

Robert Grosseteste

His Thought and Its Impact

This volume on the renowned thirteenth-century English scholar and bishop originated in papers delivered at the 2009 conference of the International Robert Grosseteste Society. The book, dedicated to the late James McEvoy, is divided into four parts.

The first section examines Grosseteste's work as a translator and commentator. In the opening essay, James McEvoy demonstrates that despite his poor reputation among the humanists, Grosseteste was a translator of rare quality. Catherine Kavanagh confirms McEvoy's view, arguing that a full appreciation of the bishop's translations is to be gained by reading them in conjunction with his commentaries. In his study of Grosseteste's commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names*, Jean-Michel Counet presents Grosseteste as a superior interpreter of the great writers of antiquity. Finally, R.M. Ball provides valuable new witnesses to Grosseteste's unpublished commentary on the Psalms.

The second section deals with science and magic. Cecilia Panti demonstrates that Grosseteste's work on light is rooted in pre-Aristotelian physics, while Pietro B. Rossi shows the great influence of Grosseteste's scientific work on British commentators such as Robert Kilwardby, Richard Rufus, and Simon of Faversham. R. James Long closes this section with a discussion of Richard Fishacre's work on magic and demonology.

Grosseteste's impact and legacy is the subject of the third section. Anne Hudson traces strong links with Wyclif through the bishop's library at the Oxford Greyfriars. Edgar Laird argues that Grosseteste's influence might be found in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and Neil Lewis demonstrates the profound influence of Grosseteste's notion of unequal infinities on fourteenth-century thinkers.

The final section, on pastoral theology, deals with the practical aspects of Grosseteste's work. Matthias Hessenauer shows that the philosopher made strong efforts to render his work accessible to an audience beyond the intellectual community. Mark Elliott counters previously held concepts of Grosseteste as an enemy of the Jewish community. The volume closes with James McEvoy's demonstration that the fourteenth-century pastoral handbook of Rudolph of Biberach owes much to Grosseteste's *Mystical Theology*.

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Robert Grosseteste
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Edited by
JACK P. CUNNINGHAM



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Abbreviations

Primary sources are cited using the conventional internal reference, followed by the modern edition (abbreviated where necessary) in parentheses, and the translation, where relevant. Frequently cited works use the abbreviations listed below. Detailed information about editions and translations cited can be found in the bibliography of primary sources (pp. 334–342).

- AHDLMA* *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* (Paris: Vrin, 1926–)
- CCCM* Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio mediaevalis (Turnhout: Brepols, 1966–)
- CCSL* Corpus Christianorum: Series latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–)
- CCSG* Corpus Christianorum: Series graeca (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977–)
- CIMAGL* *Cahiers de l'Institut du moyen-âge grec et latin* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1969–)
- CSEL* Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum (Vienna: Hölder – Pichler – Tempsky, 1866–)
- DSTFM* *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale: Rivista della Società internazionale per lo studio del medioevo latino* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1990–)
- FS* *Franciscan Studies* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, St Bonaventure University, 1924–)

- PL *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina* (Paris: Migne, 1844–)
- RTAM *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* (Louvain: Abbaye du Mont César, 1929–1996)

Dedicated to the memory of

JAMES MCEVOY,
priest, doctor, and friend

*Corporum localis divisio dolenda non est, licet praesentia sit iocunda; quia
corporum localis distantia non separat ab invicem homines, et maxime
caritate mutua coniunctos et in unum conflatos.*

after Robert Grosseteste, *Ep.* 2

Acknowledgements

This book began life as a conference held at Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln, England, in the summer of 2009. That conference was the idea of Professor James McEvoy, who provided impetus to set in motion an event that was eventually to bring together scholars from nine different countries to discuss and share their enthusiasm for all things Grosseteste in the city that provided him with his bishopric. It was by no means the first time that Jim initiated a Grosseteste project, though very sadly it was the last. He will be sorely missed and as editor of this volume I am beholden to acknowledge him as its progenitor.

I am also grateful to Bishop Grosseteste University College for hosting that event and to the Lincoln School of Theology for their sponsorship. Dr John Flood played a crucial part in the organization of the proceedings: I am aware that he might have often appeared to be a voice off stage when in fact he was sitting in the director's chair. Professor Joseph Goering has helped throughout the preparation of this book, offering advice and encouragement. Finally, in terms of preparing this document, a huge debt of gratitude is owed to Dr David Barber and to Lawal Muhammad.

