

CHAPTER 2

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ROBERT GROSSETESTE

Robert Grosseteste stands as one of the most significant figures of medieval science. Despite the fact that he has been the subject of a number of important modern studies, portions of his biography remain uncertain; yet because modern authors have already deeply mined the primary sources, my own account will be largely a synthesis of the fine work that has preceded it.¹ This chapter will provide the reader with the basic outlines of Grosseteste's life, including those portions on which we are forced to speculate to a greater or lesser degree. Though primarily intended to familiarize the reader with Grosseteste's life in order to place his astronomical and computistical textbooks in their proper context, this chapter will also stand on its own as an introduction to the life and works of this important scholar, teacher and bishop. The first two sections of the chapter will follow Grosseteste's life chronologically, from his early activities through his time at Oxford. The third section will shift focus to examine his writings, and trace the attempts of modern authors to create a chronology of his scientific works. The final section will return to his activities in a later stage of his life, discussing in brief his tenure as the bishop of Lincoln. The chapter ends with a table summarizing Grosseteste's biography, while

¹The works on which I have drawn most heavily for Grosseteste's biography include D. A. Callus, "The Oxford Career of Robert Grosseteste," *Oxoniensia* 10 (1945): 42–72, and "Robert Grosseteste as Scholar," in *Robert Grosseteste, Scholar and Bishop*, edited by D. A. Callus, 1–69, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955; James McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste and Robert Grosseteste*; and R. W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.

simultaneously conveying what aspects of his life are better or less-well known.

Whereas the first chapter offered a picture of his intellectual environment, this chapter will show the reader what Grosseteste accomplished in this environment. This outline of his life will be vital to the tasks of later chapters, as I both attempt to place the composition of the textbooks into this chronology and to argue that an examination of the textbooks allows us to elaborate further on his biography.

2.1. Grosseteste's Early Life

Our knowledge of a given period of Grosseteste's life is in inverse proportion to his age during that period. His final years as a bishop can be reconstructed accurately through the official documents he prepared while in office, whereas his time at Oxford, immediately preceding his tenure as a bishop, is understood only partially. His activity in his later years at Oxford, as a theological master and as an instructor to the Franciscans, is better understood than his earlier associations with the university. The paucity of surviving pieces of documentary evidence from the earliest years of his life leaves his biography during that period known only sketchily. Attempts to reconstruct his biography contain a great deal of conjecture, and have produced very different pictures of his life.

Thirteenth-century sources for Grosseteste's biography include Matthew Paris, the St. Albans chronicler who had a mixed opinion of Grosseteste,² and the otherwise unknown friar Hubert, a witness from within Grosseteste's household, who composed in verse a brief and personal account of Grosseteste as a lament following his death.³ Roger Bacon can also be added to the list, for his works includes numerous references to Grosseteste's activity at

²For more on Matthew Paris's opinions of Grosseteste, see Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 6–13.

³For more on Hubert's account, including translated portions of the lament see McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 40–42. See also Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 19–20

Oxford,⁴ but it is uncertain whether Bacon himself ever knew Grosseteste; he may have learned about him only secondhand through Grosseteste's pupil Adam Marsh. No concerted effort to write Grosseteste's biography was made until 1330, when John of Schalby wrote his *Lives of the Bishops of Lincoln*. A much longer account was written in 1502, a *Life of Grosseteste*, by Richard of Bardney, an abbey near Lincoln. Its late date certainly does not qualify it as contemporary, but Southern believes it deserves greater attention than has heretofore been given.

It is certain that Grosseteste died in 1253 after eighteen years as the bishop of Lincoln, the largest diocese in England. The date of his birth, however, is much contested. Modern authors date it anywhere from 1160 to 1175.⁵ This variety of dates implies that he was between the ages of seventy-seven and ninety-three when he died. His chroniclers agree that he lived to be quite old, but do not provide any precise dates. An established tradition of his biography used to place his birth as late as possible, probably based on the advanced age at his death that an earlier date would imply. All modern authors agree that the key source for his date of birth is a charter that he signed while a member of the household of Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln. The dating of this charter is problematic. Southern states that it must date before 1192, but after 1189,⁶ whereas McEvoy dates it between 1186 and 1190.⁷ In

⁴For a list of such references, see McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 13, n. 17. For more on Bacon's opinion's of Grosseteste, see Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 13–19.

⁵For example, Jeremiah Hackett, in his article on Grosseteste for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 115, *Medieval Philosophers*, edited by Jeremiah Hackett, 225–235, Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1992, gives a date of “circa 1160.” Lynn Thorndike, in *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, p. 436, provides a date of “about 1175.” A. C. Crombie, in his article on Grosseteste for the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 5, pp. 548–554, splits the difference at 1168.

⁶Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 63–64, see especially n. 2.

⁷McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 4.

any event, the difference is not overly significant because the document still does not allow us to calculate Grosseteste's precise age at the time. He simply signs as *Magister Robertus Groteste*, which does not allow us to compute his age. The problem is to understand this title of *magister*.

Callus advanced the argument that the title of *magister* implied that Grosseteste was a master of the arts as one would find coming out of the university setting, thus putting him in his early twenties when he signed the charter, and pushing his date of birth back to about 1168.⁸ Southern, on the other hand, prefers as late a date of birth as possible, based in part on Grosseteste's journey to the papal court in 1250, a difficult journey for a man in his eighties. In addition, Southern argues, if he were a full-fledged master of the arts from a university such as Paris, Grosseteste would more likely have been in his mid-twenties, pushing his birth back to the first half of the 1160s. In order to avoid this, Southern suggests that a later date of, say, 1170, would make him only a little over twenty when he signed the charter. If this were the case, then the title of *magister* may refer merely to teaching activity, rather than a formal title gained from university schooling.

Grosseteste was born in the county of Suffolk, perhaps in the village of Stow,⁹ to lowly parentage. We know of one sister, Ivette, who became a nun.¹⁰ His family was

⁸See Callus, "Robert Grosseteste as Scholar," pp. 3–4. McEvoy explicitly repeats Callus's argument, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 4–5.

⁹Suffolk is given as his birthplace by Hubert; see McEvoy's translation in *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 41. The reference to Stow comes from Richard of Bardney, who does not mention Suffolk; see Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 77. Southern notes that there are three Stows in Suffolk.

¹⁰McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 6. McEvoy also mentions two kinsmen who came across his path when he was a bishop, but we do not know their precise relationship. See also Grosseteste's letter to Ivette, letter VIII in Robert Grosseteste, *Epistolae*, edited by Henry Richards Luard, London: Luard, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861 (hereafter *Epistolae*), pp. 43–45.

probably Anglo-Norman, as the French derivation of his name suggests.¹¹ Beyond this, we have little secure knowledge of his childhood. Though many sources agree that he came from humble beginnings, Richard of Bardney presents a picture of destitute poverty, becoming an orphan at an early age, begging successfully for patronage in Lincoln, and receiving schooling in Lincoln and Cambridge. Richard's account suffers from a variety of problems, not the least of which is its late date of composition, two and a half centuries after Grosseteste's death. But Southern, following the lead of J. C. Russell, believes Richard's account can be taken seriously in its general outline, even if not in its more marvelous anecdotes, such as Grosseteste's horse, which was said to have conveyed him from England to Rome in a single night.¹² Southern's main reason for taking this account seriously is that there is little about the details that are overly romantic, or that serve a purpose in 1502 that Richard would be promoting. The only exception I see to this is that the city of Lincoln figures in significant fashion in Grosseteste's early life, both as the place he found his initial patronage and where he received his early education; the work was written for the bishop of Lincoln, and hence in a small way glorified Lincoln as a source of influence in Grosseteste's early years, and not just as the place of his eventual bishopric.

Even though this objection is not overwhelming, I still find it difficult to accept Richard's account as especially significant, at least in its particulars. The late date of its

¹¹McEvoy is confident of this because of the poem, *Château d'Amour*, composed by Grosseteste in the Anglo-Norman French dialect, and a few other pieces of writing in that tongue. McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 20.

¹²Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 75ff. He cites J. C. Russell, "Richard of Bardney's Account of Robert Grosseteste's Early and Middle Life," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 2 (1943): 45–55. A few other details of the account are problematic, as Southern points out, such as the fact that Grosseteste was said to have begged to the mayor of Lincoln, though Lincoln had no mayor until 1205. On the other hand, Southern also points out some of the embellishments that might have been added could have their source in other places; the first mayor of Lincoln, Adam of Wigford, was supposed to have taken in a handicapped child, and so perhaps the story of Grosseteste was conflated with some other story.

composition, even if it does get certain details right,¹³ weighs heavily against it. Southern's best guess is "that Richard of Bardney had access to sources of a period much earlier than his own day."¹⁴ At the same time, however, there is little to corroborate Richard's account, certainly in its details, and perhaps even in its general outline. Southern, however, has a clear goal in using Richard's *Life* of Grosseteste: to paint a picture of a poor man, educated in England, who would eventually achieve fame during his years at Oxford, rising to the position of bishop on his own merits rather than through the wealth of his family. Southern's account also discounts any role for Paris as the source of Grosseteste's education.

We do know, based upon his signature on the aforementioned charter, that Grosseteste was associated with the household of the bishop of Lincoln sometime between the years of 1186 and 1192. When signing that charter, he used the title *magister*. Callus, as mentioned above, believed that this implied that Grosseteste had been educated in the university system, specifically at Paris. Richard of Bardney's account makes no mention of Paris, but instead states that Grosseteste had been educated in Lincoln and Cambridge. Even if Richard's account cannot be believed straightforwardly, it seems unlikely that Grosseteste could have received an education in the arts at Paris. As discussed in the previous chapter, reaching the rank of *magister* was an expensive undertaking. We have no evidence that Grosseteste had this level of financial support. On the other hand, other members of the bishop's household who signed the same charter *had* received an education in Paris,¹⁵ so it

¹³Southern is particularly impressed by Richard's account of Grosseteste's position of friendship with the young King Henry III; see his *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 80–82.

¹⁴Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 82.

¹⁵Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 64.

certainly is conceivable that Grosseteste could have as well.

