

PRESENTACIÓN / INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ROBERT GROSSETESTE AND ARISTOTELIANISM

Robert Grosseteste flourished in the key moment of a profound cultural transformation that swept through the Latin world. This transformation witnessed the initial assimilation of Aristotle's natural philosophy and metaphysics, accompanied by the fundamental commentaries by al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, and the first Parisian condemnations of Aristotelian theories. This crucial period spans roughly from 1200 to 1230, encompassing a long and rather obscure phase of Grosseteste's life. His university career and activity as a commentator of Aristotle's works were shaped during this period. Grosseteste wrote a full commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* and a series of notes and comments on the *Physics*, which remained unfinished and was likely assembled posthumously. These writings by Grosseteste appear to be the first Latin commentaries produced in the Latin Middle Ages on these Aristotelian works. Grosseteste also wrote a series of brief treatises (*opuscula*) on various scientific and philosophical topics. There, the influence of Aristotle and the Arabic Aristotelian philosophers becomes gradually stronger, although references to specific names remain infrequent.

Around 1230, Grosseteste started to teach theology at the Franciscan convent of Oxford and, from that date onwards, he seems to have engaged with the production of theological works and the study of Greek. In 1235, he was elected bishop of Lincoln. It was in this context that his translation work began, facilitated by the availability of funds and the help of his pupils and collaborators, mainly Franciscans and Dominicans. Grosseteste's translations of Aristotelian texts include two *inedita*: the first complete version of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – featuring segments of comments by Eustratius, Michael of Ephesus, Aspasius and by an anonymous commentator – and the first Greco-Latin partial version of the *De caelo*, which encompasses the second and the beginning of the third book and includes the translation of Simplicius' commentary on the same section of the work. To these two genuine translations, we may add the Latin versions of some pseudo-Aristotelian *opuscula*, such as *De virtutibus*, *De passionibus* and *De lineis insecabilibus*, whose attribution to Grosseteste remains to be confirmed. James McEvoy suggested that Grosseteste's motivation to learn Greek and venturing into translation, on the threshold of his fifties, might have been less about Aristotle and more about emulating the method of the Fathers in interpreting the Scriptures by directly accessing the Greek Bible and sources of Christianity. Regardless of his intention, it is worth noting that Grosseteste's last scholarly undertaking was – to the best of my knowledge – the incomplete translation of Aristotle's *De caelo*.

Grosseteste, therefore, read, commented on, and translated the works by Aristotle, especially those devoted to the scientific method, the natural world, and the foundations

of human wisdom. Thus, he played a significant role in the rediscovery of Aristotle and in his assimilation and dissemination in the Latin West. As a pioneer in the exploration of this vast and complex system of knowledge, he realised that the most controversial issues of Aristotle's thought required an understanding of Greek and the guidance of Greek interpreters. To the latter, he resorted as far as he could as an aid in his commentaries and translations, which let us envisage the 'hidden' presence of Proclus, Eustratius, Themistius, Simplicius, Philoponus, and other still unidentified Greek *expositores*. In his quest for understanding Aristotle's philosophy, Grosseteste also drew upon the insights of Arabic commentators, particularly Avicenna, but also al-Farabi and Ibn Gabirol (Avicebron). Neoplatonic influences, Greek, Arab and Christian, undeniably influenced Grosseteste's approach to Aristotle. However, he was also one of the first medieval scholars to refer to Averroes, whose understanding of controversial issues, such as the celestial movers and the eternity of the world, is used by Grosseteste as maintaining a reliable interpretation of Aristotle's true positions. Grosseteste, indeed, openly declared that the principles of Aristotle's thought could not and should not be unduly mixed with Christian principles. In the *Hexaemeron*, which is his major exegetical work, he vehemently criticised those who, misled by flawed translations, try to 'Christianise' Aristotle, most notably in the matter of the eternity of the world. According to Grosseteste, Aristotle's stance on this issue was unequivocal. This invective could be considered a leading example of a correct philological attitude toward pre-Christian philosophical thought, were it not that the features that characterise Grosseteste's Aristotelianism are in fact multiple and to some extent even conflicting. The importance of reading Aristotle's texts and interpreters directly in the Greek language seems to clash, therefore, with an exegesis strongly based on the Neoplatonic and Augustinian traditions. The pioneering interest in Aristotle's scientific method based on the science of demonstration is coupled with the value of experience and personal observation and an understanding of the natural world firmly rooted in the Christian worldview.