Lastly, I would like to offer sincere thanks to Terry Cunningham – my dad and the person who first inspired my interest in all things theological. Go raibh mile maith agat.

Preface

We are told it was likely that Robert Grosseteste arrived in Lincoln as a boy in order to receive his first schooling. If so, it was the beginning of a lifelong relationship with the city and the start of an extraordinary career. It is not unusual for a medieval man of letters to achieve the status of polymath, but what is striking about Grosseteste is not how many subjects he had mastery of, but just how much he excelled in them. The bishop's commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* on its own would have been sufficient to cement his reputation as a great contributor in the history of scientific thought, and that is before he ever dipped his pen in the ink of theological reflection. This is all the more impressive when we consider that his see was the largest in England, stretching for much of the country from the Humber to the Thames. In this volume, one of our contributors reminds us that it was on taking up his position as bishop that Grosseteste immersed himself in the serious study of Greek. In addition, far from pursuing a rarefied life solely dedicated to academia, he was the epitome of the hands-on pastor. We are told that he would refuse to pass a corpse in a ditch without stopping to provide it with an appropriate burial, no matter how late it made him for his appointment. Grosseteste was impressive not because he was a great scholar, but because he was at the same time so great a bishop. The contributions gathered here provide ample testimony of a wide-ranging intellect which was married to a startling practical energy.

Reflecting this multifaceted quality of Grosseteste's work, the following volume has been divided into four parts, each treating a different theme. The first of our sections examines Grosseteste's work in the field of translation and commentary. It opens with James McEvoy demonstrating that, despite his poor reputation amongst the humanists, Grosseteste was a translator of rare quality – the best Latin translator of Greek since Boethius, in the opinion of Roger Bacon. It was exactly the bishop's ability to combine linguistic expertise with philosophical insight that made him so valuable, and precisely these qualities that the scholars of

the Renaissance failed to appreciate. Catherine Kavanagh takes up this theme when she compares the translation work of Grosseteste and Eriugena; reiterating Prof. McEvoy's point, she tells us that, regardless of what the humanists may have thought, if we consider Grosseteste's rather literal translations in conjunction with his insightful commentaries we might better arrive at a true appreciation of his work. Jean-Michel Counet turns his attention to the commentary on the *Divine Names* and in doing so offers a clear illustration of how Grosseteste's work provides us with a master class in the art of reading the great writers of antiquity. R.M. Ball then provides us with his own master class in scholarly detective work when he brings before us from the fifteenth century two new witnesses to Grosseteste's unprinted commentary on the Psalms. Thomas Gascoigne's *Liber seu scriptum* and a manuscript from Durham Cathedral Library of Peter Herendal's *Collectarius super librum Psalmorum* provide valuable missing pieces to the jigsaw and edge us closer towards the possession of a better text of this incomplete work.

The second section takes us into the altogether different territory of science and magic. However, Cecilia Panti provides a link to previous discussions when she points out that in his treatment of light, Grosseteste traces his line of reasoning to the pre-Aristotelian physicists – a truly admirable endeavour when one considers that he was one of the first translators and commentators to offer the Latin world a discussion of Aristotle's natural philosophy. Pietro B. Rossi shows us that the work of Grosseteste the scientist was an important influence on later generations of British Aristotelian commentators such as Robert Kilwardby, Richard Rufus, and Simon of Faversham. More than providing a useful source for these scholars, Grosseteste should rather be regarded as something of a scientific mentor. R. James Long then takes us into the contiguous world of magic with an examination of Richard Fishacre's work on magic and demonology. Here we find evidence that the Dominican's musings on the nature and abilities of magi and devils furnish us with a forerunner of similar speculations in Bonaventure and Aquinas.

Section three treats the theme of impact and legacy and here Anne Hudson links Grosseteste to Wyclif, even more firmly than Samuel H. Thomson¹ did, via the library that the bishop bequeathed to Oxford

