhaps the absence of a literal enumeration of the four elements in Philastrius’ work was due to the absence of such a list in Genesis, which was his main point of reference on cosmological matters.

¹⁷ Cf. Filastrius Brixienis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 47, 5; Aristoteles, *De generatione et corruptione* II 2-5, 329b-333a. See G.E.R. Lloyd, *Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of his Thought*, Cambridge 1968, p. 166-169; M. Wilejczyk, *Filozofia przyrody Arystotelesa – wokół koncepcji czterech elementów*, Wrocław 2008.

to him, this concept appears in Ambrose of Milan, who explained that the earth is dry and cold, water is wet and cold, air is warm and wet, and fire is warm and dry¹⁸.

In Philastrius' treatise, the two mentioned meanings – general and particular – of the term *elementa* intermingled, leading to a certain ambiguity. When speaking of the elements of the material world, the Bishop of Brescia usually did not specify whether he meant the various components of this world or the specific four elements¹⁹. On the other hand, when he focused on the fundamental elements, their list sometimes deviated from the generally accepted list of elements: it was either limited to only some of them or expanded to include others²⁰. This was related to, above all, with the criticised views of heretics who either highlighted certain elements, attributing special power to them, such as those advocating the recognition of water as the source of everything²¹, or expanded the list of primary elements, such as the representatives of certain Gnostic schools in their doctrine of emanation about the eons²².

For example, when Philastrius criticised the heretical views about the composition of the human soul from elements, in addition to the traditional elements – water, fire and air, he listed such components, or rather categories of being, as: matter (*materia*), atoms (*atomi*), spirit (*spiritus*) and a not definitely specified origin (*fons*)²³. This was not the position of the author of the treatise, but a citation of the argumentation used by heretics rooted in ancient philosophy. Referring to atoms as the “elements” probably referred to the views of Democritus²⁴. In

¹⁸ Cf. Ambrosius, *Hexaemeron* III 4, 18. See M. Otisk, *The Four Elements and Their Characteristics according to the Schema in the Early Medieval Anonymous Fragment “De Quattuor Elementis”*, “Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy” 17/3 (2021) p. 475-476. For more on the philosophical inspirations in Ambrosius' work, see G. Madec, *Saint Ambroise et la philosophie*, Paris 1974; Moreschini, *Storia della filosofia patristica*, p. 407-418. The acquaintance of Philastrius with Ambrose is attested by Augustine in one of his letters. Cf. Augustinus, *Ep.* 222, 2.

¹⁹ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 109, 6: “Neque ergo angelos adorari praecepit alicubi Dominus, neque mundi elementa, nec creaturam aliquam, neque idola”.

²⁰ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 94, 1; 96, 1; 126, 1.

²¹ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 96, 1.

²² Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 33, 4.

²³ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 126, 1.

²⁴ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* IX 7, 44. See Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, v. 1, p. 190-200.

the criticised association of the term *elementum* with matter in the context of the structure of the soul, an allusion can be made to the Peripatetic concept of a fifth essential material substance of a subtle ethereal nature²⁵. Considering spirit as one of the elements may have been an allusion to Stoic views about the soul being composed of spiritual elements²⁶. Philastrius' criticism of such ideas stemmed from his belief, mentioned above, that the elements could not be spoken of in relation to immaterial reality. However, it is difficult to ascertain what type of origin was referred to as an *elementum* and by whom. It could have been a reference to Neoplatonic views about the origin of the soul from a single divine source²⁷. It also seems plausible that what was pointed out in this way was the reality referred to both in ancient Greek philosophy and in early Christian literature by the term ἀρχή – “principle”, “origin”, “beginning”, “basis”²⁸. What would be meant here, therefore, is not so much some specific element, but rather the identification of the primordial nature of what is expressed by the noun *elementum*.

