

## A Biographical Database of Medieval Commentators on Aristotle and Peter Lombard.

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The prosopographical database upon which I am working focuses on medieval commentaries on Aristotle's works and those on a theological text with significant scientific content, Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, these two groups of texts became the primary pedagogical tools for the two major faculties of nascent European universities. Students and masters alike were expected to show their familiarity with and elaborations upon both Aristotle and the *Sentences*. The database under construction takes its unifying structure in the literary products of the Arts and Theology faculties, and seeks to investigate the institutional and biographical components of these products.

While one potential use for the database is prosopographical research, the determining focus of the tool is textual, and thus it would be of use to other scholars whose research is textual rather than social or political. The determining criterion for inclusion is that the medieval scholar produced a commentary, the evidence for which may be either its survival in an extant manuscript or printed edition, or the historical reference to such a work in sources such as Bale or Leland or early library catalogues. The data file that collects information on the texts themselves will serve as a flexible index to texts, and because it incorporates an *incipit* file, it can serve as a locating device as well.

Beyond this general perspective, the database should have several other uses, enabling researchers to tie texts to their biographical and institutional bases. One can only give a sample of questions that may be asked of such a database. It is often assumed that the academic careers of medieval scholars were divided into two relatively distinct periods of interest: a scientific one, followed in many cases by a theological one.<sup>1</sup> Such impressions are reinforced by the usual picture of university training, in which affiliation in the Arts faculty preceded advancement to the theological faculty. However, the extent to which such general impressions were borne out in practice can be readily determined from the data compiled here. Questions of productivity and their correlation both to affiliation with religious orders or the secular clergy and to chronological developments are also attainable under this database. Suitable subsamples of these data may be scrutinized for answers to questions about: institutional vitality in the late Middle Ages; the extent to which geographical movement or ecclesiastical preferments affected productivity; changes in duration of scholarly training between matriculation and inception; or the extent to which scholarship reflected cross-disciplinary interests in the late Middle Ages. Our knowledge about the curriculum at medieval universities has often been based largely on the academic statutes of universities,<sup>2</sup> yet we also know that those statutes were applied with considerable flexibility; because the projected database collects information on lectures at universities, the database may serve to illustrate the training that students actually achieved.

Because the database also incorporates information on the commentators' social class and (for those originating in towns) their family's profession, one can analyze the extent to

which late medieval scholars originated from particular classes or professions. Finally, one can also trace epistolary networks of scholars and the networks of student/master relationships. In the process of entering data, I have observed that masters seem to have attracted a significant proportion of their students from the same diocese or region; whether this resulted from the retention of ties – perhaps in benefices or social connections – in the home region or for linguistic reasons remains to be investigated. Such questions are unlikely to be answered by manual procedures except in the most cursory way. Traditional institution-specific prosopographical databases may provide more extensive confirmation of results for particular university centres, but fail to answer more universal questions that the database under construction seeks to address.

The database arose out of research that I have carried out over the past several years. My primary concern has been an analysis of the definition and modification of scientific disciplines during the late Middle Ages. Initially, the focus for that research was commentaries on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, in which Aristotle discussed his own concept of disciplinary autonomy and integration. More recently, the focus has shifted to commentaries on a theological work, the *Sentences*.<sup>3</sup> Because Aristotle's works formed the basis of instruction in the medieval Arts faculty and the *Sentences* was a primary text in the Theology faculty, this historical investigation possesses a strong institutional as well as theoretical component. For this reason, much of my research has involved such things as the individual educational backgrounds of commentators, the transmission of their texts, and the subsequent fortunes of their university and other careers. These initial individual biographical investigations raised significant questions about the disciplinary relationships between members of the Arts faculties and the superior faculties, the relative importance or prestige assigned to each, and the mobility of scholars and their works among various late medieval universities,<sup>4</sup> but the evidence they provided was at best anecdotal and limited. Beginning in 1988, these biographical investigations were expanded into a prosopographical investigation of scholastic commentators on Aristotle's works and the *Sentences*. The database was founded on two fundamental sources: a list of commentators on Aristotle's work and a similar list of commentators on the *Sentences*.<sup>5</sup> Beyond these initial sources, I have also examined several other sources, including: addenda to Lohr and Stegümler;<sup>6</sup> repertoria of religious orders and university masters; ecclesiastical records; manuscript catalogues; and, other bio- and bibliographical records. Particularly in the area of commentaries on the *Sentences*, the database will significantly improve the information about the location of texts.

The project was automated by a series of programs written in dBase III Plus, but I plan to convert to Microsoft Access; the code for the data entry/review program is Visual Basic. When complete, I expect the database will be disseminated on a sequence of floppy disks or CD-Rom containing both an application program to manipulate the database and the database files.

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**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> N. H. Steneck, *Science and Creation in the Middle Ages* (1976).

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Weisheipl, 'Curriculum of the Faculty of Arts at Oxford in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Mediaeval Studies*, 26 (1964).

<sup>3</sup> Livesey, *Theology and Science in the Fourteenth Century* (1989) and *idem*, 'Theology and Science in the Fourteenth Century: The Subalternate Sciences in Oxford Commentaries on the Sentences', *Synthèse*, 83 (1990).

<sup>4</sup> Livesey, 'Proportions in Late-Medieval Universities: An Examination of Two Treatises', *Revue d'histoire des textes*, 16 (1986).

<sup>5</sup> C. H. Lohr, 'Medieval Latin Aristotle Commentaries', *Traditio*, 23-24, 26-30 (1967-74) and *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, 14 (1972); F. Stegmüller, *Repertorium commentariorum in Sententias Petri Lombardi* (1947), and *Supplément*, ed. V. Doucet (1954).

<sup>6</sup> J. Van Dyk, 'Thirty Years Since Stegmüller', *Franciscan Studies*, 39 (1979).