Yet Grosseteste need not have, and there is no positive evidence that he did. By the last quarter of the twelfth century, there were opportunities in England for an individual to receive a good education, just as there were opportunities for someone of Grosseteste's abilities to teach, thereby earning the title of *magister*. Even if we are disinclined to accept Richard's account as evidence that Grosseteste received his education in Lincoln and Cambridge, the picture of a poor young Englishman, natively educated, scratching out a living by teaching, seeking promotion in a bishop's household, is not unlikely. In fact, the weight of evidence is in its favor. Grosseteste's humble beginnings are well-attested, and he seems to have had little luck finding a generous and stable patron, which he likely would have needed in order to study at Paris. I am thus inclined to believe that he spent the first twenty-plus years of his life in England, so that when we find him attached to the bishop of Lincoln, he is a *magister* not from a university, but from local school.

Within a few years of signing the charter, Grosseteste moved on from Lincoln to the household of William de Vere, Bishop of Hereford. During this period we see a number of noteworthy coincidences surrounding Hereford. In 1194 or 1195, Gerald of Wales was in Lincoln, and wrote a letter recommending Grosseteste to William. Describing Grosseteste, Gerald wrote,

I know that he will be a great support to you in various kinds of business and legal decisions, and in providing cures to restore and preserve your health, for he has reliable skill in both these branches of learning, which in these days are most highly rewarded. Besides, he has a solid foundation of the liberal arts and wide reading, which he adorns with the highest standards of conduct.¹⁶

This was the same Gerald of Wales to whom Simon du Fresne in 1195–1197 addressed his poem about the school of Hereford, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Simon's description of the teaching at Hereford bears remarkable similarities to the areas of

¹⁶Quoted and translated in Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 65.

knowledge and ability that Gerald attributes to Grosseteste. One can thus easily conjecture that Grosseteste is being recommended not just as an able clerk for the household, but potentially as a teacher as well. It is attractive even to speculate that Grosseteste had been teaching in Lincoln, where Richard of Bardney thought he had been educated, and thus the title of *magister* from the charter could refer not merely to some past employment, but to his activity in Lincoln.

It is interesting to note that Gerald recommended Grosseteste on the basis of two particular areas of knowledge: law and medicine. The former is no surprise, for if he had been a useful member of the Bishop of Lincoln's household, certainly he must have been knowledgeable to some extent of the law and of the conduct of ecclesiastical business. But he was also recommended for his knowledge of medicine, not something for which he is today recognized. But Southern has pointed out that Grosseteste used imagery from the medical realm in some of his writings,¹⁷ and that Richard of Bardney attributed to him knowledge of medicine.¹⁸ Again a remarkable coincidence presents itself: Roger French has pointed out the interest in medicine associated with the circle of scholars around Hereford in the second half of the twelfth century.¹⁹ Gerald's recommendation of Grosseteste's skill in an area for which he did not possess a lasting reputation, but which was consonant with the interests of scholars at Hereford, suggests that Grosseteste was being recommended as a scholar and teacher.

The recommendation of Gerald is also significant for what it does not say. It does not say where Grosseteste was educated. Would he have said more if Grosseteste did

¹⁷Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 65–66 and n. 5.

¹⁸Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 78.

¹⁹French, "Foretelling the Future." And see the previous chapter of this dissertation.

possess an education from Paris? This is impossible to know, but the letter states only that he has a “solid foundation” in the liberal arts, and that he is widely read, a fairly generic description. It must also be admitted that it does not state that Grosseteste was a teacher, though we do know that Grosseteste himself used the title of *magister* prior to Gerald’s letter. The statements about Grosseteste’s learning stand next to a statement about his good standards of conduct, and so perhaps these statements can be interpreted as only a general description of a person well-suited to become a member of a bishop’s household: an educated man who will behave with composure. As with other aspects of Grosseteste’s life, we are limited to constructing a plausible picture, rather than a definitive one.

William de Vere, Grosseteste’s patron in Hereford, died on Christmas Eve in 1198. With his death, Grosseteste’s support disappeared, for he had never received a benefice, which would have provided him with an income. For the next twenty years or so, only small pieces of evidence for Grosseteste’s life are available. There exists a recollection of Grosseteste, told on his deathbed to John of St. Giles and reported by Matthew Paris, that he had heard preaching against the usurers of Cahors while in France.²⁰ In addition, a document bears Grosseteste’s name, as an official involved in a dispute between the monks of Worcester and a local landowner, which occurred between 1213 and 1216.²¹ The two other officials named in this document are Hugh Foliot, archdeacon of Shropshire, and an official in the diocese of Hereford. Hugh is especially significant in that he became Bishop of Hereford in October of 1219. Following on the heels of that appointment, Grosseteste’s name crops up twice, once as witness to a charter of Hugh, and once in relationship to a

²⁰Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 66–67. In n. 7, Southern writes that, “the story as we know it does nothing to support (as is often imagined) the view that he was teaching in Paris during these years;” the parenthetical note is Southern’s.

²¹Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 67.

court case, which took place sometime before August of 1220. As Southern has argued, it seems that Grosseteste became “more active in diocesan administration” immediately after Hugh became bishop.²² This suggests that Grosseteste did not leave the Hereford region after the death of William de Vere, but continued on in some fashion as an ecclesiastical official, perhaps in Shropshire with Hugh, the duties of which may have taken him to France.

A turning point in Grosseteste’s ecclesiastical career came in 1225. In that year, he was granted a benefice: the rectory of Abbotsley. The document recording the benefice also notes that he was in deacons’ orders at the time.²³ With this appointment, Grosseteste’s ecclesiastical career was on the rise, making his economic status secure. In addition, Abbotsley was only a day’s ride from Oxford, thus enabling him to care for his parishioners and still be able to give lectures at Oxford, which we know he was doing by that time.²⁴ In 1229, he became the archdeacon of Leicester, at which time he was in priestly orders, and had a prebend in Lincoln Cathedral. In 1231, he resigned all benefices except the prebend due to illness.²⁵ By the 1220s, however, Grosseteste had also become associated with the University of Oxford, and to this relationship we now turn.

2.2. Grosseteste’s Association with Oxford

As with the earliest years of Grosseteste’s life, his first associations with Oxford are unclear. We saw above that he probably received his early education in England and that he

²²Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 67.

²³Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 69; McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 10.

²⁴Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 70.

²⁵McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 10.

was considered knowledgeable in the liberal arts, at least by Gerald of Wales. It is also likely that he had been a teacher at some level. So it is entirely possible that after the end of 1198, when William de Vere died and Grosseteste lost his patron, he spent some of the next twenty years earning a living through teaching, and some of that at Oxford. We have a few pieces of evidence that he acted occasionally as a diocesan official during this time, but those few events do not preclude the possibility that he was engaged in teaching. The cathedral at Hereford, as we saw in the previous chapter, may have provided a location for him to teach. Oxford, too, is in the same general region. Both could have provided a congenial environment for his teaching, as well as further study, of the liberal arts.

We shall see in the next section of this chapter that Grosseteste's earliest interests lay with the liberal arts and various scientific fields. We also know that the latter achieved prominence at Oxford later in the thirteenth century in large part because of Grosseteste's influence.²⁶ But because he was so influential in establishing Oxford's reputation in the natural sciences, it is not clear that Oxford had a reputation for them before his presence; with this in mind, it is impossible to sustain the argument that Grosseteste went to Oxford because of his interest in science. In fact, it seems very plausible that Grosseteste's inchoate interests in science would have been fueled by the company he could have found in Hereford, where the study of the natural sciences had been promoted during the previous decades.

An additional factor in the equation is that Grosseteste came to the study of Aristotle's natural philosophy relatively late, perhaps not until the 1220s. Had he been at Oxford in the two prior decades, after such notables as Alexander Nequam and John Blund had been teaching from Aristotle's *libri naturales*, it would be curious that his study of

²⁶Recall Weisheipl's claim in "Science in the Thirteenth Century," p. 440, and McEvoy's reinforcement of it in *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 18–19

Aristotle was so delayed. Another famous teacher of Aristotle, Edmund of Abingdon, was a personal acquaintance of Grosseteste, but recall that his teaching of Aristotle was in the logical works. Arguments from the negative—in this case, that Grosseteste did not study Aristotle's natural philosophy until later because we lack evidence that he knew of them earlier—are not convincing in themselves. Certainly it is not inconceivable that Grosseteste was teaching the traditional liberal arts at Oxford and was oblivious of the Aristotelian natural philosophy being taught by other masters, but this seems unlikely. Yet even at Hereford there was an appreciation of the Aristotelian works, given the circle of scholars there. Definitive statements about Grosseteste's teaching activity, especially about where it happened, cannot be made until further work is completed, especially on the schools at Hereford at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Nor can we currently answer the question of why Grosseteste did not study Aristotle earlier in his career.

How do we even know that Grosseteste was teaching? Two reasons are especially important. First, many of his early works deal with matters that would have been taught in schools, and some are in fact demonstrably written for teaching. We shall deal with these in more detail in the next section and in the next chapter. The other piece of evidence comes from Grosseteste's appointment as chancellor of Oxford. There is much scholarly controversy over this appointment, with which we shall deal momentarily. It is clear, however, that at sometime after 1214, Grosseteste was appointed to a high-ranking position in the university administration after the legatine ordinance of that year unequivocally established Oxford as a university.

At some point in his career, Grosseteste was appointed to the office of chancellor of the University of Oxford, though he was denied the title of chancellor. The evidence for this comes from a statement made by Oliver Sutton, Bishop of Lincoln from 1280–1299. In 1295, while discussing the appointment of a new chancellor of Oxford, Sutton said,

blessed Robert formerly bishop of Lincoln [i.e. Grosseteste], who filled this office while he was teaching in the aforesaid University, said at the beginning of his term as bishop that his immediate predecessor as Bishop of Lincoln [i.e. Hugh of Wells] did not allow him to be called ‘cancellarius,’ but only ‘*magister scholarum*.’²⁷

The issue of the title that the bishop was willing to bestow on Grosseteste, “master of the schools” or “chancellor,” forms the core of the debate over when he held this office.