²⁵ This view, criticised by, among others, Origen and Basil the Great, was discussed in Aristotle's work *De philosophia*, which has not survived to our time. The essence of this idea was presented by Cicero. Cf. Cicero, *Academica* I 5, 26, the author's own translation: “[There are] those basic elements (*illa initia*) which from the Greek [στοιχεῖα] I translate as elements (*elementa*), among which air and fire have the power to move and cause, while the others – namely water and earth – to receive and, as it were, to perceive. The fifth type (*quintum genus*), of which the stars and minds are composed, is, as Aristotle believes, particular and dissimilar to the four mentioned above (*singulare eorumque quattuor [...] dissimile*)”. See Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 4, 56; Basilius Caesariensis, *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* I 11, 25; Ambrosius, *Hexaemeron* I 6, 23. Cf. E. Osek, *Wizja prapoczątków świata w „Heksaemeronie” Bazylego Wielkiego*: część I, *VoxP* 34-35 (1998) p. 397-398; E. Osek, *Krytyka kosmologii Arystotelesa w „Hexaemeronie” Bazylego Wielkiego*, „*Collectanea Philologica*” 3 (1999) p. 165-166; M. Szram, *Ciało zmartwychwstałe w myśli patrystycznej przelomu II i III wieku*, Lublin 2010, p. 599-600.

²⁶ Cf. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, v. 3: *Systemy epoki hellenistycznej*, Lublin 1999, p. 361-363.

²⁷ Cf. J. Kopania, *Czy zmierzch platońskiego rozumienia duszy?*, “Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria” 10/4 (2001) p. 125; T. Stępień, *Czy dusza ludzka jest indywidualna? Kontrowersje wokół rozumienia duszy w starożytnym neoplatonizmie niechrześcijańskim*, “*Studia Philosophiae Christianae*” 48/1 (2012) p. 90-91; T. Stępień, *Neoplatońskie źródła problemu pochodzenia osób boskich*, *STV* 41/1 (2003) p. 43, 50; Filastriusz z Brescii, *Księga różnych herezji*, p. 169, fn. 602.

²⁸ Cf. Origenes, *Commentarii in Iohannem* I 16-19. See M. Szram, *Chrystus – Mądrość Boża według Orygenesesa*, Lublin 1997, p. 84-87; Biedrzyński, *Pojęcie harmonii w filozofii Empedoklesa*, p. 5-6.

The semantics of the term *elementa* presented above, comprising a general aspect, referring to the constituent parts of created material being, and the specific aspect, indicating the elements underlying reality experienced through the senses, delineates the thematic circles, related to the structure and history of the world, addressed by Philastrius in his treatise in the context of the criticised heretical views. These themes oscillate around questions of protology and eschatology.

2. The role of the *elementa* in the structure of the created world – issues related to protology

The term *elementum* appeared in Philastrius' treatise in the critical description of various heresies primarily within the context of the beginnings of the visible world – its origin and structure. The general meaning of the term *elementa*, indicating the complexity of the world and its material nature, conveyed the specificity of created being and served to show its dissimilarity from God the Creator, who is by nature simple and not composed of any elements²⁹. The Bishop of Brescia criticised the views of the Galatian heretics Seleucius and Hermias, who held that the material elements of the world are rational and endowed with a soul and that the matter that constitutes them exists eternally, like God³⁰. Against the ideas alluding to the beliefs of the Ionian natural philosophers, he insisted that no structural element of the created world, such as water, could exist on its own, but that each was created by God and could not receive the worship that belongs to the Creator³¹. Defending the idea of divine providence on various occasions in his treatise, he pointed out that the elements could not exert magical influence on human life³² or, on their own, without the command of God, cause various phenomena in nature, such as earthquakes³³. The Bishop of Brescia also opposed the Gnostic concept of the emergence of divine aeons from such primordial elements as darkness, abyss and water³⁴.

²⁹ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 155, 6.

³⁰ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 55, 1-2.

³¹ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 96, 1; 109, 6.

³² The dependence of the fate of human beings on letters, elements and planets was said to have been suggested by Colorbasus, a second-century Egyptian Gnostic. Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 43.

³³ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 102, 1-2.

³⁴ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 33, 4.

In his anti-heretical polemic, Philastrius examined which elements were primary and essential in the creation of the structure of the world. He had no doubt that material reality, according to the belief of the ancient philosophers, is composed of elements that are a combination of qualities: moisture, dryness, heat and cold³⁵. However, he pointed out that, according to a literal understanding of the teaching on the origins and structure of the world contained in Genesis, which was for him the primary point of reference in this regard, the elements created first were the earth and the sky (cf. Gen. 1:1)³⁶.