Modern scholars who questioned Aristotle's role in Grosseteste's thought have focused on each of these aspects. On the one hand, the scholarly interest in Grosseteste's Aristotelianism began, chronologically, with Ludwig Baur's *Die Philosophie des Robert Grosseteste* (1917), which emphasised the Neoplatonic character of Grosseteste's Aristotelianism. On the other hand, Ezio Franceschini delved systematically into Grosseteste's translations of Aristotle in his extensive work *Roberto Grossatesta vescovo di Lincoln, e le sue traduzioni latine* (1933), which provided a fundamental basis for the *Aristoteles Latinus* project, in which Franceschini actively collaborated. A few decades later, Thomson's comprehensive catalogue of Grosseteste's works allowed for a more methodical examination of Aristotle's influence on his writings, while the celebration of the seventh centenary of his death, in 1953, produced two volumes which marked a turning point in modern studies on the subject. Alistair Crombie's book *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science* radically reshaped the view of Grosseteste's interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of science. For him, the bishop of Lincoln developed not only the notion of scientific knowledge but also a peculiar experimental approach to the study of nature,

positioning him as a forerunner of modern scientific methodology. Similarly, the celebratory volume *Robert Grosseteste Scholar and Bishop* edited by Daniel Callus focused on Grosseteste as a commentator and translator of Aristotle, picturing him as the key figure of English scholasticism.

In the second half of the twentieth century, investigations into Grosseteste's Aristotelianism gained momentum thanks to Richard Dales' edition of the *Commentary on the Physics* (1964), later followed by the publication of the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, edited by Pietro B. Rossi (1986). Precisely in the 1980s, the presence of Aristotle was approached within the framework of two new and partly antithetical overall views on Grosseteste's philosophy. On the one hand, McEvoy's book *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (1983) pointed to a systematic reconstruction of Grosseteste's philosophy under the banner of Neoplatonism, the so-called 'metaphysics of light', and a reassessment of Grosseteste's theological thought. According to McEvoy, Aristotle played a diminished role in Grosseteste's reflections, with Neoplatonic commentators taking on prominent positions. McEvoy also highlighted the pervasive influence of Augustine and Augustinianism, positing that they constituted the primary and ubiquitous source of Grosseteste's view of the natural world. In contrast, Southern's groundbreaking book *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (1986) shaped a peculiar and 'anti-continental' view of Grosseteste's life and thought, focusing on the originality of his approach to Aristotle, diverging from the prevailing manner of the Parisian scholastic philosophers and marked by an inclination for experimentation and direct observation of nature.

More recent contributions are due to scholars who have also generously contributed to this special issue of *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval*. I leave to the reader the pleasure of following the latest developments on this topic through the eight papers presented here. While each of them presents valuable insights, they all underscore the need for further research.

The first three articles deal with Grosseteste's pioneering approach to Aristotle's logic and scientific method in his *Commentary on Posterior Analytics*. My own study focuses on Grosseteste's working notes, and more specifically on the case study of Philoponus, one of the anonymous Greek *expositores* mentioned by Grosseteste. It outlines the debated medieval circulation of excerpts from Philoponus with the goal of verifying the presence of the Alexandrian *expositor* in Grosseteste's commentary. To this purpose, I adopt the Latin version of Philoponus' commentary edited by Philippus Theodosius (Venice 1542), which adds *marginalia* referring to Grosseteste. Next, the study by Pietro B. Rossi investigates the meaning and role of the numbered *conclusiones* that fix the doctrinal developments in Grosseteste's commentary. Rossi convincingly shows that, contrary to previous interpretations, these *conclusiones* are similar to the concluding statements found in the demonstrations of theorems in Euclid's *Elements*. Accordingly, the geometrical method is for Grosseteste a strategical tool for understanding the science of demonstration, namely logic, and the Aristotelian scientific methodology at a time. Third of the group, the paper by Michele Trizio contributes to the wide debate on one of the most crucial passages of

Grosseteste's commentary, namely the description of how the human mind forms universal concepts after the Fall. Trizio argues that Grosseteste likely reformulated an identical text from Eustratius' *Commentary on Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, which Grosseteste translated only at a later stage. However, Trizio advances the hypothesis that Grosseteste had access to it much earlier than it is generally believed.