Recall from the previous chapter that Oxford had been under a *suspendium clericorum* from 1209 to 1214, and that it had ended only with the legatine ordinance that had been negotiated with the dispersed masters. Graham Pollard has argued that the denial of the title of chancellor was a slight against the masters of Oxford, because that they had agreed to return to Oxford in exchange for creating a university on the model of Paris, which included a chancellor as the head of a corporate body. When Grosseteste was denied this title, as the consensus selection of the body of masters, the masters were understandably upset, and perhaps threatened to leave Oxford again. In 1215, Geoffrey de Lucy was confirmed by the bishop of Lincoln as chancellor to appease the masters. While this scenario does not explain why Grosseteste was denied the title, it does account for the short tenure Grosseteste must have held if a new chancellor was appointed in the next year. In addition, it requires that Grosseteste was in 1214 an influential man among the Oxford masters, which in turn suggests that he had been teaching there before 1209, of which we cannot be sure.²⁸

McEvoy has suggested one possible answer to why Grosseteste might have been

²⁷Quoted and translated in Pollard, “The Legatine Award,” p. 63. The parenthetical notes are Pollard’s. Note that McEvoy translates *regebat* in this passage, not as ‘teaching’ but as ‘was regent;’ McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 8. This will be significant when we consider where Grosseteste received his theological education. The occasion of Sutton’s statement, according to Pollard, was over the issue of whether the masters or the bishop elected the chancellor.

²⁸For a fuller explanation of the legatine award and the controversy over Grosseteste’s appointment, see Pollard, “The Legatine Award.”

denied the title of chancellor.²⁹ It was regular practice, though not without exception, that the chancellor of a university should be a priest. In 1214, Grosseteste was not, for in 1225 he was only a deacon. The denial of the title, in that case, would not have been due to any incipient power struggles or a mere oversight on the part of the bishop, but was made due to a concern that Grosseteste's ecclesiastical office was insufficient to merit the greater title.

Southern, on the other hand, has argued that Grosseteste's appointment must have come later.³⁰ In 1214, he suggested, the legatine award was too fresh in everyone's mind, and there was no reason why the bishop would slight the masters in this way. In addition, Southern believed that Grosseteste was not yet in 1214 a suitable candidate for the office, as he thought that Grosseteste's theological education came later. He suggests that Grosseteste would have made a better choice for the office after he had become an established teacher of theology at Oxford, which was not the case until after 1225.

The resolution of this argument hinges on a controversial topic: when and where Grosseteste received his theological education. Normally, the chancellor would have had to have been a master in theology. If the appointment came early, Grosseteste must have been a master of theology and teaching theology in Oxford in 1214, and so must have received his theological education before 1214. The typical assumption, if one defends the early date, is that, like many other masters at Oxford in 1209, Grosseteste went to the continent to study theology at Paris during the *suspendium clericorum*. McEvoy points out that he demonstrated familiarity with the theological course of study at Paris, and knew a number of theologians whom he would have met at that time.³¹ However, as Rodney Thomson pointed

²⁹McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 8–10.

³⁰See Southern, "From Schools to University," pp. 35–36.

³¹McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 6–7.

out,³² there had been strong ties between England and northern France since the eleventh century. While this would have made it easy for Grosseteste to travel to Paris for an education—providing he had the financial wherewithal to do so, which is by no means clear—it also would have increased the likelihood that he would be familiar with practices and masters there without actually attending the university in Paris. Grosseteste’s Anglo-Norman background, too, could have contributed to his familiarity with continental practices and personages; McEvoy writes that, “[w]hile there is no documentary evidence that he studied or taught at the university of Paris, there are ample grounds for believing that he was no stranger to France.”³³ Finally, as pointed out above, whereas Grosseteste was in France for some time during that period, there is no evidence that places him in Paris.

Grosseteste’s study of Aristotle’s natural philosophy in the 1220s is an additional factor in knowing when he received his theological education. McEvoy has suggested that Grosseteste was first introduced to the *libri naturales* of Aristotle while in Paris for a theological education. Though public lectures on these texts had been forbidden at Paris since 1210, members of the school of theology could examine them in private.³⁴ Why Grosseteste would have begun an examination of Aristotle under these circumstances, rather than in the more congenial atmospheres of Hereford or Oxford, is not clear. Southern, on the other hand, wanted to place Grosseteste’s theological education and his study of Aristotle’s natural philosophy into a period spent at Oxford, presumably after 1214. Oxford had no prohibition on Aristotle, and so his introduction to those works could have come at

³²Thomson, “England and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance.”

³³McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 74. This comment was made in the context of discussing the national tradition of Grosseteste studies in English, but the comment is also apropos to the question of whether or not he studied at Paris.

³⁴McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 8.

nearly any time in his career, except during the *suspendium clericorum* (unless he studied them privately while teaching was prohibited at Oxford).

Southern has proposed a rather different account for Grosseteste's theological education, suggesting that he could not have lectured in theology before 1225 because he was only a deacon until that time, not a priest.³⁵ This would rule out the possibility that Grosseteste could have received a theology degree in Paris in or before 1214. Southern does not clearly state the alternative, but presumably Grosseteste must have received a theological education in England, perhaps at Oxford, perhaps completing it sometime around 1225. But McEvoy has pointed out that the assumption that lecturers in theology must be priests is not a secure one, and indeed that we do not know precisely what being a deacon entailed during the Middle Ages.³⁶

McEvoy objects to Southern's compression of Grosseteste's university-based theological activity into such a limited span of time (i.e., circa 1225–1235), suggesting that the voluminous theological writings required more years than Southern makes available to a theologically-educated Grosseteste.³⁷ But it is plausible that Grosseteste's theological education lasted over a longer period, and that some of the works could date from the period during his education, in other words before 1225, rather than being written only after his theological degree had been granted. Without a reliable income or a wealthy patron, neither of which we are certain Grosseteste had before 1225, it could be that Grosseteste progressed slowly in his theological education, perhaps supplementing his income by

³⁵Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 70.

³⁶McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 24–25.

³⁷McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 25–26. I do not find this argument especially convincing, as Grosseteste has a reputation for being a constantly busy scholar and ecclesiastic.

teaching in the liberal arts. It is possible that his study of theology stretches back to 1214, or even before (though presumably he did not study it at Oxford during the *suspendium*), and that his lecturing did not occur until his final stages of theological study. It is usually assumed that a theological education was taken in the strict pattern of university regulations, but we cannot preclude the possibility that Grosseteste's need to support himself through teaching and ecclesiastical duties forced him to stretch out his theological training over a number of years.

A final complication regarding Grosseteste's appointment as chancellor comes from Sutton's statement that Grosseteste was teaching at Oxford at the time of the appointment. If he had received his theological degree in Paris during the *suspendium*, he could have been teaching theology at Oxford only for a span of a few months at the most. Of course, he might also have been teaching in the arts prior to the *suspendium*, and we have no reason to state unequivocally that he had not been doing so. This could account for his selection by the masters as their choice for chancellor, but this seems problematic since he could have been in the theology faculty for only a brief time. While it may not have been a necessity to choose the chancellor from among the masters in theology, it seems likely that the leader chosen by the body of masters would have been selected from among the better-established members of the theology faculty, as the preeminent faculty at a university, leaving Grosseteste an unlikely choice in 1214.

So what picture of Grosseteste's life emerges from these considerations? By around 1190, he was calling himself a *magister*. It seems most likely that this simply referred to his having taught, perhaps at nothing grander than a small provincial school. For the next three and a half decades, he sought patronage within ecclesiastical households, apparently achieving some minor success, for his name occasionally appears on charters and in relationship to legal cases. He probably continued to teach and to study during this time, likely at Hereford and perhaps at Oxford. The source of his theological training is still in

question; he could have received it in Paris, and if so probably between 1209 and 1214. If this is the case, his association with Oxford predates 1209, for the *suspendium clericorum* would have compelled him to travel at that time only if he had then been at Oxford. This scenario, however, requires that he had ample patronage to conduct his studies, for which we have no positive evidence. It could be that his association with Oxford was merely as a teacher in the arts, beginning either before 1209 or after 1214, and that he picked up a theological education—or at least finally completed it—as late as the 1220s. A turning point was reached in 1225 when he finally received a benefice near Oxford. His association with the university becomes clear after that point.

I am unconvinced that we can, as yet, have a clear picture of Grosseteste's activity before 1225, and, in fact, we do not know much detail before he became bishop. Certainly he must have been teaching in the arts, at Oxford or elsewhere, well before 1225, and probably by 1190. As we shall see in the next section, and in later chapters, this lack of detail in his biography will make it difficult to establish with certainty the chronology of his scientific writings.

What of the ten years from 1225 to 1235, the time when he is clearly associated with Oxford and before his appointment as bishop? For the first five years, he was an active theological master, delivering sermons and lectures³⁸ and composing various works on scientific and theological topics. McEvoy believes that he was actively teaching in both theology and the arts during this period.³⁹ Southern states that “[b]y 1230 he was certainly

³⁸Southern identifies an important manuscript, Durham Cathedral MS A iii 12, for establishing Grosseteste's preaching and theological lecturing activities in the years before 1230; see his *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 72–73.

³⁹James McEvoy, “The Chronology of Robert Grosseteste's Writings on Nature and Natural Philosophy,” *Speculum* 58 (1983): 614–655; see especially p. 631.

the most distinguished master of the schools in Oxford.”⁴⁰

A significant change in Grosseteste’s life took place in 1229 or 1230 when he was asked to be the lecturer to the Franciscans. The Franciscans had arrived at Oxford in 1224, and had begun to hear lectures by secular masters at the university, walking “daily to the schools of theology, however distant, barefoot, in bitter cold and deep mud.”⁴¹ In 1229, however, they built their own school, and shortly thereafter invited Grosseteste to be their lecturer, which post he accepted and held until his appointment as bishop in 1235.

A. G. Little believed that Grosseteste’s lectures to the Friars encompassed three main topics: the study of the Bible, the study of languages (especially Greek), and mathematics and the physical sciences.⁴² Stewart Easton has pointed out that the evidence for Grosseteste lecturing both on languages and on mathematics and the physical sciences is slim.⁴³ Regarding mathematics and sciences, he points out that the evidence comes from Roger Bacon, who links Grosseteste and Adam Marsh, who was a member of that Franciscan school and a pupil and friend of Grosseteste. To assume that Grosseteste thus lectured on natural philosophy to the Franciscans, Easton argues, is to make too great a leap. But Bacon’s claim is consonant with what we know of the interests of both Grosseteste and at least some of the friars—Marsh, for example—who were in Oxford at the time. McEvoy believes that Grosseteste was lecturing on natural philosophy in the secular schools of

⁴⁰Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 72.

⁴¹A. G. Little, “The Franciscan School at Oxford in the Thirteenth Century,” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 19 (1926): 803–874; p. 805, quoting Eccleston.

