The project „Stephen Langton”

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The full name of the project in Polish:
Filozofia i teologia Stefana Langtona († 1228) w kontekście początków nauczania uniwersyteckiego w Paryżu. Krytyczna edycja czterech ksiąg Quaestiones theologiae oraz studium twórczości

1. Objectives and hypotheses

Stephen Langton († 1228), the promoter of the Magna Carta, famous for his crucial role in the history of medieval Europe, was also one of the most eminent masters of theology of his time. Langton’s production stands out not only for its dimension, but also for its quality. Because of the use of a particularly advanced method based on semantics and logical analysis, Langton’s literary inheritance is commonly considered the climax of the 12th-century analytical speculation (Quinto 1994; Valente 2008 et al.).

In past, the influence of Langton on the 13th-century scholasticism was seriously underrated due to lack of editions of his works. Today, as the number of edited texts is growing, it has become clear that Langton was among the most important sources for the subsequent generations. In particular, it seems that Langton’s Quaestiones were the chief source of William of Auxerre’s Summa aurea (ed. Ribaillier 1981), that is to say of one of the most important, popular and long-lasting manuals of the 13th-century scholasticism (Young 2014).

The aim of the present project is a complete critical edition and study of Stephen Langton’s Quaestiones theologiae. The edited texts will be compared to other speculative works of the turn of the century, in particular to Summa aurea, in order to offer a thorough, comparative analysis of their contents and to evaluate their sources and influence. Moreover, the study will include finding parallels among Langton’s Quaestiones and his remaining works, especially the inedited Commentary on Lombard’s Collectanea, that is closely related to Langton’s Questions.

2. Research method

All the preliminary steps, necessary to undertake a critical edition of the Quaestiones, have been concluded: the manuscripts containing the questions have been located, described, reproduced and digitalized, and a standard policy for transcribing, collating, and editing has been determined. The first volume, containing 23 of over two hundred Quaestiones, has been published by Quinto and myself in the series Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi (Oxford University Press, 2014). The British Academy has agreed to publish the whole edition. Moreover, since 2010 a group of young scholars has been frequenting specialized seminars at the University of Warsaw, during which selected Langton’s Quaestiones have been edited, studied, and published under my direction (Wciórka-Bieniak 2011; Bieniak-Trepczyński 2014).

One of the main assets of Langton’s Questions is their oral origin. However, the same factor is also the major source of methodological problems, because these teachings have come down to us in multiple redactions. As a consequence, all of the existing texts ought to be treated as complementary and each version should be edited separately. Due to the significant length of the material and the complexity of the task, the edition and study of the Quaestiones will necessarily require a five-year long cooperation of an highly prepared team of researchers.
3. Significance of the results

The comprehensive edition and study of Langton’s Quaestiones will allow to assess their sources and the exact impact on the later thought. First, it might offer the long-hunted answer to the question concerning the continuity between the 12th-century theology, developed above all in the cathedral schools, and the 13th-century university philosophy, deeply marked by the assimilation of the newly translated Aristotelian and Arabic works. For reasons that still need to be fully explained, since the very beginning of the Parisian University the works of Peter Lombard were made the principal vehicle of the theological tradition. It seems that Stephen Langton may have played a decisive role in establishing Lombard’s authority. What were his motivations? What was the theological legacy that Langton passed to his successors? Second, the time when the University of Paris was taking shape was marked by anxiety caused by the raise of heresies (Gorochov 2012) and the uncontrolled absorption of new Aristotelianism, culminating in the first interdiction of reading Aristotle announced at the Synod of Sens (1210). If the raise of the Parisian University was motivated mainly by the need for control over the theologians, as Nathalie Gorochov has recently claimed, and for promoting traditional theology, then the correct appreciation of the theological tradition transmitted by Stephen Langton and his eminent disciple, William of Auxerre (later assigned by the pope Gregory IX to emend Aristotle’s writings from doctrinal errors), would be of utmost importance for understanding the crucial period for the development of the Western scholarly practice. This evaluation will not be possible without a trustworthy edition of Langton’s works. Finally, Langton’s works constitute a very important testimony of early university teaching. His Quaestiones originate from written reports (reportationes) of oral discussions. Consequently, the edition of these works allows us to take a closer look at the educational practices in precisely the period when the University of Paris was taking shape and when the didactic techniques used in the thirteenth century were not yet well established. Our knowledge concerning this critical period is still extremely limited; hence, Langton’s works offer the opportunity to fill an important gap.

The project will shed new light on the problem of university’s identity and will give us valuable evidence concerning the poorly known origins of the institution.

References