1 Samuel H. Thomson, *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste 1235–1253* (Cambridge, 1940), p. 1.

Greyfriars. Grosseteste provided for Wyclif an esteemed antecedent, a type of Christian exemplar that embodied all his ideals; this appreciation was garnered from a close and extensive reading that went far beyond his contemporaries. Hudson's important contribution establishes much more clearly the enormous debt of gratitude that Wyclif owed to the bishop of Lincoln, and in this the Greyfriar's connection is central. Edgar Laird traces Grosseteste's legacy to a literary contemporary of Wyclif when he finds the bishop's imprint in the work of Geoffrey Chaucer. The Knight's Tale in *The Canterbury Tales* has been described as a heady blend of fourteenth-century philosophy and theology. Laird convincingly identifies Grosseteste's musings on universals, as found in the *Posterior Analytics*, as the missing ingredient in this cocktail. Finally Neil Lewis points out the surprising, and not a little alarming, fact that Grosseteste's philosophical influence is an area that still remains neglected. Lewis's own contribution in addressing this want is a study of Grosseteste's endorsement of the notion of unequal infinities. Lewis provides an intriguing source for this theory in the writings of the Muslim scholar Thabit ibn Qurra before he goes on to illustrate its profound influence on the thought of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century thinkers, in particular Richard Rufus of Cornwall.

Our last section offers ample proof that as profound and influential as Grosseteste's scholarly contributions were, remarkably he did not allow them to prevent him from taking his pastoral duties seriously. Matthias Hessenauer demonstrates that he made great efforts to make his work accessible to an audience beyond the intellectual community. As well as penning great scholarly works, he was concerned also with producing the type of spiritual manual that would be useful to a more ordinary audience. After this, Mark W. Elliott's piece goes a long way to redressing Grosseteste's somewhat tarnished record with regard to the Jews. Elliott points out that the bishop of Lincoln was not pursuing a vendetta against the Jewish community but was instead concerned to protect people from usury. In fact, Elliott argues, it is only by grasping Grosseteste's deep appreciation of the moral law of the Mosaic code that we can arrive at a proper understanding of his perspective on the Covenant and the Incarnation. James McEvoy finishes this last section with an examination of *Die siben strassen zu got* by Rudolph of Biberach. This work is a compilation of many mystical authors set out as a handbook for pastoral purposes in the fourteenth century. It was a highly influential text and in its pages Prof. McEvoy traces strong evidence that

its author drew heavily on the *Mystical Theology* commentary of Robert Grosseteste. In so doing, he demonstrates that even the pastoral care that the bishop of Lincoln took pains to exhibit to the ordinary Christian extended beyond his own lifetime, resurfacing as it did in the work of those who followed.

When the Grosseteste conference opened in 2009 it was without the physical presence of one of its keynote speakers, James McEvoy. We had to make do with a communication via a rather shaky video link with Belfast. His absence left a deep lacuna in our proceedings, keenly felt by all his gathered friends and colleagues. Yet, in another sense, there was scarcely a moment over the course of the weekend when Jim left the room. Paper after paper made reference to his indispensable work, to a pivotal conversation held with him, or to a generous act of scholarly camaraderie. Indeed, his presence once more infuses the articles gathered here. In a work that is assembled as a tribute to Jim it is fitting that two of his essays form our alpha and omega, opening and closing the text. Though, in point of fact, turning the pages in between, the reader will meet with Jim McEvoy many times along the way. He will be greatly missed in Grosseteste circles and in the world of scholastic philosophy, but perhaps this present work will, in a way, bring him into our company once more and make his loss slightly more bearable. Fr McEvoy died on the eve of St Dionysius, the very feast on which we are told that Grosseteste himself passed away. It is very tempting to think of them together now, discussing and laughing about the many other things that they held in common.

Jack P. Cunningham
Lincoln, England
January 2012

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JAMES MCEVOY was until his death Professor Emeritus at Queen's University Belfast. His many publications include *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford, 1982), *Robert Grosseteste: Great Medieval Thinkers* (Oxford, 2000), and *Thomas Aquinas: Approaches to Truth* (Dublin, 2002). Fr McEvoy was a member of the Royal Irish Academy.

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Her main contributions to the study of Grosseteste include the volumes *Moti, virtù e motori celesti nella cosmologia di Roberto Grossatesta* (Florence, 2001) and *Roberto Grossatesta, La luce* (Pisa, 2011). She is currently engaged in a long-term project that focuses on Grosseteste's opuscula on natural philosophy.

PIETRO B. ROSSI is Professor of History of Medieval Philosophy and the head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Turin. Publications include *Robertus Grosseteste, Commentarius in Posteriorum Analyticorum libros* (Florence, 1981) and the edition of *Aristoteles, De partibus animalium: Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, in *Aristoteles Latinus Database* (Turnhout). He is a member of the commission of Edizione nazionale delle traduzioni dei testi greci in età umanistica e rinascimentale and of the *Corpus philosophorum medii aevi*.