⁴²Little, “The Franciscan School,” pp. 808–810.

⁴³Stewart C. Easton, “The Lectures of Robert Grosseteste to the Franciscans, 1229–35,” Appendix A of *Roger Bacon and His Search for a Universal Science*, 206–209, New York: Russel & Russel: 1952 and 1971.

Oxford between 1225 and 1229. Adam Marsh, a pupil and lifelong friend of Grosseteste, was clearly interested in natural philosophy. Thus there was a demonstrable interest in the fields of mathematics and science in the years following Grosseteste's tenure there, and it seems unimaginable that the friars would not have taken advantage of his expertise while it was available.

It is only for the final five to ten years before his appointment to the bishopric of Lincoln that we begin to get a clear picture of Grosseteste's life. At this point, he is probably in his mid- to late-fifties, having devoted his energies to producing scholarly works, teaching in the arts at various schools in the southwest of England, and engaging in the duties of ecclesiastical office. Let us turn now especially to the first of these activities to examine the texts that he composed over this long, productive period of his life.

2.3. Grosseteste's Intellectual Development, Especially Regarding His Scientific Works

In the foregoing sections, we have concentrated on Grosseteste's life and whereabouts, but have largely neglected his vast number of written works that still survive. In this section, we shall rectify this situation. In important ways, his professional activities and his scholarly pursuits cannot be separated. It is impossible to compartmentalize the different aspects of his life. As the reader will discover, however, we must have some notion of his activities in order to place his work in its proper context, and indeed to discover the chronology of his texts. Assumptions about his progress in his own education and teaching will affect our conclusions about when he wrote his various treatises.

It is difficult to summarize Grosseteste's textual output briefly. His bibliographer, S. Harrison Thomson, classified his works using the following categories: translations from the Greek, biblical and philosophical commentaries, philosophical and scientific works, pastoral and devotional works, Anglo-Norman works, and a brief miscellaneous category. This demonstrates the broad range of his interests. We shall concentrate on examining his

scientific and natural philosophical texts,⁴⁴ but will also discuss his other writings in order to present a more accurate picture of his life's work. Regarding his astronomical and computational textbooks, the *De spera* and the *Compotus correctorius*, I shall have much to say in the following two chapters, and so they will be mentioned only briefly here.

Thomson classified Grosseteste's works by subject matter. Because his work was a bibliography of manuscripts and early printed works, his emphasis regarding dates centered on the dates of the manuscripts, not the works themselves. Though he does discuss the date of composition of a few of the texts, he was not trying to establish a chronology of Grosseteste's writings. This required a research project in its own right, to which Thomson's bibliography would certainly prove essential.

Thomson's ground-breaking manuscript research led to various attempts to date Grosseteste's works. One of the most significant works spurring on the project of arranging Grosseteste's scientific and philosophical works chronologically did not itself focus on the chronology *per se*. In his *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science, 1100–1700*, A. C. Crombie asserted that Grosseteste completed his commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* around 1217–1220, before his other scientific texts. He based this on Trivet's assertion that it was written "while a master in the arts,"⁴⁵ and that it

⁴⁴The most important works on the chronology of Grosseteste's scientific writings are S. Harrison Thomson, *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste*; Richard C. Dales, "Robert Grosseteste's Scientific Works," *Isis* 52 (1961): 381–402; McEvoy, "The Chronology of Robert Grosseteste's Writings," which is largely reproduced in Appendix B of McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 505–519; and chapter six of Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 111–140. Latin editions of most of the scientific works are contained in Ludwig Baur, ed., *Die philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste, Bischofs von Lincoln. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Band 9. Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1912.

⁴⁵Qui, cum esset magister in artibus, super librum Posteriorum compendiose scripsit. Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 46, n. 1, citing Callus, "The Oxford Career of Robert Grosseteste," who quotes Trivet. According to contemporary assumptions about Grosseteste's career, this would place it before 1209. But as we have seen in the preceding section, Grosseteste was probably lecturing in the arts, even if not at Oxford, as early as 1200, and that he might have still been a master in the arts for some years after teaching

contains zoological information from Michael Scot's translation of *De animalibus*, which was translated no earlier than 1217. The dating of this work was vital to Crombie's larger project, namely, to establish that Grosseteste was the seminal figure in the adoption of a new method of science that relied heavily on observation and experimentation.⁴⁶ As evidence for this thesis, Crombie demonstrated the ways in which Grosseteste's scientific works relied upon the methods that he espoused in the commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*.

Richard Dales responded to Crombie's work with an article in which he both questioned the assumption that the commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* was one of Grosseteste's earlier works, and sought to establish relationships among the scientific works themselves.⁴⁷ This latter methodological technique would prove invaluable for later attempts to create a chronology of Grosseteste's works.

Dales did not try to establish a complete chronology of Grosseteste's scientific works, but discussed only a select few among which he could establish relationships in terms of subject matter.⁴⁸ He also made two assumptions: that Grosseteste's "career as a scientist" extended from 1220 to 1235, and that a few works could be dated with "relative certainty," namely, *De generatione stellarum* to about 1220, and *De lineis, angulis et figuris* and *De natura locorum* to about 1231. Dales then divided Grosseteste's career into

resumed at Oxford in 1214.

⁴⁶Crombie's grand thesis, which places the origins of experimental science in the thirteenth century, has been convincingly challenged. See, for example, Bruce Eastwood, "Grosseteste's 'Quantitative' Law of Refraction: A Chapter in the History of Non-Experimental Science." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): 403–414, and "Mediaeval Empiricism: The Case of Grosseteste's Optics." *Speculum* 43 (1968): 306–321. A new attempt to establish the vital role that the medieval period played in the later development of modern science can be found in Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁴⁷Dales, "Robert Grosseteste's Scientific Works."

⁴⁸He explicitly stated that he would not attempt to date the *De spera* or other astronomical (and presumably computistical) works. Dales, "Robert Grosseteste's Scientific Works," p. 381, n. 2.

early, middle and late periods. Two works belong to the early period. He characterized them as less sophisticated than later works. *De generatione stellarum*, Dales notes, is “loose in structure and...indefinite in purpose,”⁴⁹ covering various topics regarding the composition and appearance of stars. It presents arguments from Aristotle that there are degrees of transparency, which Dales notes will be taken for granted in some of Grosseteste’s later works. The *De generatione sonorum* discusses the generation of sound only briefly before it departs into the main topic of the treatise: phonetics, the creation of sounds by the mouth to produce words. The discussion of sound is similar to treatments he gives elsewhere, including in the *Posterior Analytics*. Dales is convinced, however, that the treatment in *De generatione sonorum* predates the developed commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* because the former is more complete and systematic, presumably allowing him merely to summarize the topic in the later commentary

Dales’s middle period for Grosseteste’s interest in scientific matters stretched from about 1223 to about 1230. He characterized the works of this period as more methodologically precise, and as relying less heavily on mathematics and the subordination of sciences than works from his later period. They also share a common theme of the effects of heavenly bodies on terrestrial ones. In terms of their methodological approaches, Dales’s analysis was heavily influenced by Crombie’s treatment, seen especially in Dales’s discussion of the extent to which Grosseteste used methods of experimental verification and falsification, clearly a concern arising from Crombie’s analysis of these categories. This ‘experimental’ approach is probably better described as an ‘experiential’ approach, because Grosseteste’s ‘experiments’ do not contain the precision or control that the term ‘experiment’ implies in modern English. Instead, Grosseteste uses common experiences to demonstrate his points. For example, in the *De impressionibus elementorum*, which Dales

⁴⁹Dales, “Robert Grosseteste’s Scientific Works,” p. 383.

placed in this period, the observation that it is colder high in the mountains than in valleys is used to prove that it is the rays of the sun, rather than the body of the sun, that cause heat. Each treatise from this period also shares the common feature that Grosseteste debunks older theories—i. e., engages in falsification, again a theme from Crombie—regarding their respective subject matter before presenting his own theory.

Dales placed three works into the middle period: *De impressionibus elementorum*, *De accessione et recessione maris*, and *De cometis et causis ipsarum*. The first shows how the celestial bodies, mainly the sun, affect the terrestrial elements, especially how heat from the celestial region affects precipitation in its various forms. Dales dates this work early because it lacks understanding of some of the optical principles that Grosseteste will utilize in later works. In *De accessione et recessione maris*, Grosseteste discusses the tides. He makes use of al-Bitruji's theory of the tides, showing his use of Arabic authors. Again his optical assumptions allow Dales to place it between *De impressionibus elementorum* and the optical works of the late period. Finally, in *De cometis et causis ipsarum*, Grosseteste discusses comets—their origin, place and nature—and ends with a brief astrological discussion, “the way in which planets affect men and earthly things and permit some men to ‘sense complete what is yet inchoate.’”⁵⁰ Finally, Dales argued that the commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* belongs to the end of this period, after the aforementioned works, but before the works of the next period.

Dales's final period ranged from 1231 to 1235, a period when Grosseteste was completely involved with teaching the Franciscans. This period Dales characterized by an emphasis on mathematics and optics.⁵¹ *De lineis, angulis et figuris*, an early work of

⁵⁰Dales's description; see “Robert Grosseteste's Scientific Works,” p. 394.

⁵¹This certainly is consonant with Roger Bacon's appreciation of Grosseteste's emphasis on mathematics. If Grosseteste's use of mathematics in his scientific works reaches its fullest potential with

Dales's late period, "stresses the importance of mathematics in understanding the world of nature,"⁵² but in large part this is the mathematics of geometry, not the arithmetic that characterizes later scientific methodology. That is, much of his discussion, say of heat in mountains and valleys, remains qualitative, though geometry is used to characterize the relationship of places. Three other works belong to this period: *De colore*, *De calore solis* and *De iride*. They cover the topics of, respectively, color in light, the heat generated by the sun and the rainbow. The first and last may be closely related, the latter assuming the former.

Dales's important work laid the foundation upon which James McEvoy expanded the discussion of Grosseteste's scientific works in his 1983 article.⁵³ He included a number of works Dales had not included, but treated the works not strictly chronologically, but also topically. Not only did he disagree with some aspects of Dales's chronology, though at the same time preserving much of it, he discussed a broader range of Grosseteste's interests.

