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The Biblical Interpretation of William of Alton

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as well as for the broader question of the relationship between literate and oral regimes in medieval Spanish cultural history.

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TIMOTHY BELLAMAH, *The Biblical Interpretation of William of Alton*. (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xiii, 354. \$74. ISBN: 9780199753604. doi:10.1017/S0038713413001164

William of Alton succeeded Thomas Aquinas as Dominican regent master at the University of Paris in 1259. He probably served for two years and then disappeared into the workforce of his order, possibly returning to Paris before 1270 to lecture for another term. He might have studied Peter Lombard's *Sentences* under his Angelic predecessor. He might have heard Thomas lecture on Isaiah and Jeremiah when Thomas was *cursor biblicus* a few years before his own regency. The evidence is inconclusive, as Timothy Bellamah's book—always cautious—respectfully says.

St. Thomas slept here, but it should not matter. For some decades now, bible commentaries have been helping historians see beyond ancient and modern pieties. To be a regent master at Paris in the thirteenth century lent status enough, however obliquely they may have cited you, however close or far you may have been to the trinity of Albertus, Thomas, and Bonaventure. Among the living, William of Alton, a Dominican, especially liked the Franciscan Bonaventure, quoting him favorably, and blind, even while exploring points of evangelical poverty in the gospels, and doing it in a way mostly above Dominican and Franciscan debates and rivalries. His commentary on John relied heavily on Bonaventure. Two centuries later, his commentary on the Book of Wisdom was repeatedly printed under Bonaventure's name. It seems he did not quote or clearly use St. Thomas even once, although Bellamah ferrets out an instance in which he came close (157). In one of many neat exercises of textual reasoning, Bellamah also shows us how William very probably conveys, to an elderly Albert the Great, an opinion of Bonaventure, unsigned, on the relatively neutral topic of the efficacy of priests absolving sins (154–55).

When observing conclusions such as these, which crowd this study, is it too much to say that Bellamah suggests how the biblical commentary functioned as a medium? It was a medium of ideas running freely through a faculty, trailing the Old Testament's wild narratives and their fourfold interpretation, unbridled from Peter Lombard's distinctions and from the differences separating monastic rivals. William of Alton, by the way, is one of those masters who did not leave a commentary on the *Sentences*, or if he did, it is yet to be identified. He forces his reader to consider bible reading as near-total knowledge production. In William's university, the bible produced a flowing stream of knowledge, and worlds seemed to meet when its narratives were carefully deciphered.

This is a quality of medieval scholarship easy to overlook as we systematically break down and examine scholastic exegesis. The staccato style of William's *postillae*, like the *postillae* of many, could seem to drain these manuscripts of narrative blood. Bellamah's book is one of the most intimate and complete portraits painted so far of any single bible scholar at work in the third quarter of the thirteenth century. Martin Sabathé's massive study of Aquinas's commentary on the Gospel of John, *La Trinité rédemptrice* (2011), is more narrowly preoccupied with Trinitarian theology. Bellamah systematically navigates each facet of William's exegetical science. It is exacting work. He begins at the beginning, by anchoring his sources. Four works are already agreed to be William's. Bellamah compares features of these four (such as the use of prologues, a certain manner of *divisio textus*, stylistic features of comments and citations, and the use of questions) to the remaining seventeen attributed commentaries and determines the authenticity of three additional

texts, making a total of seven: commentaries on Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and the Gospel of John. Bellamah then studies William's method as an interpreter and his own use of sources (the Ordinary Gloss is the unsurprising leader), in the manner of his mentor Gilbert Dahan. He examines passages broadly related to theological discussions of revelation (in connection with prophecy, preaching, contemplation, spiritual sensation, etc.) and to discussions of religious poverty, still a fresh topic at Paris circa 1260, when William was lecturing. One appendix provides a summary of evidence for and against the authenticity of each of the twenty-one commentaries ascribed to William. Another appendix provides editions of the prologues of six of the seven authenticated works (Isaiah is not included). The book includes many long, well-translated quotations, which are edited from select manuscripts in the endnotes. It is sensitive to William's intellectual context, and it draws its conclusions with great caution and care.

Bellamah emphasizes William's literal interpretation, in the manner of Beryl Smalley and Alistair Minnis. He is quick to point out how his systematic study of texts only marks a beginning. William of Alton's ten or eleven extant sermons remain to be studied, as does a single Marian treatise. Some or all of the seventeen commentaries of uncertain authorship could still prove authentic. Only his commentary on Lamentations has ever been critically edited, by Bellamah, in the *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* in 2006. But besides the useful gateway to a little-known contemporary of St. Thomas, this book offers a solid, focused portrayal of exegetical work in the early university.

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FRANCESCO BENELLI, *The Architecture in Giotto's Paintings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xv, 276; color and b&w figs. \$99. ISBN: 9781107016323. doi:10.1017/S0038713413001176

As the author of this consistently stimulating book, Francesco Benelli, states, the architecture in Giotto's painting has received curiously little sustained attention. Its dynamic role in the creation of pictorial space and its evidential value for the early constructional history of the Scrovegni Chapel remain exceptions to this statement, but it is nevertheless broadly true that the ways in which buildings participate in the narrative, condition its dramatic impact and the symbolic charge of Giotto's paintings, or, indeed, reveal a peripatetic painter, have not yet been as comprehensively investigated as they are here. Whether this provides a new key for interpreting painted architecture as Benelli claims is more open to question. It should perhaps be added that Benelli discusses only the wall paintings, thus omitting one of the central documents of any discussion of Giotto and architecture, the scene of the *Dream of Innocent III*, which forms part of the predella of the signed panel of the *Stigmatization of Saint Francis* from San Francesco at Pisa, now in the Louvre.

The frescoes in Assisi provide the beginning of the discussion, and indeed are the focus of a large part of the book—valuably so, for the analysis and discussion of the architecture in the frescoes of the Lower Church is a significant contribution. The Isaac scenes, the *Pentecost* and *Christ among the Doctors* in the Upper Church form the prelude to an extended examination of the *Saint Francis Legend*. This leads to discussion of the Scrovegni Chapel, the Peruzzi and Bardi chapels in Santa Croce, the Saint Nicholas and Magdalen Chapels, Christ's Infancy scenes, and the *Posthumous Miracles of Saint Francis* in the Lower Church. The Saint Martin Chapel and its relationship to the architecture in Duccio's *Maestà* follows, and a chapter on the legacy of Giotto's pictorial architecture focuses predominantly on the Baroncelli Chapel by Taddeo Gaddi and the *Silvester Legend* by Maso di Banco, both in Santa Croce.