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Gumerlock, Francis X. *The Seven Seals of the Apocalypse: Medieval Texts in Translation*. Medieval Institute Publications. TEAMS Commentary Series. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2008. Pp. xii, 98. \$11.00. ISBN: 978-1-58044-108-7.

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In his anthology Francis X. Gumerlock collects medieval commentaries on the compelling verses of the Apocalypse describing the opening of the book sealed with "seven seals" (Rev. 5-8). He divides the types of commentary into three major categories: Christological (tying the seals to events in Christ's life), Ecclesiastical (applying them to events in the church "as it triumphed over paganism and expanded its influence") and Historical (eschatological, futuristic readings seeing the seals as "periods of redemptive history," see p. 2 for Gumerlock's introductory summary). The readings can overlap (numbers 2 and 3 both involve church history one could say, and Christ is of course everywhere) yet can also be rigidly exclusive and contradictory: to see the first seal as the Incarnation or to call it the "spread of the Gospels" in the early church is to summon absolutely different systems of association. Gumerlock offer a series of tables and lists that help us sort out the various schemas. His clear, detailed and readable introduction describes the goals and motivations of each of the three branches and sets the authors very effectively into the historical contexts--the political, doctrinal, intellectual moments and movements in church, history from the 6th to the 15th centuries, that inspired them to adopt a particular reading.

This teaching volume can be used in class to display the compelling art and accomplishment of medieval criticism. I can also see it supplementing English vernacular texts, particularly *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, both deeply indebted to the Apocalypse. So even though Marjorie Reeves's entry in David Jeffrey's *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* tells us that the theme of the *seven seals* is treated cautiously and obliquely by medieval English authors, Gumerlock's anthology may help alert us to how vernacular authors draw upon the imagery of the seals and upon the interpretations made in these commentaries. Further, the Joachite, Franciscan, and Olivian influences on medieval poets and theologians are getting ever more attention in literary criticism, and this volume conveniently collects material relevant to that area of study, in Joachim himself and in Proulx Boneta. In fact, it would be very hard

to find and read any of the anthology's texts individually, and few if any are translated beyond scattered short quotations across scholarship. So Gumerlock has done a service in this deeply humane, cogent volume, which also includes, in addition to Joachim, some major figures in the Commentary tradition, including Cassiodorus, Caesarius of Arles, and Hugh of St. Cher.

The introduction confronts the modern inheritance of Revelation by citing data that 40% of Americans believe Armageddon will occur; this is not to mock the religious but to point to the persistence, urgency and relevance of Revelation throughout history and to contrast the modern "apocalyptic" reading with the variety of medieval responses under study here. After detailed summaries of all the works and authors to be excerpted, the introduction looks toward the birth of early modern and modern scholarship on the Bible and contextualizes the contribution of the medieval authors to this evolution. Reference-rich footnotes clarify passages, address textual cruxes, and enable advanced study and research papers; a bibliography and a list of all the editions used complete the volume. The final page advertizes the other volumes in this TEAMS series, including texts of Wyclif and selections from the *Glossa Ordinaria*, all of which TMR's readers will be anxious to use.

The commentaries themselves on the "seven seals" defy paraphrase because, so to speak, God is in the details, but selections from a few authors will reveal the range and depth of the works excerpted. In her edition of Pseudo-Alcuin, Ann Matter (*Traditio* 1980: 111-37), argues that the focus on Christ in this 6th-7th century text is, as Gumerlock summarizes, "related to a Mozarabic liturgical rite called *fractio panis*" where "pieces of host were arranged in the shape of a cross and symbolized major events in the life of Christ" (Gumerlock 7). Matter further associates the text and its Christological focus with the combating of Arianism, while Gumerlock more broadly associates Christological commentary itself with the desire of the early church to defend the significance of the book of Revelation itself against accusations of irrelevance. Pseudo Alcuin neatly lists the correspondences that display the Christological branch of commentary:

We read in the Apocalypse that there is a book sealed with seven seals which no one was able to open or break its seals...the first seal is the nativity of the Lord. The second, the baptism. The third, the crucifixion. The fourth, the burial. The fifth, the resurrection. The sixth the assention. The seventh the judgment. (30).

Ecclesiastical Interpretations (Part II) don't look for the seven events in the life of Christ but rather associate the seals with events in the ongoing history of the church and to God's acts of revelation and grace, as here in Caesarius of Arles, on Rev. 6.2:

As is customary, when the divine scripture was read, you listened. In this manner blessed John says, *And behold a white horse, and the one who sat upon it, has a bow, and a cross was given to him, and he went out conquering.* The horse is the church, the rider Christ.

A little later the red horse of 6.3 is glossed as "sinister and evil people, bloodthirsty from its rider, the devil" who "went forth against the victorious and conquering church." The black horse is "sinister people agreeing with the devil," and, "Also by *the pale horse* is understood evil people who do not desist in inciting persecutions." The three horses go "out after the white horse; and they have as their rider the devil, who is *Death*. Therefore the three horses are understood as famines, and wars, and plagues" (44).