It should be noted that the author of *Diversarum hereseon liber* strongly emphasised the existence of a primordial earth, different from the earth perceivable by the senses and created before the existence of the latter, and it was to it that he referred the first sentence of Genesis³⁷. The views that did not acknowledge the existence of any earth other than the visible earth were considered by him to be erroneous. The Bishop of Brescia was convinced that the first earth, regarded as the matrix of all things (*matrix omnium rerum*) is the supreme, as it were, exemplary element of the created world, identical to the first matter (defined by the Greek term ὕλη), that is invisible and incomposite (*invisibilis et inconposita*; cf. Gen 1:2). It is from it that the earth and water emerged to form the world inhabited by humans³⁸. The primordial nature of the invisible and incomposite earth as opposed to the earth perceived by the senses was also emphasised by Ambrose of Milan in his commentary on the first days of creation, but he did not use the formulation of the first earth as the matrix of all things³⁹. Philastrius emphasised that the first earth was also created

³⁵ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 47, 5. Philastrius was also convinced that the four qualities mentioned were the basis of the four climates: warm, cold, dry and wet. Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 123, 3.

³⁶ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 94, 1. See M. Boczar, *Patrystyczna tradycja interpretacji kosmogonii biblijnej*, “Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki” 42/1 (1997) p. 7-20; C. Setién García, *La transformación de la cultura clásica en el s. IV: el caso de Filastrio de Brescia*, “Studia Philologica Valentina” 20 (2018) p. 201-204; M. Szram, *Egzegeza literalna Starego Testamentu jako źródło herezji – stanowisko Filastriusza z Bressii*, *VoxP* 67 (2017) p. 626-627.

³⁷ Referring to biblical texts (cf. Ps. 148:4; 1Kings 8:27; 2Cor. 12:2; Matt. 6:9), Philastrius – like Ambrose of Milan – also defended the view of the existence of different heavens or rather heavenly spheres. Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 94; Ambrosius, *Hexaameron* II 2, 5-6.

³⁸ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 95-96.

³⁹ Cf. Ambrosius, *Hexaameron* I 7-8.

by God and has absolutely no attribute of eternal duration, reserved for the Creator alone. On the other hand, views about the earth or uncreated matter co-eternal with God (*hyle, id est materia mundi coaeterna cum Deo*) referring to Plato's idea of eternal matter and Aristotle's concept of prime matter deserved – in the opinion of the Bishop of Brescia – to be unequivocally refuted⁴⁰. Ambrose wrote in a similar vein, emphasising that the elements from which the world came into being must first have been created by God⁴¹.

Philastrius regarded water as an element that was secondary and less important (*elementum minus*) than the earth, not only the primordial one, but also the visible one on which humanity lives. In this way, he wished to demonstrate the groundlessness of the heretical view of water as the aseitous beginning of all things⁴². In this respect, his view was to some extent incompatible with the biblical text, understood literally, “Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear” (Gen. 1:9). Rather, in a literal sense, the text indicated the emergence of the earth from water and may have inspired the representatives of the doctrine criticised by Philastrius, referring to the idea of water as ἀρχή proposed by Thales⁴³.

It seems that the above-mentioned hierarchy of the world's constituent elements, a hierarchy not explained in entirely clear terms, was inspired as much by a literal reading of the biblical account of creation (although not devoid of some inconsistencies indicated above) as by the need to polemicise against specific heresies in Philastrius' view erroneously exposing certain elements or, worse, attributing a divine character to them. According to the Bishop of Brescia, in cosmological matters it was necessary to stick to the biblical description and to avoid views that deify elements of created nature.

⁴⁰ Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 55, 1; Plato, *Timaeus* 31b-33a; Aristoteles, *De caelo* III 8, 306b. See Osek, *Krytyka kosmologii Arystotelesa*, p. 169-170; Osek, *Wizja prapoczątków świata*, p. 393.

⁴¹ Cf. Ambrosius, *Hexaameron* I 1, 1: “Plato discipulique eius [...] Deum non tamquam creatorem materiae, sed tamquam artificem [...] fecisse mundum de materia, quam vocant *hylem*, quae gignendi causas rebus omnibus dedisse”; Ambrosius, *Hexaameron* I 6, 20: “quatuor illa elementa creata sunt, ex quibus generantur omnia ista quae mundi sunt”.

⁴² Cf. Filastrius Brixienensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 96, 1.

⁴³ Cf. R. Legutko, *Tales z Miletu o wodzie*, “Peitho. Examina Antiqua” 1/8 (2017) p. 81-89; Filastriusz z Brescii, *Księga różnych herezji*, p. 131, fn. 351.

