VENAVIUM
An International Journal for the Philosophy and Intellectual Life of the Middle Ages and Renaissance

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Vivarium (print: ISSN 0042-7543, online ISSN 1568-5349) is published 3 times a year by Brill, Plantijnstraat 2, 2321 JC Leiden, The Netherlands, tel +31 (0) 71 5353500, fax +31 (0) 71 5317552.
Review


One of the most important developments in thirteenth-century exegesis was the rise of the postilla. These were commentaries on the entire Bible that combined textual analysis with moral and doctrinal application. They established the literal sense as their basic hermeneutical principle, but this literal sense often incorporated the idea that much of the Biblical text should be regarded as metaphor. These Postilla reflected the scholastic practice of the medieval universities, with their Aristotelian emphasis on text division as a method of interpretation, and with their incorporation of thematic quaestiones into the verse-by-verse commentaries. The greatest center of exegetical activity was probably the Dominican convent of Saint Jacques in Paris, where massive commentaries on the entire Bible were composed under the direction of Hugh of Saint Cher. But some of these scholastic postillators (such as Peter of John Olivi, Nicholas of Lyra, and Hugh of Saint Cher) have been the subject of conferences and anthologies, much scholarship remains to be done on thirteenth-century exegesis, and many of the postillators' works still await critical editions. This makes the present edition, containing the postilla of William of Luxi on Baruch and Jonah, all the more welcome.

Little is known about the life of William of Luxi (also Lisey, or Lysit): as Sulavik shows, William was probably from Lucey, in Burgundy, and most of what is known about him is wrong, as Sulavik shows in his introduction. The early modern biographers John Bale and Luke Wadding incorrectly thought him to be a Franciscan of English origin, but the work of more recent scholars such as Bartholomew Hauriaux and Jean Baratillon more correctly identifies him as a French Dominican and regent master in Paris sometime between 1267 and 1275. It is known to be the author of various sermons, as well as postilla on Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, and the Minor Prophets. This volume offers the edidio princeps of Luxi's commentaries to Baruch (translated in six manuscripts), Jonah (one manuscript only), and Jerome's prolegomena to the books of Jeremiah, Lamentations (five manuscripts), and the Twelve Prophets (one manuscript).

In addition, Sulavik presents the Biblical text of Baruch and Jonah, reconstructed from Luxi's commentary, collated with three thirteenth-century Bible manuscripts.

There are not many extant medieval commentaries on the book of the Twelve Prophets. Even more unusual was William's choice to comment on the book of Baruch. Until the thirteenth century, the canonicity of this book was still a matter of dispute. The main source for Luxi's commentary on Baruch, in addition to Hugh of Saint Cher's postilla, is the late twelfth-century gloss on Baruch by the anonymous Dean of Salisbury. William of Luxi's work is closely related to the postilla of William of Milleranus (or Melanus), and he incorporated large sections of his material into his work. Sulavik compares the work of both Williams in parallel columns. Sulavik's edition of William of Luxi's Biblical text is of great interest for the history of the Vulgate text, while the commentaries on the Biblical prologues are particularly interesting for the study of medieval hermeneutics.

Sulavik's edition is a solid and ampley documented piece of work. (The apparatus criticus, for instance, lists all individual readings of all manuscripts, excluding spelling divergences.) This makes it the more surprising that the edition's ratio adendae, while dwelling at length on minor issues of spelling and punctuation, does not offer the reader any insight into the principles on which these editions are based. The editor states that the edition is based on the same principles as the Leonine edition of Thomas Aquinas' works, but that hardly answers questions such as: What manuscript was taken as the reference text for the collation? What principles guided the choice between the variant readings of the different manuscripts? The editor claims that the edition only presents the "restored text", but what text is exactly being "restored"? Sulavik says that the text has been corrected for "grammatical inaccuracies, nonsensical readings, omissions," and so on, but what if the case is not as clear-cut? Why, for instance, in p. 19, l. 76, "His ostendit orandi modum, ubi prius antiquum beneficia reducit ad memoriam" (the reading in MSS P, Z, and M) a better reading than "antiqua beneficia" (in MSS A, T, and N)? Or why is "radice caritatis" (in MSS P and Z) better than "caritatis radice" (in MSS A, T, M, and N) in p. 36, l. 130, unless P and Z are used as the edition's basic text? We are not told in the ratio adendae.

Sulavik explains that no single manuscript stands out as a clearly superior copy; they were copied done in time, with few steps between the textual witness and the archetype, which makes it difficult to establish a stemma. The individual readings, though numerous, are neither spectacular nor often very significant. Even though Sulavik loosely divides the six manuscripts into three different groups, he admits that the readings on which these families are based seem hardly significant, and often the readings of certain "families" are attested in MSS of other families as well. This makes the edition necessarily selective, but it would be nice to have more insight into what guided the process of selection.

Overall, however, the edition presents a readable and well-punctuated text, with an ample apparatus that allows the reader to reconstruct the readings of the individual MSS, and trace editorial choices. All in all, this volume offers a wealth of material for those interested in the history of thirteenth-century exegesis.

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DOI: 10.1163/15785407260717
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