

**Robert J. Porwoll, David Allison Orsbon (ed.),
Victorine Restoration. Essays on Hugh of St Victor,
Richard of St Victor, and Thomas Gallus, Turnhout
(Brepols) 2021, 376 p., 15 b/w, 2 col. ill., 4 b/w
tabl. (Cursor Mundi, 39), ISBN 978-2-503-58513-0,
EUR 110,00.**

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par
Constant J. Mews, Clayton, Victoria

This publication, in the Brepols Cursor Mundi series, offers a valuable introduction to Victorine thought. It combines studies by scholars of both established authority and those of a younger generation. The introductory essay by Robert J. Porwoll, one of the two editors, offers a relatively straightforward narrative introduction to the emergence of regular canons in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and to the foundation of canons at Saint-Victor in particular. Its founding sources are far from clear. While Peter Abelard emphasizes the role of William of Champeaux in its foundation, the necrology of Saint-Victor is surprisingly silent about his role. There can be no doubt, however, that under the tutelage of Gilduin, its founding prior from 1113 until 1155, the abbey enjoyed privileged support from the crown. Porwoll presents the abbey as steering a path between reformist impulses and loyalty to the crown. He offers brief summaries of three of its distinguished teachers, Hugh, Richard and Thomas Gallus. There were other personalities not studied in this volume who perhaps could have been introduced here, in particular Andrew, Achard, Walter, and Godfrey. The striking feature of all these Victorine personalities is their internal diversity. Andrew is focused on the historical sense of Scripture, in particular the contribution of Rashi's exegesis to understanding the sacred text, while Richard is passionate about its spiritual signification. Achard explores Platonist philosophical assumptions to explain Christian doctrine. Walter is bitterly opposed to all secular masters, not just Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers, but also Peter Lombard and Peter of Poitiers. By contrast Godfrey celebrates the contribution of many different disciplines to the discovery of wisdom. The absence of attention to these other figures creates a potentially misleading impression that there were no debates within the abbey, when it is clear that there was never any clear definition of its identity. Nonetheless, by focusing on just three figures (Hugh, Richard and Thomas Gallus), the essays in this volume at least provide a useful introduction to three of its most distinguished figures.

The title of the volume picks up a key concept of Hugh's thought: that of redemption in terms of the original establishment of creation. Andrew Salzmann provides a helpful introduction to his thought, originally for focusing on exegesis as the means for grasping its profoundly trinitarian character. This refers not just to the doctrine of the Trinity, but to Hugh's love of three-



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

fold distinctions in everything he discusses. Salzmann helpfully situates Hugh's exegesis combining both the historical perspective on which Beryl Smalley focused and the spiritualizing emphasis of Henri de Lubac. He rightly demonstrates that Hugh of Saint-Victor focuses on multiple layers of meaning. Salzmann tends to emphasize that Hugh was re-working existing patristic traditions rather than devising something new. In his »De tribus diebus«, however, one could argue that Hugh was revising Augustine's focus on finding God in soul to bring out the divine presence in creation as a whole.

The chapter of Rainer Berndt offers a helpful introduction to Hugh's teaching about the sacraments of Christian faith, bringing out the importance of salvation history. It complements that of Salzmann in focusing on the centrality of scripture to Hugh's thought. Hugh understands sacrament not simply as an ecclesiastical ritual but as an image of God's presence in the world, most fully manifested in the person of Christ. The contribution of Conrad Rudolph introduces Hugh through his description and commentary (as taken down by a student) of an extraordinarily complex work of art. Rudolph condenses arguments he had previously raised in his 2014 monograph »The Mystic Ark: Hugh of Saint Victor, Art, and Thought in the Twelfth Century«. This well-illustrated chapter provides a refreshing visual complement to the various studies of Hugh in this volume. Dominique Poirel's chapter on Hugh's Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy will be of particular value to those unfamiliar with his French language publications. Poirel discusses the difficulty of assigning a specific date to his »Commentary«. He observes that while Hugh seems to have been aware of Dionysius from early in his teaching career (even from before he came to Paris), but that he did not complete his »Commentary« until relatively late in life. Poirel's discussion of how Hugh taught that love prevails over knowledge, provides a helpful avenue to appreciate how Hugh's reading of Dionysius – even if heavily shaped by familiarity with Augustine – began to offer a fresh perspective on the nature of theology, that others would take much further.

This volume also provides four chapters on Richard of Saint-Victor, a figure whose writings (often described as mystical) are providing a particular surge of contemporary interest, simply by their imaginative power. Ineke van't Spijker offers a valuable introduction to Richard's analysis of contemplation in his »De contemplatione«, also known as »Benjamin Major«. We know frustratingly little about Richard's early career, in particular as to when he first came to Saint-Victor. There can be no doubt, however, about his debt to Hugh's teaching and (less explored here) his distrust of the historical focus of Andrew, who developed Hugh's teaching in a very different direction. Van't Spijker is particularly good in demonstrating the interaction between affect and knowledge in Richard's teaching, as also between contemplation and action. His interest is more in the cognitive process for elite readers, rather than summarizing Christian teaching for students. Her study is nicely complemented by that



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

of a younger scholar, David Orsbon about Richard's »Benjamin Minor« (»De duodecim patriarchis«), a text that he presents as about both scriptural exegesis and mystical contemplation. It reads biblical figures as prototypes of different stages of mystical ascent, bringing out its experiential character. Niko den Bok focuses on the originality of Richard's understanding of the Trinity through developing a relational understanding of »person«, influenced by both Augustine and Anselm, but taking their thought in a new direction. Kyle Rader examines Richard's »Four Degrees of Violent Love«. Thematically it connects more to the process of contemplation than to the doctrine of the Trinity. While more could be said about Richard's response to Bernard of Clairvaux on loving God, this chapter offers an initial avenue into a thinker of great complexity.

The last two chapters consider what the less well-known Thomas Gallus had to say about Dionysius. Csaba Németh (author of »Quasi aurora consurgens. The Victorine Theological Anthropology and its Decline«, Turnhout 2020) explains how his teaching offers a path to divine experience, without Richard's complexity. Katherine Wrisley Shelby matches this in a chapter about the affective quality of Thomas's thought. Even if there are other Victorine authors that could have been included here, this volume still provides an accessible introduction to a way of thinking that shaped medieval theology in a powerful way.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)