
Twelfth-century thought and literature are very much part of a long tradition in which (as for example Pierre Hadot has pointed out) philosophy and theology were exegetical: consisting of commentaries and exegesis of older texts. This is evidently so for the vast field of biblical commentaries, but the exegetical format applies equally to philosophy and other literature. In its turn, twelfth-century intellectual culture has long been the object of historical interpretation. The concept of the “Renaissance of the Twelfth Century” remains a pervasive one, if only as a backdrop for some qualifications. A renaissance certainly is there, but coexists with older forms, or, rather, this renaissance takes simultaneously different shapes, of “progressive” rationalization and what can be seen as more conservative voices.

In the book under review, the comprehensive perspective from which twelfth-century intellectual culture is presented is that of a Foucauldian archeology of knowledge — in which the “figure of thought” of *integumentum* is followed through its development by different authors. The central theme of the book is the idea that words and texts may contain a hidden meaning, that the truth is hidden beneath a veil (*vela veritatis*). An example is Plato’s World Soul, which is taken by twelfth-century authors such as Abelard — who in the tradition mentioned above articulates his thinking by commenting on, in this case, Plato — to be hiding a deeper meaning. The author first explains what, in his view, are inadequate ways to discuss this “integumental hermeneutics.” Thus, *integumentum* is not just to be seen as part of a long history of an essentially unchanging phenomenon of allegory, or, with due respect to Marie-Dominique Chenu, of a “symbolic mentality.” Although it has its place in rhetoric, treating *integumentum* or *involucrum* as one of its subjects is not sufficient; nor is it only part of an Augustinian “language of things,” Hennig Brinkmann’s “zweite Sprache.”

Approaches from a literary point of view, for example by Peter Dronke, or efforts, by for example Peter von Moos, to construct a medieval theory of literature fall equally short in the author’s view. On the contrary, he argues, opposed to what “literature” in a modern sense implies as to its autonomy, literature in the twelfth century is heteronomous, knowledge creating a space for itself in literary texts. This is what — as he argues later in the book — Alan of Lille effects when he, just as Bernard Silvestris had done in his *Cosmographia*, composes his own integumental texts (where hidden meaning and commentary come together). The hermeneutics of *integumentum* is to be seen — this is the central thesis of the book — as part and aspect of the twelfth-century process of rationalization and the growth of scientific thought (*Verwissenschaftlichung*), a process in which the role of reason, the methodology of the *artes* and *scientia*, the role of language in science and knowledge,
and the position of intellectuals, had to be newly defined. It is pre-eminently subject to the ambivalences of the period, and its discussion enables a view of processes which did not persist, and of which a more teleological treatment — the twelfth century as a preparation for later scholasticism — would lose sight. Avant-garde elements are incorporated by for example William of Conches who at the same time represents the old educational ideals. Above all, integumental hermeneutics is conceptualized in the context of methodological discussions about the role of language in theology and philosophy and as part of the growing self-constitution of theologians and their discipline. Thus, it should be part of a history of philosophy.

This becomes perhaps most clear when after this long introduction in the first chapter Bezner discusses how Peter Abelard exploits the concept of *integumentum*, or *involucrum*, to define the role of reason and its limits in theology, in other words to design a theological rationality that does justice to the ineffability of the divine. At the same time Abelard thus construes/implies the criteria for interpretative competence and legitimizes doubt as an epistemological instrument (referring to the twelve-year old Jesus and his questioning in the Temple — thus fashioning his own *imitatio Christi*).

I will not attempt in this brief review to discuss all chapters of this voluminous study. Later chapters examine, among others, Gilbert of Poitiers and his further development of the specifics of theological language; William of Conches, whose short redaction of a Commentary on Macrobius’s *Somnium Scipionis* is here edited; Bernardus Silvestris, Alan of Lille, and John of Salisbury. For all authors, language, as carrier of truth, especially theological language, is in need of interpretation. A pervasive idea is how integumental hermeneutics increasingly converges with philosophy of language and signification-analysis, *Bedeutungsanalyse*. Thus, although an expression as *aliud dicit, aliud sentit* indicates a rhetorical background, it is dialectics and logical-semantic analysis that really constitute the room within which *integumentum* can be conceptualized. However, this results in a tension between, on the one hand, the wish to explain hidden meanings, and on the other hand, the question as to what extent this hiddenness is acceptable, given the function of language to clarify. At the end of the century “meaningful darkness” loses its epistemological fascination. Openness, and *manifesta locutio*, become leading metaphors in the discussion about the language of science. (Pointing, in an archeology of knowledge, to the metaphorical character of at first sight such transparent sounding words, is only consistent.)

The work would have benefited from a more thorough editing process. Many printing mistakes mar the book; occasionally redundant language obfuscates an already difficult subject; footnotes are repeated; the same author in the bibliography appears under different headings. On a less prosaic level, one might differ with some of the interpretations, or with the way in which others’ interpretations are discussed — perhaps a study like this (an incompletely reworked PhD Thesis)