McEvoy broadened the chronological treatment of Grosseteste's works, and placed two of them in his earliest period of activity, before 1209 when the Oxford masters dispersed. The first of these is *De artibus liberalibus*, a treatise in which Grosseteste discusses the seven liberal arts. The work must be among Grosseteste's earliest, for it lacks any awareness of Aristotle or Arabic science. Regarding astronomy, it repeats the typical Augustinian assertions of astronomy's usefulness to medicine and agriculture, and links it closely with astrology. We shall discuss this treatise again in the next chapter. The *De generatione sonorum*, a treatise discussed by Dales, has close affinities to the *De artibus liberalibus*, leading McEvoy to argue that it belongs to the same general period, but the Franciscans, it would come as no surprise that Bacon would appreciate this aspect of Grosseteste's work.

⁵²Dales's description; see "Robert Grosseteste's Scientific Works," p. 394.

⁵³McEvoy, "The Chronology."

probably postdates the *De artibus liberalibus*.

After discussing these early works, McEvoy turned to Grosseteste's astronomical works. Of special interest here is the manuscript Oxford MS Bodl., Savile 21, a manuscript with a number of treatises copied in Grosseteste's own hand.⁵⁴ Among these are mathematical treatises by Jordanus and Gerbert, astronomical works by Thebit, astronomical tables, and a treatise on eclipses. The manuscript has been dated to 1215–1216, but the reasons for doing so are suspect.⁵⁵ Thomson notes that these dates coincide with the period following the Oxford dispersion. Had Grosseteste gone to Paris for a theological degree and returned to Oxford as a theological master, it would be curious that his interest would have been so focussed on complex mathematical and astronomical subjects immediately after his return.

While I will leave discussion of Grosseteste's *De spera* and his computistical works for later chapters, it is worth noting McEvoy's comments regarding two other astronomical works. Grosseteste wrote an astrological treatise, which may have been intended for teaching, entitled *De impressionibus aeris*, also known as *De prognosticatione*. In the treatise, Grosseteste calculates what the weather will be on 15 April 1249.⁵⁶ Grosseteste cites only Ptolemy and Theodosius, but no Arabic authors.⁵⁷ Some

⁵⁴The manuscript is described fully in Thomson, *Writings*, pp. 30–33.

⁵⁵The date seems to come from a horoscope in the manuscript, but there is no reason that the horoscope needs to be for a date contemporary with the creation of the text. I shall discuss this manuscript in more detail in the following chapters.

⁵⁶As McEvoy points out, there is no reason to date the treatise to that year, though others have done so; see McEvoy, "Chronology," p. 621. Of course, since the point of the treatise, and of astrology, is to predict the future, there is no reason that the 1249 date in the text implies proximity to that date for its composition.

⁵⁷Though he does refer to Arabic years, and hence to the tables derived from Arabic sources. See the fourth chapter of this dissertation for more details.

references to the tides show that he had not yet developed the theory found in *De accessione et recessione maris*, both of which suggest an early date. McEvoy suggested 1215–1220 as a *terminus ante quem*, but I am not convinced that its composition need be so late. Given that he does not make use of Arabic astronomical resources, at least some of which he had by 1215, and given his stance on astrology demonstrated in the *De artibus liberalibus*, the work could be quite early, perhaps even dating to his period of association with Hereford, where astrology was an active interest among other scholars. I shall discuss the contents of this work in more detail in the next chapter.

The final astronomical work covered by McEvoy is the *De generatione stellarum*, already mentioned above, in which Grosseteste discusses the composition of stars, including discussion of alchemical theories. It is of note that Grosseteste uses Aristotelian ideas in this work, yet seems to lack the deep understanding of Aristotle that he will later develop. He also cites at least one Arabic author in this work, Abu Ma-shar. Both these facts suggest a slightly later date for the treatise, though it is unclear how late it need be. Both Aristotle and Abu Ma-shar were known among Hereford scholars, and so Grosseteste could have found resources there, again suggesting the plausibility of a very early date.

The next section of McEvoy's article dealt with the treatises of Grosseteste on the sublunary world, and largely overlapped Dales's middle and late periods. For the most part, McEvoy agreed with Dales's dates, give or take one to two years, thus reinforcing the picture that Grosseteste developed a more sophisticated understanding of Aristotle and a more developed sense of the importance of mathematics over the period stretching from the early 1220s to the mid-1230s. To that same period belong Grosseteste's other Aristotelian works, including his important commentaries on the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Physica*.

The commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, McEvoy notes, predates Grosseteste's

study of the Greek language.⁵⁸ It does demonstrate, however, wide-ranging reading in Aristotelian works, including the *Physica*, *Metaphysica*, and the *Meteorologica*, and it shows overlaps with various of his optical treatises, as Dales had already shown. But McEvoy also discussed portions of the commentary that do not focus on natural philosophy or scientific methodology. He noted that the psychological theories of the work show influences of a theological nature.⁵⁹ McEvoy dated the commentary to 1228–1230, which is consonant with the idea that Grosseteste developed a stronger interest in theology during this later period, rather than during the period of the *suspendium clericorum*. This also allows us to account for Trivet’s assertion, mentioned earlier, that the commentary was written while Grosseteste was teaching in the arts. If, during the mid-1220s, Grosseteste was studying theology and teaching the arts at Oxford, he could accurately be described as a master in the arts while at the same time he would have had occasion to increase his knowledge of Aristotle, develop a commentary on a work vital to the teaching of logic, and at the same time be developing more concerted theological interests.

McEvoy also assigned Grosseteste’s significant treatise *De luce* to this period. With this work, in the tradition of the ‘metaphysics of light,’ Grosseteste offered a cosmology based on the propagation of light.⁶⁰ Also a theological work, it places the origins of all

⁵⁸McEvoy, “Chronology,” p. 637.

⁵⁹McEvoy, “Chronology,” p. 641.

⁶⁰McEvoy summarizes the *De luce* more fully in *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 151ff. He describes the text as “one of the few scientific cosmologies, and perhaps the only scientific cosmogony, written between the *Timaeus* and early modern time,” p. 151. See also his description in *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 88ff. A translation and brief introduction is contained in *On Light*, translated by Clare C. Riedl, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942. For further analysis of Grosseteste’s project in *De luce*, see Andreas Speer, “Physics or Metaphysics? Some Remarks on Theory of Science and Light in Robert Grosseteste,” in *Aristotle in Britain in the Middle Ages*, edited by Jon Marendon, 73–90, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1996.

created things with God's creation of a single point of light from which all else issued. Clearly at this point Grosseteste was dealing with theological ideas at the same time as he was writing major scientific works, showing that his interests defy any neat division between science and theology. In fact, his later optical works must have been motivated by his desire to understand better the implications of his metaphysics of light, and thus cannot be considered purely 'scientific' works in the modern sense as they offer an additional goal beyond understanding the physical world: they also lead one to a better understanding of God's activity in creation.

Around the same time, Grosseteste began, but never fully finished, another commentary on a major Aristotelian work, the *Physica*. It was apparently written over the course of a number of years, and perhaps never reached the final form at which Grosseteste was ultimately aiming.⁶¹ In any event, he probably began it around 1228, and left off around 1232. During this same period, McEvoy noted, Grosseteste was producing smaller treatises, which made use of his study of the *Physica*. McEvoy discussed four treatises: *De finitate motus et temporibus*, refuting the doctrine of the eternity of the world, *De differentiis localibus*, on the problem of defining place, and *De motu supercaelestium* and *De motu corporali et luce*, both on problems of motion.

I have included below a table allowing the reader to compare Dales's and McEvoy's chronologies.

⁶¹Dales believes it is a 'rough draft' of an organized work, while Callus believes it to be less-organized, more a series of glosses. See Dales, "Robert Grosseteste's *Commentarius in octo libros physicorum Aristotelis*," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 11 (1957): 10–33, especially pp. 13–15. For the Latin text of the commentary, see Robert Grosseteste, *Commentarius in VIII Libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, edited by Richard C. Dales, Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1963.

TABLE 1
 ROBERT GROSSETESTE'S SCIENTIFIC WRITINGS, C. 1209–1235,
 ACCORDING TO DALES'S AND MCEVOY'S CHRONOLOGIES⁶²

Dates	Dales's Chronology	Dates	McEvoy's Chronology
		1209 or earlier	<i>De artibus liberalibus</i> <i>De generatione sonorum</i>
		1215–1220	<i>De impressionibus aeris</i>
		1217/20–1225	<i>De generatione stellarum</i>
1220	<i>De generatione stellarum</i>		
1221–1222	<i>De generatione sonorum</i>		
		1222–1224	<i>De cometis et causis ipsarum</i> (a. k. a. <i>De cometis</i>)
1224	<i>De impressionibus elementorum</i>		
		before 1225	<i>De impressionibus elementorum</i>
		1225–1228	<i>De luce</i>
1226–1228	<i>De accessione et recessione maris</i>	1226–1228	<i>De accessione et recessione maris</i> (a. k. a. <i>De fluxu et refluxu maris</i>)
1226–1230	<i>De cometis et causis ipsarum</i>		
1227–1229	Commentary on the <i>Posterior Analytics</i>		
		1228–1230	Commentary on the <i>Posterior Analytics</i>
1228–1232	Commentary on the <i>Physics</i>	1228–1232	Commentary on the <i>Physics</i>
		1230	<i>De differentiis localibus</i> <i>De motu supercaelestium</i> <i>De motu corporali et luce</i>

⁶²Dales's chronology is found in "Robert Grosseteste's Scientific Works," p. 402. McEvoy's chronology is found in "Chronology," p. 655. The table above does not include McEvoy's dates for the *De spera* and computistical works, as they will be the subject of later analysis.

TABLE 1 (contd.)

Dates	Dales's Chronology	Dates	McEvoy's Chronology
		1230–1233	<i>De lineis, angulis et figuris</i> <i>De natura locorum</i> <i>De iride</i> <i>De colore</i> <i>De calore solis</i> <i>De operationibus solis</i>
1231	<i>De lineis, angulis et figuris</i> <i>De natura locorum</i>		
1232–1235	<i>De colore</i> <i>De calore solis</i> <i>De iride</i>		
		1235	<i>De finitate motus et temporibus</i>

Richard Southern, too, has written on the question of dating Grosseteste's scientific works. His strongest objection to McEvoy's chronology, which he nonetheless respects, is that it places nearly all of the scientific works into a period that is too compressed, namely from 1220–1235.⁶³ Southern's main objection to this is that, in his version of Grosseteste's biography, that period was more fully devoted to Grosseteste's theological training. For example, Southern suggests that the *De cometis*, lacking certain Aristotelian discussions of comets, could belong to the late 1190s, when a comet was reported in chronicles from regions near Hereford.⁶⁴ Southern also wants to date the commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* earlier, to sometime before 1225.

