

Preface

The present study grew out of the question, “What is the *Historia scholastica*?” This work, one of the most copied and cited from the time of its composition and appearance around 1170 through the end of the Middle Ages and beyond, evades simple characterization. Pregnant with the Bible, it is nevertheless not a biblical commentary. It presents the history of salvation from beginning to end but does so in a manner that no modern person would recognize as a history. Composed of lemmata and glosses, like so many medieval works, its lemmata are nonetheless effectively hidden from the view of anyone not intimately familiar with Peter Comestor’s unique but durable method of presentation.

Comestor himself, Peter the Eater, remains as much a mystery as his name or his most famous work. We will never know how he received his unique surname, *Comestor* or *Manducator*. His contemporaries were convinced that it had everything to do with the work that made him famous, that he ate the Bible and spit out the *History*. Whatever the truth of the matter, it is a great story, as great as the medieval legend that made him the brother of his master, Peter Lombard, and Gratian. Here again, the work itself was at the center of the story, for these three produced the most famous schoolbooks of the twelfth century.

The *History* was indeed a schoolbook, a quite successful one. The biblical *Gloss* was also a schoolbook, at least in Paris from the time that Peter Lombard got his hands on it until well after Peter Comestor was through with it. Unlike the *History*, it was not a successful schoolbook, at least according to Peter Comestor, even though the biblical *Gloss* was his most important source for the *History*. In fairness, however, it must be admitted that his may not be the last word on the subject of the *Gloss* as schoolbook; since we now know what to look for, we are discovering courses by other masters in which the biblical *Gloss* served as the textbook. There may be a great deal to say on this subject as these courses come to light.

One cannot discuss the *History* as a schoolbook without considering the Lombard’s *Sentences*, which went on to become an even more famous schoolbook. Studying the sources of the *Historia scholastica* leads inexorably back to

Comestor's master, the Lombard, for it turns out that Comestor not only mined the *Sentences* in creating the *History* but also took advantage of the Lombard's work on the *Gloss*. For a long time now, ever since the great Ignatius Brady gave up the search for the Lombard's long-lost glosses on most of the Bible apart from those still extant on the Psalms and the Pauline Epistles, scholars have assumed that they are gone forever. They are not, and tracking Comestor's sources for the edition of the *Historia scholastica* will only further underscore the importance of the *Sentences* and the Lombard's own glossed Bible. All signs are that medieval legend had it right in making Peter Lombard and Peter Comestor brothers.

To understand the *History* as a schoolbook, one also has to look ahead, to Comestor's successors as much as to his predecessors, and here Stephen Langton must also be assigned a starring role. Half of this study is devoted to Langton's role in the making of the *History*, and it is no exaggeration to say that without the multiple versions of his course on that work we would be able to know very little for sure about the early history of its text. Langton provides a unique bridge from the Paris schools of the 1160s, when he was a student, to the university that came into being by the close of the twelfth century and beginning of the thirteenth, when he retired from academic life to serve as Archbishop of Canterbury. Like Comestor, Langton was intimately familiar with the Lombard's biblical teaching. Unlike Comestor, he was able to carry it into the thirteenth century. Careful study of his still unedited and unstudied corpus of lectures on the Old Testament is the *sine qua non* not only for editing the *History* and understanding the biblical *Gloss* at Paris during the second half of the twelfth century (how it was used, how its text changed and when, etc.) but also for beginning to study the biblical works of the masters, and especially the friars, during the first half of the thirteenth century.

After an introductory chapter that reviews existing historiography and situates the *History* in four main contexts, the next three chapters are devoted to Peter Comestor's role in the making of the *History*: Chapter Two examines his lectures on the glossed Gospels as background to the making of the *History*; Chapter Three his use of the *Gloss* as a schoolbook; and Chapter Four his applications in the *History* of the lessons learned in teaching using the biblical *Gloss*. The following three chapters feature Langton's role in the making of the *History*: Chapter Five shows why Langton is the key to the early history of the text of the *History*; Chapter Six explores Langton's relationship with Comestor and the changing roles in that relationship; and Chapter Seven examines the three versions of his course on the *History*. A brief Chapter Eight concludes the volume.

Out of the many debts incurred in writing this book, I owe the greatest to Steve Brown of Boston College, who first put me on the right track long ago when he taught me how to work with medieval manuscripts and showed me in particular how to use Langton's course to unlock the secrets of the *History*, to my wife, Bernardine, who has patiently supported me and my work while the fruit of this labor slowly ripened, and to our four children, who never tire of teasing their father for his longtime interest in Peter the Eater.

Many of the debts are owed to scholars around the world who have graciously interested themselves in my research. I owe a very substantial debt to Joe Goering of Toronto, whose interest in my work on Comestor and Langton led to my publishing this volume with PIMS Press and will I hope lead to my publishing there my edition and translation of the entire *Historia scholastica*. Joe's careful reading of my drafts combined with his magisterial knowledge of both the history and theology of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries sharpened both my prose and my arguments. Marcia Colish too very generously read through and commented on the entire manuscript, sharing with me the benefits of her considerable wisdom and expertise; her mentorship has been invaluable. Gilbert Dahan has also been so generous in sharing his immense erudition, and I have relied on his judgment time and again, always to my benefit. Numerous conversations and interactions with the late Riccardo Quinto, whose tragic death deprived his family and friends of a wonderful man and the academic world of a peerless scholar, helped me untie thorny knots in unveiling the complicated early history of the manuscripts. It would please Riccardo to know that I have decided at long last to take up his insistent suggestion to immerse myself in the complexities of Langton's surviving works on the Old Testament. And I have benefitted immensely too from the great learning and expertise of his circle of former students and colleagues: Magdalena Bieniak, Caterina Tarlazzi, Francesco Siri, Riccardo Saccenti, Massimiliano D'Alessandro, Fabrizio Amerini, and others. Tracking down the sources of the *History* stuck my nose into the biblical *Gloss* and, serendipitously, into a wonderful and ongoing collaboration with Alexander Andr  e, a young but accomplished scholar as gracious as he is learned.

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