3. The ultimate fate of the *elementa* that form the visible world – issues related to eschatology

The issues discussed above concerning the role of the *elementa* in the emergence of the world and the creation of its structure are complemented in the treatise *Diversarum hereseon liber* by themes concerning the end of earthly reality. Arguing against various heresies, the Bishop of Brescia wondered what would happen to the elements from which the visible world was built.

In his discussion with the Gnostic views of Apelles, he raised the question of the future fate of the material elements in a Christological context. He cited the heretic's belief in the complete abandonment of the earthly elements and their specific surrender to the world by Christ, who, after the resurrection, would allegedly leave the elements taken from the world and ascend to heaven without an earthly body⁴⁴. Epiphanius described Apelles' views in a similar way, albeit in more detail, describing Jesus' earthly body as real, but not like that of other people, but composed of a heavenly element and the four elements, which were given back after the end of his earthly life⁴⁵. Very close to Philastrius' description is also the description of Apelles' conception in the anonymous short work *Adversus omnes haereses* attributed to Tertullian⁴⁶. Philastrius negated the above view held by Apelles, borrowed – as he pointed out – in his time by the Arians. Earlier – which the Bishop of Brescia did not mention – similar ideas had been attributed to Origen, who, although suggesting in the *Contra Celsum* that Christ gradually abandoned human flesh⁴⁷ after the Resurrection, in the lost *Commentary on the Psalms*, quoted by Pamphilus in the Alexandrian's apologia, he at the same time rejected the – criticised by Philastrius – literal exegesis of the biblical verse “He has pitched in them a tent for the sun” (Ps. 19:5-6), suggesting that Christ left his body in the sphere of the sun before entering heaven⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 47, 4-6.

⁴⁵ Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* I 44.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tertullianus [dubium], *Adversus omnes haereses* 6. Tertullian himself also wrote about Apelles' view according to which Christ's body originated from the stars. Nonetheless, he did not mention any connection with the four elements. Cf. Tertullianus, *De carne Christi* 6, 1-3. See Szram, *Ciało zmartwychwstałe*, p. 142.

⁴⁷ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 47, 4-6; Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 3, 41-42.

⁴⁸ Cf. Pamphilus, *Apologeticus pro Origene* 148, 1-23. See R. Gounelle, “*Il a placé sa tente dans le soleil*” (Ps 18/19. 5c/6a) chez les écrivains ecclésiastiques des cinq

In defending the status of a resurrected body composed of earthly elements, the author of *Diversarum hereseon liber* was at the same time trying to avoid the extreme of a belief in the total immutability of the created world, which he attributed to a heresy not given a specific name. Its proponents were said to believe that the world is not subject to change and will always remain in the same state, even in the end times⁴⁹. According to the Bishop of Brescia, referring to numerous texts of the Old and New Testaments, the *elementa* also – referred to as *semina* (“seeds”; cf. 1Cor. 15:45) and understood as the original components of the created world associated with the four elements – will undergo change⁵⁰. While they will not be destroyed (*non pereunda*), although God, who in his omnipotence brought them into existence, could also annihilate them (*ad nihilum adducere*), they will be transformed (*mutata*) and renewed (*restauranda*). Philastrius did not specify how he understood this transformation, he only mentioned the acquisition of the qualities of incorruptibility (*incorruptio*) and the attainment of greater glory (*maior gloria*)⁵¹. The special power and graciousness of God will be revealed in this act, which will leave alive what by nature should perish⁵².

In his assessment of the ultimate fate of the *elementa* that make up the visible world presented above, Philastrius represented, on the one hand, an anti-Gnostic attitude, critical of anti-materialist Docetism. On the other hand, he advocated a – not definitely specified – transformation of the material characteristics of the constituents of the visible world, criticising ideas about the immutability of matter after the present reality comes to an end. The position of the Bishop of Brescia seems to be

premiers siècles, in: *Psautier chez les Pères*, Cahiers de Biblia Patristica 4, Strasbourg 1993, p. 197-220; Szram, *Ciało zmartwychwstałe*, p. 380-381, 542-543.

⁴⁹ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 80, 1.

