

REVIEWS

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LEYRA CURIÁ, Montse, 2017. *In Hebreo: The Victorine Exegesis of the Bible in the Light of its Northern-French Jewish Sources*, (Bibliotheca Victoriana, XXVI). Turnhout, Brepols.

The book whose review we present here provides a valuable contribution to the theological discipline that studies, discusses, and scientifically criticizes the meaning of biblical books. The exegesis of sacred texts in the Middle Ages played a prominent role in certain periods of religious controversy. For instance, in Barcelona, the Dominican convent of Santa Caterina offered training in oriental languages such as Arabic, Syrian Aramaic, and Hebrew in order to prepare and educate the friars in the sacred and exegetical texts of the peoples they were to evangelize. Throughout the disputes between Jews and Christians, the latter were increasingly better trained to attack, question, and/or justify the errors of the Jews. Thus, from the twelfth century onwards, it was usual for Christian communities to take an interest in the fidelity of biblical texts and to turn to numerous sources to study this question in depth, even by receiving instruction from Jewish exegetes.

Montse Leyra Curiá, who graduated in Semitic Philology and Classical Studies at the Complutense University of Madrid and holds a Master's degree in Hebrew Bible from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she recently completed her doctorate, is currently a lecturer of Latin and Hebrew at the San Dámaso University in Madrid. In her book, *In Hebreo: The Victorine Exegesis of the Bible in the Light of its Northern-French Jewish Sources*, the author displays what has become an indispensable resource for the study of any medieval field, namely interdisciplinarity. The author draws on theology, philosophy, and interreligious philology to address the study of the commentaries of two representatives of the twelfth century school of Saint Victor in Paris, specifically Hugh and Andrew of St Victor.

Leyra Curiá presents a comparative analysis between the interpretations made by these Victorine exegetes of each fragment of their biblical commentaries that contained explanations in Hebrew, and Latin and Hebrew sources, including the textual traditions of *Vetus latina* translations, the Vulgate, the Greek Septuagint, and the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible itself.

One of the strengths of this work is the recovery of the theological resources of the period in question, the twelfth century, that is, the interpretation of biblical writings and the works of other commentators. Moreover, the word 'recovery' is not a random choice here, for one of the most important aspects of Montse Leyra's work is the identification of Jewish exegetical texts hitherto unknown or considered lost that were used in the commentaries of these two Victorines.

The book is divided into three parts: Latin sources, biblical texts, and Jewish sources. As for the Latin sources, both Hugh and Andrew, broadly speaking, drew their exegetical material from the prologues of Jerome's *Vulgate* for the explanation of the Hebrew books of the Bible, from Remigius of Auxerre for translations and traditions, and from Bede the Venerable for Hebrew. Hugh probably used one of the earliest glosses that would later be incorporated into the compilation of the Latin Bible, the *Glossa Ordinaria*, to comment on the book of Exodus, although he certainly did not have access to this compilation. Conversely, his disciple Andrew drew inspiration from this work to comment on the books of the Bible, and for this reason it is not unusual to find that over half of his interpretations of *in hebreo* derived from Latin sources are from the *Glossa* itself.

As for the second chapter, the author offers the biblical sources that inspired these two Victorines. The books that are discussed are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Judges and the Books of Samuel. Their textual source was the Vulgate, and in particular Andrew was most influenced by the Septuagint. Thus, the text reached them either through *Vetus Latina* translations or through revisions of the latter influenced by the Septuagint. A major point in Leyra Curiá's study is the fact that these Victorines did not know Hebrew and Greek, however, Andrew had collated Latin biblical manuscripts containing different textual traditions and considered that the most correct form of the text should be the one closest to Hebrew, so there were Jewish exegetes who helped him in his work of comparing and correcting different versions of the biblical text. In fact, one of the reasons that motivated the Victorines to seek the help of Jewish scholars seems to have been their need to identify which Latin readings of certain biblical texts conveyed the original meaning of the Hebrew text most accurately. Hugh and Andrew would not have been able to use a Hebrew text on their own, but nevertheless, they succeeded in grasping the exact meaning of the Masoretic Hebrew text. Montse Leyra shows that the Victorines learned these interpretations from contemporary Jewish authors.

As for the Jewish sources, along with the interpretations of early Latin commentators, the author compares them with those written by Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), Joseph ben Simeon Kara, Bekhor Shor, Abraham ibn Ezra, and other sources of Jewish exegesis, some of them belonging to the twelfth-century school of northern French rabbis. In many of their biblical interpretations, Hugh and Andrew cite Rashi and therefore it is plausible that they had access to the commentaries of this important rabbi through one or more of his disciples. Likewise, it is also possible that they learned directly from Rabbis Joseph Kara and Samuel ha-Meira.

Their rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew would not enable them to read the text of the Hebrew Bible on their own, thus the author argues that Hugh and Andrew must have personally met Jews whose works have survived to this day. Furthermore, these Victorines claim that they were instructed by Hebrews, describe Jewish religious practices typical of their time, and their

interpretations are very close to those transmitted by twelfth-century Jewish commentators of the northern French school. This shows that contact between Christians and Jews in terms of exegetical transmission was not a strange phenomenon and is well documented in other contemporary Latin authors. Leyra Curiá gives two possibilities as to how these encounters could have taken place. On the one hand, Hugh, either by himself or accompanied by Andrew, could have held a series of meetings on which the Victorines based their interpretations of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Judges and Samuel. On the other hand, after Hugh's death, Andrew would have kept meeting Jewish scholars, which would lead to his interpretations of certain biblical books that cannot be found in Hugh's commentaries.

It should be noted that one of the difficulties encountered by Leyra Curiá is that the better part of Victorine interpretations resulted from in situ oral translations, which is an added difficulty when it comes to identifying the quotations from the sources, especially if we take into account that not all the Jewish sources of the exegetical school of northern France have survived.

As a final remark, we must stress the importance of the fact that the texts of the exegetical school of northern France have survived, not only in the few extant Hebrew writings, but also in the discourses of Christian theologians. Montse Leyra has analysed parallels that have gone unnoticed by other researchers, identifying the direct sources of the Victorines, determining the incorporations of the biblical textual variants from *Vetus Latina* translations, the Septuagint, and the Masoretic Hebrew text, as well as the similarities between the Victorines and Jewish exegetes and sources.

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