Although the commentary tradition has its roots in antiquity, there is perhaps no other genre of literature that reflects the nature of intellectual culture of the middle ages than the commentary. It typifies scholastic culture because it suggests that knowledge derives from books and authorities and because it frequently asserts that one must analyze the text in a conventional and uniform way. Together with various ancillary devices that were used by scholastics in their creation and use, the commentary functioned in a wide variety of areas – theology, philosophy, medicine, law – all of which contained significant scientific content. From its zenith in the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, the commentary tradition declined beyond the middle ages, to the point that in subsequent periods (and today) the commentary is suggestive of an antiquated, uninspired, and repetitious intellectual perspective. This course will focus on the rise of the commentary tradition, the material elements of the commentary, the extensive reach of commentaries, and the subsequent decline of the genre.

This course is not intended for specialists in the middle ages or medieval science. Nor will it by itself turn you into a specialist, if you even had the intention of becoming one. Rather, its goal is to expose you to some of the literature that surrounds this defining medieval form of literature, hopefully with the goal of inspiring some comparisons with the preferred techniques of investigation, analysis, publication and pedagogy in the period of your interest. I hope that this comparative thread will be pursued in each class meeting, but certainly in the final meeting, when we read Francesco del Punta’s essay on originality in the commentary tradition.

January 19

**Introduction**

Richard Sharpe, *Titulus: Identifying Medieval Latin Texts. An Evidence-Based Approach*. Turnhout: Brepols 2003. Introduction (pp. 21-34), ch. 15: Some Principles (pp. 246-250), Appendix: A Shelf of Reference Books (pp. 251-301). (To be handed out in class)

January 26

**The Ancient Commentary Tradition**


February 2

No class – Livesey in D.C.

Please use this week to meet with me Monday – Tuesday to discuss ideas for a semester project.

February 9

Theological science, or Scientific theology?

February 16

Biblical Commentaries

February 23

Aristotle Comes to the Wild West
Forms of Commentary Literature

Asking Questions: Scholastic disputationes

Spring Break

Commentaries on the Sentences: Recent work
March 30

Travel to St. Louis

Thursday, March 31
9:00 – 11:00  Introduction to the Vatican Film Library, Dr. Gregory A. Pass, Librarian, Vatican Film Library
1:00 – 5:00  Individual work on projects

Friday, April 1
9:00 – 11:00  The Material Configuration of Commentaries

1:00 – 5:00  Individual work on projects

April 2  Return to Norman

April 6  Commentaries on Aristotle: Recent work

April 13  No class meeting – Consultations on Papers

April 20  No class meeting – Consultations on Papers

April 27  Tradition and Originality in Commentary Literature

May 4  Presentation of Papers
Course Requirements

1. The most important requirement of the course is completion of the reading by the assigned date. Because of the nature of the course, its success depends on the participation of all members. Throughout the semester, I will assign particular dates on which seminar members will be responsible for leading discussion. I may also divide especially heavy reading assignments among participants and ask those assigned an article to prepare a one- or two-page précis to be distributed and discussed by members of the seminar.

2. The only other requirement for the course is the preparation of an analytical essay on a topic agreed upon mutually. It is not my intention that these essays be traditional ‘research papers,’ for in order to require that, I would have to assume that each of you has the requisite language skills and methods necessary to work with original sources in often inaccessible forms. Nor would the research paper contribute to your goals in other areas of the history of science.

So, instead I propose that you choose a topic that draws upon the central issue of the seminar – the commentary tradition – and prepare an essay that draws heavily on the secondary literature that surrounds it. For example, you might be interested in historiography, and select as a topic some aspect of historical investigations of the commentary tradition. You may be interested in iconography or visual representations of nature; an essay on the interface of art history and the history of science might be appropriate. The middle ages has enjoyed several resurgences of popularity since the Renaissance, so your essay might reflect the view of things medieval in the more modern period of your interest.