HILDEGARD, THE SCHOOLS, AND THEIR CRITICS

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The century in which Hildegard of Bingen lived was a time of great upheaval and cultural change. Prominent among these developments is the transformation of the education system, founded on monasteries and cathedral schools, into the independent academic institutions which would eventually become universities. The full story of this dramatic transformation has not yet been narrated, nor has Hildegard’s place in these events been fully recounted. Constant Mews, in a seminal 1998 study, introduced the question of Hildegard’s relationship to the schools of her day, concluding that “we cannot exclude Hildegard from the scholastic world in which she lived.” By examining her reading, her personal connection with schoolmasters, her imitation of scholastic genres, and her conception of human reason and its limits, this study will further investigate the magistra’s connections to the scholastic world and contextualize her critique of the schools within a 12th-century discourse of monastic anti-scholasticism.

Hildegard’s Scholastic Sources

Hildegard’s sources have been occasionally discussed, and it is not the place here to fully investigate the question. Nonetheless, in order to

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3 The serious study of Hildegard’s sources was inaugurated by Hans Liebeschütz’s monograph Das allegorische Weltbild der Heiligen Hildegard von Bingen (Leipzig, 1930). Since that time, no scholar has done more to further our knowledge of Hildegard’s sources than Peter Dronke. Among his many contributions, one can point first to his introduction
accurately assess Hildegard’s relationship to the schools, it is important
to determine whether or not Hildegard was familiar with some of the texts
12th-century scholastics studied, as Peter Dronke and others have argued
based on lexical evidence. The evidence presented, however, is hardly
conclusive. For example, Dronke has argued that Hildegard was deeply
familiar with the *Timaeus* of Plato, in the translation of the late-antique
scholar Calcidius. But the phrase *prima materia* on which he bases his
argument is fairly widely attested in the 12th century, as Dronke himself
notes.\(^4\) Her cosmological use of *conglutinare* could as easily have come
from Augustine\(^5\) as Calcidius. The phrase *capacitas mundi* is used by
Jerome\(^6\) and Cassiodorus.\(^7\) Hildegard’s phrase *circumvolutio elementorum*
also appears in Peter Comestor’s *Historia scolastica*, completed around
1170.\(^8\) Claudianus Mamertus is similarly unlikely to have been a direct
source: the adverb *illocaliter*, while undoubtedly stemming ultimately from
his works, had some currency in the 12th century, as evidenced in its use
by authors as diverse as Frowin of Engelberg,\(^9\) Aelred of Rievaulx,\(^10\) and,
most importantly, Rupert of Deutz.\(^11\) It is also unlikely that Hildegard read
Filastrius’s rare *Diversarum haeresiarum liber*; her key term *fructuositas* is
amply attested in the works of her older contemporary, the abbot Guibert


\(^{5}\) Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, ed. Dorothea Weber, CSEL 91 (Vienna,
1998), 2.7.9, p. 128.

\(^{6}\) Jerome, *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 72 (Turnhout, 1959), 1.15,
p. 260.

118.63, p. 1085.


\(^{9}\) Frowin of Engelberg, *Explanatio dominicae orationis*, ed. Sigisbert Beck, CCCM 134

\(^{10}\) Aelred of Rievaulx, *De anima*, eds. Anselm Hoste and Charles Hugh Talbot, CCCM 1
(Turnhout, 1971), 1.64, p. 705.

\(^{11}\) Rupert of Deutz, *De divinis officiis*, ed. Rhaban Haacke, CCCM 7 (Turnhout, 1967),
2.13, p. 47, and 9.8, p. 324.