⁶³Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 122.

⁶⁴Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 126.

Southern's basis for moving the dates of some of these works is his belief that, from 1225 to 1230, Grosseteste was engaged in writing a commentary on the *Psalms*.⁶⁵ This commentary, he believes, demonstrates not only Grosseteste's progression to greater theological acuity, but also his engagement with theological teaching—and thus a corresponding neglect of scientific concerns—during these years. The commentary on *Psalms*, Southern posits, shows a marked evolution in theological thought, from incomplete comments focussing on natural objects mentioned in the *Psalms* (thereby showing Grosseteste's continued interest in secular studies) to fully integrated commentary covering the complete verses, demonstrating increasing comprehension of Greek through his use of Greek authors. He also places in these years two theological-philosophical treatises, *De veritate* and *De libero arbitrio*,⁶⁶ which he believes demonstrate a move from secular to theological studies.

Southern's thesis, however, suffers from too sharp a dichotomy between science and theology. His basic assumption that, once he moved on to study theology, Grosseteste's scientific interests fell by the wayside is untenable. While this may be evident in the commentary on the *Psalms*, I see no reason to assume that it is valid for his work in general. Many of his scientific works show theological interests, which is not surprising for a scholar who had long been involved with ecclesiastical business. Grosseteste's biography clearly shows a multi-dimensional mind, through his pursuit of both scientific study and an ecclesiastical career. So while I believe Southern is correct regarding Grosseteste's theological training—that it took place at Oxford after the *suspendium clericorum*—I am also convinced that Grosseteste continued to work on scientific topics during and after the

⁶⁵Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 112ff.

⁶⁶McEvoy presents summaries of *De veritate* in *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 320ff, and of *De libero arbitrio* in *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 110ff.

period when he received his theological education.

So far we have focussed mainly on Grosseteste's scientific and natural philosophical writings, but he also produced a large number of theological works. In addition to the commentary on the Psalms, he wrote a full commentary on the letter to the Galatians and a commentary on the majority of the letter to the Romans. Scraps of comments on other Pauline works also survive. No comments or lectures on the gospels remain, which is a curious omission for such a prominent and active theological master; either he never had occasion to prepare lectures on them, or they simply have not survived or been identified. He also wrote treatises on the Old Testament, including *De cessatione legalium*, on a prophecy of Christ's passion, and *De decem mandatis*, on the Ten Commandments. His most impressive work of biblical scholarship is his *Hexameron*, a thorough commentary on the creation narrative.⁶⁷

Grosseteste also produced, in addition to strictly biblical works, other theological and pastoral works. Thomson lists thirty-two works in the pastoral and devotional category of Grosseteste's writings.⁶⁸ Some of them have already been mentioned, such as *De cessatione legalium* and *De decem mandatis*. Examining the whole list, we can see that Grosseteste wrote on a number of issues, from confession and the Eucharist to pastoral care. The popularity of one of his theological works, the *Templum Domini* or *Templum Dei*, also known as *De articulis fidei*, is demonstrated by the fact that it is extant in over forty manuscripts.

⁶⁷For the last item, see *Hexaëmeron*, in *Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi VI*, Latin text edition by Richard C. Dales and Servus Gieben, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. A translation by C. F. J. Martin has been published as *Robert Grosseteste: On the Six Days of Creation*, in *Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi VI (2)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. The biblical works are also summarized in McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 96ff.

⁶⁸Thomson, *Writings*, pp. x-xi.

Grosseteste's theological and pastoral writings were heavily informed by his reading of the Church Fathers. He even worked out a system of unique symbols, in essence a topical concordance, allowing him the means to index the works he read. He created a symbol for each topic he wanted to index, sorted them into different categories, and then created a list of the symbols, each with references to passages dealing with the topic. The passages come from both Church Fathers and secular authors. This *Concordantia patrum*, as Thomson labelled it,⁶⁹ demonstrates Grosseteste's wide reading of numerous authors, including Ambrose, Augustine, Basil, Bede, Boethius, Cicero, Gregory, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Pseudo-Dionysius, Seneca, and many more.⁷⁰ To get a sense of the amount of labor Grosseteste put into this project, consider the following numbers: he selected 197 subjects (and their corresponding symbols, which are inventions of Grosseteste, not a system already in place) with over 6,000 references. Augustine tops the list with approximately 3,000 references, while the next most abundant references are to Gregory with 1,257, Jerome with 488, and Seneca with 333.

Despite the fact that Grosseteste was reading Latin translations of Greek scientific works, it was apparently his interest in theology, and particularly in understanding the Scripture, that prompted him to engage in yet another major scholarly project: learning Greek.⁷¹ This would have been a difficult task in his day, as he did not have the apparatus commonly used to learn a language, such as grammars and dictionaries, readily available to

⁶⁹For more on the *Concordantia patrum*, see S. Harrison Thomson, "Grosseteste's Topical Concordance of the Bible and the Fathers," *Speculum* 9 (1934): 139–144, and "Grosseteste's Concordantial Signs," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 9 (1955): 39–53.

⁷⁰Southern includes a list of authors, including the number of references to each, in *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 195.

⁷¹See McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 113ff.

him. The most probable source of such aids was John of Basingstoke, who had seen service with the Church in Athens, and himself knew Greek. Grosseteste, soon after becoming a bishop, appointed this same John to the archdeaconry of Leicester, suggesting that he was acquainted with John before that time. Grosseteste's episcopal household included Nicholas Graecus, who doubtless assisted him in his Greek translations, which continued into his episcopacy. Grosseteste did somewhere find written aids for his translation work, employing the *Suda Lexicon* and the *Etymologicum Gudianum*,⁷² and perhaps a bilingual dictionary created by John of Basingstoke.

The precise date when Grosseteste first began his translating activity is not known. It has been placed during his period with the Franciscans, while McEvoy suggests it could have been earlier due to the prodigious amount of work he subsequently performed. In any event, he did produce a large number of translations. He translated the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, five works of John Damascene, the full corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius—which includes *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *On the Divine Names*, and *On Mystical Theology*—and commentaries on each of those four works, the letters of St. Ignatius, and the *Nichomachean Ethics*, also with a commentary. These works alone could be the production of a lifetime, but merely account for one of the many avenues of scholarship that Grosseteste pursued.

Grosseteste also produced a handful of works in the vernacular, Anglo-Norman tongue.⁷³ These include a *Confession*, discussing the seven deadly sins, a *Rule*, outlining the proper forms of conduct for his household, a couple of short prayers, and a long poem with the modern title *Chasteau d'Amour*, which is an allegorical salvation history. The dating of

⁷²McEvoy describes these works in *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 115–116.

⁷³See McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 146ff.

these works has not received a great deal of attention.

The preceding section has not covered every written work of Grosseteste's life, and it has perhaps over-represented the scientific works because of the focus of this dissertation. I have also not attempted to establish dates for all of the works, but have presented the arguments of previous authors so that the reader may understand the major issue surrounding the dating of the works, namely, the impact of our lack of a secure biography for Grosseteste's early life. My own conclusions regarding the dating of Grosseteste's works is that previous attempts to establish a chronology have relied too heavily on strict delimitations of Grosseteste's interests and career: that he handled exclusively secular topics until he switched to theological ones, that he produced the vast majority of his works after the *suspendium clericorum* and his supposed education in Paris, that his interest in Aristotle must have arisen after about 1220, and so forth. Theories of his biography and the chronology of his writing will necessarily influence each other, and questions still remain for any of the proposed biographies.

My inclination is to push his interests in scientific matters to an earlier date, beginning in the last one or two decades of the twelfth century. The Savile manuscript in which Grosseteste copied mathematical and astronomical texts, some of them Latin translations of Arabic authors, even if it does date from 1215, need not imply that his use of mathematics and Arab science must postdate that time. The significance of this text and the implications of its date will become apparent in the next two chapters. Of greater controversy are the questions of when he received his theological education and when he began seriously to study Aristotle. I believe that the two periods in fact overlap, and both take place at Oxford after 1214 and the resumption of teaching there. His theological training, I contend, need not have occurred in the strict two to three year pattern that university education eventually took. Rather, Grosseteste, an active scholar and teacher of the arts, possessing some duties in an ecclesiastical household, may have gradually achieved

his theological training over the course of many years, eventually attaining a mastership, after which he could lecture and write authoritatively in theology. At the same time, however, his interests in science, and especially in Aristotle, did not wane, and he continued to produce works on scientific matters that overlapped with his theological interests. Eventually, his accomplishments earned him benefices and a secure livelihood, while circumstances later brought him into the Franciscan circle at Oxford. His theological work led him to pursue a study of the Greek language relatively late in life, which in turn led him to produce a number of translations, some of them during his time as bishop of Lincoln.

The reader by now has a feeling for the broad range of Grosseteste's interest and scholarly production, but also for the insecure state of scholarship regarding the chronology of his writings. We are on much more secure foundations when it comes to the final period of his life, his episcopacy, for which our documentation is more complete.

2.4. Grosseteste's Later Life as a Bishop

Grosseteste's career as a teacher ended in 1235 when he was elected to the bishopric of Lincoln. By Matthew Paris's account, Grosseteste was a compromise candidate, though he was elected unanimously.⁷⁴ When the former bishop, Hugh of Wells, died, there was controversy over who should be elected, though Matthew does not explain the source of it. Even though Grosseteste was tightly connected to the Franciscans—indeed, Matthew wrote that “it was being said that he was bound to the Franciscans”⁷⁵—the canons agreed to elect Grosseteste. Matthew also does not explain why Grosseteste was considered an acceptable candidate. Certainly his reputation as a theologian and preacher

⁷⁴See Matthew Paris's account of Grosseteste's election in MvEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 11; and McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 29–30.