The second group of three studies focuses on Grosseteste's Aristotelian natural philosophy. Clelia Cialesi deals with the topic of 'spatial differences' in Grosseteste's *De differentiis localibus*, a hitherto understudied *opusculum* which offers a precious opportunity to dig into the debated issue of the Latin versions of Aristotle's *On the Heavens*, which Grosseteste had access to. Cialesi focuses mainly on Averroes' *Long Commentary on the Physics* as the real, though undeclared, source Grosseteste relied on to shape his peculiar conception of spatial differences according to the mathematical and the physical point of view. In turn, the paper by Sokratis-Athanasios Kiosoglou discusses another understudied topic, namely the reception of Proclus' *Elements of Physics* in Grosseteste's *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* book 6. His analysis highlights, again, the fundamental role of Aristotle's *conclusiones*, recalled by Grosseteste to evaluate Proclus' partially unfaithful references to them. Kiosoglou's analysis reveals that Grosseteste "is a careful and moderately critical reader of Proclus". Finally, the study by Neil Lewis delves into Grosseteste's conception of corporeity and, particularly, his distinction between body as substance (*substantia*) and body as quantity (*quantum*). Lewis underlines that Grosseteste's understanding of *corpus-substantia* is framed within the 'metaphysics of light' first developed in the *De luce* and then partially reworked in the *Commentary on Physics* and other works. This notion of corporeity works as a sort of generating power for three dimensions resulting in *corpus-quantum*. Accordingly, Grosseteste's conception of corporeity, though based on Avicenna, is highly original and diverges from the latter's conception of corporeity as proposed by medieval and modern commentators.

The last two papers included in this issue have been authored by Pieter Beullens and Lisa Devriese, respectively, and expand on Grosseteste's role as a translator of Aristotle. Beullens examines Grosseteste's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He examines the medieval Latin translations of Aristotle's work with a view to answering the question of whether Grosseteste had access to a complete copy of the translation by Burgundio of Pisa, or only to the fragmentary version presently known to us. Beullens considers these versions as "fluid texts" that contain variants that change along the transmission, affecting the translator's original intention, and at the same time exert mutual influence, so as to generate new links within the same floating transmission. Devriese also introduces her study with an overview, which perfectly works as the conclusion of this special issue. She reconstructs the history of Grosseteste's Aristotelian translations within the context of the gigantic project *Aristoteles Latinus*, also shaping the *status quaestionis* of current scholarship and *in fieri* works. Grosseteste's version of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was edited by René-Antoine Gauthier in AL 26.1.3, while the fragmentary translation of the *De caelo*, with that of Simplicius' corresponding commentary, is present in the database version alone (ALD VIII.1), according to the provisional edition by Fernand Bossier. The second part of

her paper focuses on Grosseteste's translation method by drawing attention to Grosseteste's rendering of smaller Greek words, such as particles and conjunctions, into Latin, in order to disclose what can distinguish his genuine translations from those by other medieval translators. This method shows that Grosseteste did not translate the fragment *Quadratura per lunulas* – from Simplicius' *Commentary on the Physics* – that he himself copied among his *cedulae*.

Let me conclude this brief introduction to this special issue devoted to Grosseteste and Aristotelianism by recalling that, up to now, no comprehensive study has been exclusively devoted to such a relevant topic both for understanding the intellectual figure of Grosseteste and for retracing the history of a crucial phase of the reception of Aristotle in the Middle Ages. Hence, I am sincerely grateful to the editors of *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval*, Alexander Fidora and Nicola Polloni, the executive editor, María Cabré Duran, and the editorial board of the journal for having keenly accepted the proposal of a special issue dedicated to Robert Grosseteste and facilitated its realisation. I wish to thank in particular Nicola Polloni for his constant and fundamental help in all the phases of the preparation of the volume. Last but not least, my greatest gratitude goes to all the brilliant scholars who have participated in this issue for their enthusiastic and generous response, and their excellent contributions.

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