⁵⁰ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 80, 1-3: “cum ipse [Christus] dicat: *Omnia transibunt et mutabuntur* (Matt. 24:35). Hoc autem non intellegunt mutationis causa elementorum dictum fuisse a Domino, ut his mutatis nova creatura reformetur, quod et David docet: *Ipsi peribunt*, inquit, *tu autem ipse es in aeternum* (Ps 102:27-28; Heb 1:11-12). Et Dominus: *Caelum et terra transibunt, verba autem mea non transibunt* (Matt. 24:35). Et: *Ego faciam novum caelum et novam terram, dicit Dominus* (Isa 65:17; 66:22)”.

⁵¹ Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 80, 2-8.

⁵² Cf. Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 80, 3: “restauranda potius ergo, non pereuntia, adnuntiat [Dominus] elementa”; Filastrius Brixiensis, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 80, 8: “in hoc est eminens Christi maiestas et potentia, quod ad gloriam maiorem eadem elementa transire promittit”.

situated in the middle between the views expressed by representatives of the main early Christian traditions: the Asian (Irenaeus of Lyons), North African (Tertullian) and Alexandrian (Origen)⁵³. Philastrius sought to avoid the ambiguities and extremes associated with them. In the spirit of the first two traditions, he emphasised the realism of the material world, although his criticism of the immutability of the world's constituent elements seems at least partly directed against placing emphasis, typically for these traditions, on the complete identicalness of the components of the earthly body with those of the resurrected one⁵⁴. In the spirit of the third tradition, he advocated the transformation of the constituent elements of the material world, but did not go as far as Origen in their sublimation and adaption to the new reality by assuming an ethereal form⁵⁵, limiting himself primarily to attributing to them the characteristic of incorruptibility.

4. Summary

The presented analysis of the meanings of the term *elementa* and the philosophical and theological contexts in which it appeared in Philastrius' treatise *Diversarum hereseon liber*, although it does not provide information allowing the above work to be regarded as particularly original in this regard, offers a synthetic insight into the way in which issues related to the discussed concept were understood in the early Christian era. It also makes it possible to mitigate critical opinions about the level of the Bishop of Brescia's knowledge of philosophy and his lack of interest in this field.

Conclusions can be drawn at several levels. In terms of semantics, the use of the above term in the plural in a cosmological context, both in the general sense of the components of the world and in the specific sense of the four elements, established in the ancient tradition, is noticeable both in the author of the treatise and in the teaching of representatives of various heresies that he describes. The exception is the reference of the term also to human beings inhabiting the world. While the views of the heretics

⁵³ Cf. M. Simonetti, *Teologia alessandrina e teologia asiatica al concilio di Nicea*, "Augustinianum" 13 (1973) p. 369-398; Szram, *Ciało zmartwychwstale*, p. 636-637.

⁵⁴ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* V 11, 2; V 12, 3; Tertullianus, *De resurrectione carnis* 63, 1. See Szram, *Ciało zmartwychwstale*, p. 476-478, 483-485.

⁵⁵ Cf. Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 4, 57; Origenes, *De principiis* I 6, 4. See Szram, *Ciało zmartwychwstale*, p. 510-515, 607-612.

were dominated by meanings related to Gnostic mythology or inspired by various strands of ancient philosophical thought, e.g. Ionian natural philosophy, Platonism, Aristotelianism or Democritian atomism, for Philastrius the main determinant of the content of the concept of *elementa* was the biblical account, especially the Book of Genesis and the teaching of Christ.

The fundamental themes addressed by the term oscillated around protology and eschatology, and were triggered by suspicious ideas that Philastrius considered heretical. Within the framework of issues related to the origin and structure of the world, these were views that considered the elements as rational entities or even deified them, and introduced a new order and erroneous hierarchy into the system of elements, incompatible with the message of the Bible understood in literal terms. With regard to eschatology, the fundamental issues criticised by Philastrius were the beliefs either in the immutability and eternal permanence of the elements or in their total disappearance, associated with docetism with regard to the resurrected body of Christ.

Among the heresies criticised by Philastrius for misunderstanding cosmological issues related to the elements of the world, Gnostic movements predominated, as well as groups unknown by name that argued for divine worship for individual elements, especially water. In opposition to these views, the stance of the Bishop of Brescia was characterised by: fidelity to the accounts of creation provided in Genesis in their literal interpretation, manifested in a hierarchy of the elements in the spirit of these texts; a conviction that the *elementa* pertain exclusively to material reality and have a connection with the created world; an approach to the fate of the elements after the end of the present world that is devoid of spiritualistic extremes, assuming their continued existence, but in an altered form.

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