⁷⁵See MvEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 11; and McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 30, quoting from Matthew Paris's *Historia anglorum*.

must have helped. But he was an odd choice in another way, namely, that in 1231 he had resigned nearly all his benefices, including his archdeaconry, due to illness, retaining only a prebend in Lincoln Cathedral. For the last few years before his election, he had been exclusively an academic among the mendicants, an unlikely choice to lead one of the largest dioceses in England. On the one hand, this demonstrated his commitment to the offices: unable to fulfill his duties, he resigned the offices so that others could carry them out. On the other hand, his abandonment of offices and his withdrawal into the Franciscan community at Oxford might have signalled to some an apparent retreat from ecclesiastical aspirations.

It may be that the canons expected to gain a bishop who would not present problems, which is often why a compromise candidate is chosen. Indeed, he may have initially seemed to be a bishop who would not upset matters. Apparently the monks of Canterbury became upset over the issue of Grosseteste's place of consecration, desiring that he be consecrated at Canterbury. According to Southern, this episode was part of a long-standing power struggle between the monks and the archbishop. The monks claimed they wanted to maintain Canterbury as the traditional site where consecrations should take place, while the archbishop argued from the inconvenience of travelling to Canterbury when any cathedral was a legal place for a consecration.⁷⁶ In a letter filled with biblical passages,⁷⁷ Grosseteste wrote to Archbishop Edmund, his old colleague and friend from Oxford who would be performing the consecration, and willingly submitted to the monks' desire in an effort to maintain harmony.⁷⁸ This episode may have reassured the canons that their

⁷⁶See Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 250ff.

⁷⁷*Epistolae*, Letter XII, pp. 54–56.

⁷⁸As it turned out, Edmund decided that the consecration would take place in Reading, a place between Lincoln and Canterbury; Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 252. See McEvoy, *Robert*

compromise candidate was indeed a good choice: an educated theologian, with pastoral concerns, who would not make waves. If this is indeed what they expected, they were soon disappointed.

Grosseteste's tenure as the bishop of Lincoln was not one characterized by compromise. Indeed, it might better be described as one of recurring conflict. He was no meek ecclesiastic, ready to follow the dictates of his flock, but rather an active leader, filled with the desire to meet the pastoral demands that he thought the office required. McEvoy writes that, "[t]he central motif of his episcopate was the personal responsibility of the bishop for the pastoral care of every soul in his diocese."⁷⁹ On numerous occasions, this would lead to conflict with all levels of ecclesiastical and secular officials, from monks and barons in England to the papacy itself.

Above all else, Grosseteste was an extremely active bishop. As noted in the previous section, his scholarship was not abandoned when he took office; for example, his ability to maintain scholars within his household aided his study of Greek. He preached frequently, as attested by his surviving sermons. He conducted regular visitations throughout his diocese, which must have been quite time-consuming, given its size. And he actively corresponded with a number of individuals on a variety of topics.⁸⁰ His wide range of activity, as well as his confidence in his own theological positions, inevitably brought him into conflict on a number of issues.

Within only a few weeks of his consecration, Grosseteste became embroiled in a

Grosseteste, p. 33 for a slightly different version of the disagreement between the archbishop and the monks.

⁷⁹McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 30.

⁸⁰*Epistolae* reproduces 131 letters; see Luard's preface, pp. xcvi-xcviii on their manuscript sources. Luard also includes a table of contents, with a short description of the contents of each letter, as well as its date where available, on pp. xcix-cxxxi. See also Thomson, *Writings*, pp. 192–213 for more on Grosseteste's letters.

dispute over bastardy.⁸¹ In thirteenth-century England, only children born in wedlock could be legitimate heirs. In 1234, the issue had come under review in England as a result of a new canon law code promulgated by Pope Gregory IX, in which it was asserted that children born out of wedlock (but not as a result of adultery) should be considered legitimate if their parents subsequently married. The king, barons, and bishops had agreed in 1234 that only the issue of legitimacy was at stake, and that the rule on succession would remain the same, namely, that children born out of wedlock would not be in a position to inherit their parents' estates. In other words, English secular and ecclesiastical officials had agreed to maintain the status quo. The means by which the status quo would be maintained, however, was the ecclesiastical court, which had to agree to this interpretation of legitimacy and succession.

Grosseteste, as it turned out, would not submit to the agreement. In a lengthy letter to William of Raleigh,⁸² Grosseteste challenged the traditional English position as, in the words of Richard Southern,

being contrary to divine law, contrary to nature and natural law, contrary to reason, as well as being contrary to canon law, to old English custom, and the theory of the relations between secular and spiritual authority.⁸³

The letter is extremely detailed and closely argued, demonstrating Grosseteste's commitment to deep theological consideration of issues of import, as well as his willingness to spend the time to grapple with complex issues. Raleigh did not take Grosseteste's letter very seriously, but the bishops did, and they switched their position to support Grosseteste. The barons, however, sidestepped the issue to avoid ecclesiastical entanglement, thereby nullifying Grosseteste's efforts to change what he considered to be a violation of divinely

⁸¹See Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 252ff.

⁸²*Epistolae*, Letter XXIII, pp. 76–94.

⁸³Southern, Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 254–255.

established relationships. While he had not tried to placate the barons, as he had done in the case of the monks of Canterbury, the end result was much the same. His rejection of his proposal left him in a position of making no lasting change.

Grosseteste's episcopacy was also famous—or perhaps infamous, at least to some of his charges—for his visitations. Almost immediately upon taking office, Grosseteste set out to visit all parts of his diocese, especially the religious houses and the archdeaconries. Of the former there were dozens, of the latter eight, which together included nearly two thousand parishes.⁸⁴ On these visitations, Grosseteste brought with him a sizeable number of assistants, many of them from the mendicant orders, to help him preach and hear confessions. He also used this time “enquiring into things which needed correction or reform.”⁸⁵ The results of the final activity were often instructions to archdeacons for the imposition of proper Christian behavior among parishioners,⁸⁶ as well as the dismissal of numerous heads of religious houses.⁸⁷

Many complaints were made regarding his visitations, from outcries on the local level that what he was doing was unprecedented to official appeals to the papal court regarding many of his decisions. More of Grosseteste's time was taken up with his own counter-appeals, most of which were upheld. Again we can see that conflict was the order of the day, but that in these cases his positions were upheld, at least on the official level. Apart

⁸⁴On the size of the diocese, see Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 235–236. He also notes that Grosseteste's diocese made up about one-fifth of the population of England, p. 237.

⁸⁵Quoted by Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 258.

⁸⁶For example, see *Epistolae*, Letter XXII, pp. 72–76, in which he forbids a number of activities which he found practiced in his diocese.

⁸⁷On the dismissal of heads of religious houses, see Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 260, especially n. 26.

from the appointment and dismissal of ecclesiastical officials, however, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if his disciplinary directives were followed on the local level. Nonetheless, the records left to us demonstrate his heartfelt concern for the souls within his diocese.

Grosseteste was not afraid to try to impose his will on secular officials, at least where their functions overlapped with his ecclesiastical purview. Especially troubling to him were persons who held religious benefices while engaged in secular government.⁸⁸ Working through the papal court to receive license to deal with such matters, Grosseteste did his best to expunge his diocese of such persons. One example was Robert Passelewe, who administered a portion of the royal forest, and on whom the king wished to have an ecclesiastical benefice bestowed. Grosseteste stood firm to block his appointment to ecclesiastical office, which, as bishop, he was certainly able to do. Apparently the matter was resolved amicably, and Grosseteste maintained a positive relationship with the king. Regarding the appointment, he had been supported by the papal court, because it was clear that the bishop had command over the ecclesiastical appointments made by secular officials in his diocese. The issue of appointments within the diocese of Lincoln, however, did not cease with those of the king. Grosseteste later had difficulties with an appointment made by the pope, but we shall leave that episode for a little later.

Grosseteste did not forget Oxford when he became bishop. In fact, he could not have, given that the legatine ordinance of 1214 placed the University of Oxford under the authority of the bishop of Lincoln. Grosseteste, however, found occasion to offer unsolicited advice to the theological masters of Oxford through a letter written in 1245 or

⁸⁸Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 265ff.

1246.⁸⁹ It seems that the masters at Oxford had begun to copy a practice of Paris masters by delivering ordinary lectures on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. The real controversy was over the issue of the type of lectures in which the *Sentences* was covered. The older practice, with which Grosseteste was no doubt intimately familiar, was for ordinary lectures, delivered in the morning, to be reserved for the exegesis of scripture. Richard Fishacre, a prominent master at Oxford, proposed dividing morning lectures between scripture and the *Sentences*, as two separate dimensions of theological training. In his letter, Grosseteste exhorted the masters to restrict their ordinary lectures to the Bible, and thereby to exclude the *Sentences* from such a prominent place in the curriculum. It is significant that he did not command the masters to do so, as he might have done as their bishop, but instead only strongly recommended the practice. Ultimately the masters did not accept the recommendation of Grosseteste, and ordinary lectures on the *Sentences* became commonplace at Oxford, just as they had at Paris. In this, the masters were supported by a papal letter sent to Grosseteste soon after he sent his own letter, in which Grosseteste is commanded not to interfere with the practice of delivering ordinary lectures on the *Sentences*.

Grosseteste's early years as a bishop made it clear that he felt a strong pastoral responsibility for his flock, and his personal activity in visiting all parts of his diocese and his directives for correcting improper behavior reinforce this. His main responsibility, in Grosseteste's own eyes, was to his geographical region of influence, that is, his diocese. But he did recognize the role the pope played in the hierarchy, as the ultimate support in this world to reinforce Grosseteste's decisions in his own diocese. For that reason, Grosseteste set out for the papal court shortly before the Council of Lyons was called.

Grosseteste had departed from England for the curia in November of 1244, two months before the pope had convened the Council with a papal bull in January 1245. Two

⁸⁹See McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 160ff.

issues had probably compelled Grosseteste to make the trip.⁹⁰ First, he had experienced recurring problems with the canons of Lincoln over his rights during periods of visitation. After a great deal of correspondence with the curia to handle appeals and counter-appeals, none resolved to Grosseteste's satisfaction, he had apparently decided it was time to take a personal hand in the proceedings. In August of 1245, after the conclusion of the Council, he received a decision in his favor.⁹¹ The second issue occasioning his trip was an effort to canonize Edmund of Abingdon, the Archbishop of Canterbury, whom Grosseteste had known so well as a colleague both at Oxford and in the episcopacy.⁹² After lengthy efforts by English representatives, they achieved their goal. On 11 January 1247, a papal bull canonized Edmund, making 16 November his feast day.