Part III, "historical interpretations," focus on a boarder eschatology, as typified by the indomitable Calabrian monk Joachim of Fiore, who reads each seal, and then the opening of said seal, as parallel events in OT and Christian history; here is the beginning of his exposition on the fifth:

[The seal:] In this fifth time the battles of the Assyrians ceased, since the ten tribes had been given into their hands. Also the kingdom of *Judah* was strengthened under the hand of Hezekiah.

[Its opening]: In this fifth time the Latin church, which is another Jerusalem, was strengthened. And there came from her spiritual men who were jealous with the jealousy of God *or taking vengeance upon the nations and punishments upon the people* (Ps. 149:7). Indeed they did not carry a sword but carried a sword of the spiritual word.

As I read it, the syntax of "jealous for taking vengeance" struck me as awkward, as we try to translate Joachim's integration of the scripture into his commentary: "*zelati...ad faciendum vindictam.*" Perhaps, since Joachim is not citing an exact verse

for "zelo dei," we can take his "zelati...zelo dei" as "zealous with the zeal of God," since both zealous and jealous are expressed by L. zelus, and both concepts are attested in scripture and commentary; most relevant to the current context of retribution in Joachim may be Elijah's words to the angel in 1 Kings 19:14 "Zelo zelatus sum pro Domino." Just browsing Bibles at biblos.com will reveal an amazing variety of renderings of zealous/jealous--no doubt an old chestnut for Biblical linguists. This is less a quibble than an instance of how the very dignity of Gumerlock's work and the importance of these medieval authors made me want to understand and to dig a bit more, especially where the elusive Joachim is concerned. And, to that point, note that the editors of the Latin edition, Marjorie Reeves and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich ("The Seven Seals in the Writings of Joachim of Fiore." *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 21 [1954], 231-47) attribute the manuscript popularity of such short tracts by the monk to the need of readers to have a relatively simplified version of his elaborate systems and predictions; so Gumerlock provides for the modern reader just what the scribes did for medieval readers--access to the profoundly influential work of Joachim.

Also of particular interest in Part III is the amazing confession of the Beguine Prous Boneta (d. 1328), who, obviously treading on some heretical ground, places none other than herself into the drama of the seven seals, inspiring what strikes me as retrained awe in the recording scribe, whose name, likewise, for all time is linked to the adventure:

Again, she said and asserted that the Lord God told her that the *book, sealed with the seven seals*, that blessed John says that he saw, Prous herself opened...And the second was opened by a certain apostate lesser brother...And the third was opened by some other person whom she named. And she said that the whole aforementioned book was [now] opened to me, the notary Meneto who wrote these things (62).

The selections from Boneta skip around, and Gumerlock does not use ellipses between paragraphs, so it takes some digging to trace the Latin to the translation.

I have some other textual observations. Gumerlock offers (footnote 38, p. 79) a generous excerpt in Latin from the opening of Caesarius's commentary (not part of the translated selections) where the bishop acknowledges earlier readings of the text as referring to the coming of Antichrist but at once, as Gumerlock states, also "exhorts his

hearers to understand everything in the Apocalypse as typifying Christ and the church" (13). This taste of the Latin is helpful. But perhaps Gumerlock could have provided an image of a manuscript page from one of the authors and then also an excerpt of edited Latin beneath it, so the students can see the evolution from manuscript to edition to translation. Unusually the scribe's text will offer a lemma and an "id est" to introduce the comment; here is the Latin opening of Gumerlock's selection from Pseudo Jerome (CCSL 107; (*Commentaria Minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*, ed. Roger Gryson, p. 208; compare Gumerlock, p. 51):

VI 1 Per SEPTEM SIGILIS septem praedicationes  
intelleguntur. VENI 2 ET VIDE: hic Iohannes figuram  
humani generis tenet, quasi ad humanum genus dicatur.  
EQUUS ALBUS corpus Christi intelligitur.

The page format of medieval "grammar" can be instructive. And though Gumerlock helpfully italicizes the words of scripture throughout his translations, he offers no note on his editorial/translation method. See, for example, Caesarius's gloss on Rev. 5.1, (*librum scriptum intus et foris*): the bishop writes "Utrumque testamentum intellege," which Gumerlock translates as "Understand it as both testaments!" adding an exclamation point to express, evidently, the imperative verb. Just a short note introducing the method here and throughout would help the teacher when students ask good questions like "is that in the original" (see, as per Gumerlock's bibliography, *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis opera omnia*. Ed. Germain Morin. Bruges: Desclée, De Brouwer, and Cie, 1942, vol. 2, 221). My only other (so minor) criticism is that the authors' dates ought to appear not only in the introductory overview but also under their names for ready reference; how many will know off-hand the dates of Arpringius of Beja? (active 531-48). These humble quibbles aside, Gumerlock's labors here and his teacherly care reveal him to be part of the tradition he is tracing, and he has crafted a gem of a volume that opens up a compelling world of learning and faith that unlocks the mystical meanings of this dramatically difficult book of scripture, *sealed with seven seals that no one can open*.