Grosseteste did not return to England until after the August decision regarding the canons of Lincoln. The sessions of the Council took place in June and July, while he was still there, but we have no clear record of Grosseteste's activity during those sessions.⁹³ It is difficult to imagine that he did not participate, or at least attend, but apparently he played no major role. Given the overwhelming emphasis of the Council on the international situation of the Church, in which Grosseteste was not a player—the Islamic threat to the Holy Lands, schism with the Greek Church, barbarians in the east, and the problems with Emperor Frederick II—his lack of recorded activity is no great surprise. One of the other issues of

⁹⁰See McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 33ff.

⁹¹McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 40.

⁹²McEvoy points out that, although Grosseteste and Edmund had sometimes disagreed in official matters, their friendship had always persisted. Both the friendship and respect that is apparent in Grosseteste's letters to Edmund must have contributed to his desire to see Edmund canonized. McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 34.

⁹³His name and seal is applied to a document from the Council, the *Transsumpta of Lyons*. McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 39.

the Council, however, was the reform of the Church. Because he so strongly displayed an emphasis on pastoral care and responsibility, he must have been interested in sessions devoted to this topic. The emphasis at the Council, however, was on securing the financial status of the Church in a changing economy (so that it could thereby remain in a position to provide pastoral care), not on the curbing of abuses, with which Grosseteste's interest is amply demonstrated in his letters.

He also demonstrated a commitment to pastoral care with his second visit to the papal court five years later, in 1250. Grosseteste composed and presented to the pope and three cardinals a document in which he outlined the difficulties he had encountered in trying to carry out his duties. The upshot of the argument was that the Church hierarchy, including the pope and curia, were the source of the most troubling obstacles to his responsibilities.⁹⁴ Though some have seen in Grosseteste's document the seeds of a proto-reformation,⁹⁵ Joseph Goering has performed a diplomatic analysis of the relevant set of texts, which include the document just mentioned, and has reached a quite different conclusion from those who see Grosseteste as attempting any sort of overthrow of or break with the papacy.⁹⁶ Though Grosseteste's initial document was often subsequently referred to as a 'sermon,' it was in fact a diplomatic instrument addressed to the pope and curia. He was not preaching against the papacy, but was in fact appealing to it, asking the individuals within the papal court to engage in a systematic self-correction of abuses. By working within the

⁹⁴See Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 276ff.

⁹⁵See McEvoy's summary of later examples of the appropriation of Grosseteste for antipapal purposes, in *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 62–75.

⁹⁶Joseph Goering, "Robert Grosseteste at the Papal Curia," in *A Distinct Voice: Medieval Studies in Honor of Leonard E. Boyle, O. P.*, edited by Jaqueline Brown and William P. Stoneman, 253–276, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

hierarchy, Grosseteste wanted to improve the situation of ecclesiastical officials like himself who were genuinely concerned with the care of souls. By addressing himself to the papal court, he recognized the Church hierarchy as a viable means by which to care for souls within the Church, but also as an instrument that needed repair.

The documents are official texts sent to the court in the fashion of a legal case, and outline Grosseteste's concerns with abuses, including the appointment of unqualified persons to ecclesiastical offices, often the result of simony or nepotism, and the appointment of nonresident priests. The main thrust of the argument is that the Church, at the local level, is unable to provide adequately for the parishioners who need its aid because the hierarchy is not providing the proper persons to fulfill ecclesiastical offices. He provided a number of examples from his own experience in England, and especially in his dealings with the new archbishop of Canterbury, to support his arguments. In the end, Grosseteste called on the papacy to correct these abuses, for it was in the hierarchy of the Church that Grosseteste saw the potential cure for its ills.

Oddly enough, as both Goering and Southern note, these documents present arguments that are academic in nature. Rather than conforming to the precedents of canon law, which is the context in which they are offered, they appeal to the authorities of scripture, the Church Fathers, and Aristotle. For those who wish to see Grosseteste as denouncing and haranguing the curia, it is difficult to see why these arguments would even have been listened to. Goering's analysis, however, solves this problem: the arguments were seen as just that—arguments—and not simply as criticisms. This may explain why Grosseteste in fact achieved great success in prodding the pope to action, especially in restricting the activities of the archbishop of Canterbury.

One final, dramatic episode in Grosseteste's tenure as bishop occurred in the year

of his death, 1253.⁹⁷ The pope appointed his nephew to a benefice within Grosseteste's diocese without first consulting him. Incensed, Grosseteste wrote a letter to the pope, boldly rejecting the candidate and criticizing the pope for overstepping his prerogatives.⁹⁸ In a papal letter, argued by some to be a response to Grosseteste's criticism, the pope admitted that mistakes had been made regarding the appointment of benefices outside of Italy by the pope, and directed local ecclesiastical officials to retain control over appointments of their benefices now and in the future.

In October of 1253, during the night between the eighth and ninth, Grosseteste died. His episcopacy was one in which there had been rampant conflict—with his parishioners, the monks in his diocese, the nobility of England, and even the papacy itself. But for Grosseteste, the conflicts had never been about self-serving power. He had always, because of both his confidence in his own theological positions and an unwillingness to relent to the pressures brought to bear on him, stood up for the rights he perceived as due the office of bishop. At the same time, I am sure, he felt a solemn responsibility in that office: that the care of souls within his diocese was a burden for which he must accept responsibility. His amazing level of activity, even at his advanced age, must surely have been spurred on by his own recognition that his office called him to unceasing efforts on behalf of his flock.

He did not achieve success in all he attempted to do, as witnessed by his continual efforts within ecclesiastical courts to shape the episcopal office into the form he wanted it to take. He must have been aware of the herculean nature of the task he had set for himself: to

⁹⁷McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 47–50

⁹⁸The letter, known as Letter 128 from Luard's numbering, has been edited and translated in F. A. C. Mantello, "'Optima Epistola': A Critical Edition and Translation of Letter 128 of Bishop Robert Grosseteste," in *A Distinct Voice: Medieval Studies in Honor of Leonard E. Boyle, O. P.*, edited by Jaqueline Brown and William P. Stoneman, 277–301, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

provide adequate pastoral care to all within his diocese. Yet at the same time, he continued to do that for which he had been trained as an academic: to question and analyze issues of theological import, whether they concern the divine law in relationship to bastardy and secular successions, or abuses within the hierarchy. His pursuit of the study of Greek texts in the fields of theology and ethics probably served both of these pursuits, allowing him both to improve his understanding of relationships between humans and God, and to discern how best to serve the needs of the souls in his care. Despite his occasional setbacks, his confidence in his own abilities never seems to have left him. Even shortly before his death, probably when he was more than eighty years old, he was still willing to oppose the pope, and his resolve won the day.

Grosseteste lived a long life, and accomplished much, though probably in the face of a number of personal travails. In conclusion to the chapter, I have produced a table that summarizes the most significant aspects of his life. The table consists of two types of entries. The first are those events for which we have more or less precise dates, and that allow us to sketch at least a skeleton framework for Grosseteste's life. The other entries are events or periods for which we have little information, and about which we are forced to conjecture. The table hopefully will convey both the breadth of Grosseteste's activities and the large number of gaps that remain in his biography.

TABLE 2
 CHRONOLOGY OF GROSSETESTE'S LIFE,
 INCLUDING PRECISELY AND IMPRECISELY DATED EVENTS

Dates	Precisely Dated Events	Imprecisely dated events, or conjectured activity
1160–1175		Birth in county of Suffolk (1168-1170 is current consensus) to Anglo-Norman family
1186 (or earlier)–1194		Teaching in some capacity, probably a provincial master in England, perhaps in Lincoln, and serving in household of Bishop of Lincoln
1186–1192	Signs charter while in household of Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln	
1194–1195	Gerald of Wales writes letter of recommendation for Grosseteste	
1194–1198		In the employ of William de Vere, Bishop of Hereford, perhaps involved in teaching
1198–1219		Activity and whereabouts unknown, but perhaps employed in teaching and ecclesiastical functions, and likely in region of Hereford
before 1209		Perhaps teaching at Oxford, but no direct evidence for this
1209-1214	<i>Suspendium clericorum</i> at Oxford	Spent at least some of this period in France, but no evidence for the traditional assumption that he received a theological education at Paris
after 1214		Serves as chancellor of Oxford, but date very uncertain, perhaps as late as 1230
1213–1216	Involved as an official in a land dispute in Worcester	
1214–1219		Probably teaching at Oxford, producing original scientific works, perhaps beginning theological education; continues with ecclesiastical work

TABLE 2 (contd.)

Dates	Precisely Dated Events	Imprecisely dated events, or conjectured activity
1215–1216		Copies scientific and mathematical treatises into manuscript (Bodleian MS Savile 21), but might have occurred much earlier than this
Oct. 1219	Hugh Foliot becomes Bishop of Hereford	
1219–1225		Grosseteste involved with Hugh's household in some manner, but also actively teaching at Oxford; may still be receiving theological training at this stage
after Oct. 1219	Witnesses a charter for Hugh Foliot	
before Aug. 1220	Involved in a court case in Shropshire	
1225–1235		Becomes more involved with study of Aristotelian works, continues to lecture on scientific and natural philosophical topics, composes treatises on both scientific and theological topics, and becomes one of the preeminent theologians of Oxford
1225	Granted rectory of Abbotsley, his first benefice	Has been ordained a deacon by this date
1229	Becomes archdeacon of Leicester	Has been ordained a priest by this date
1229/1230–1235	Teaching the Franciscans, probably in both scientific and theological subjects	Continues to compose both scientific and theological works
1230		Has probably by this time begun his efforts to learn Greek
1231	Resigns all benefices except a prebend	
1235	Ordained as bishop; immediately involved in disputes over place of ordination and English legal practice regarding bastardy	

TABLE 2 (contd.)

Dates	Precisely Dated Events	Imprecisely dated events, or conjectured activity
1235–1250	Actively visiting parishes in his diocese, encouraging pastoral responsibility in ecclesiastical officials under his control	
1244–1245	Visits papal court over dispute with canons of Lincoln, and attends Council of Lyons	
1245–1246	Sends letter to masters at Oxford exhorting them to reserve ordinary lectures for the Bible, and not to deliver ordinary lectures on Lombard's <i>Sentences</i>	
1250	Second appearance at papal court, asking hierarchy to engage in self-correction of abuses	
1253	Grosseteste rejects papal candidate for a benefice in England	
1253	Dies, 8 or 9 October	