# Peter of Ireland, the University of Naples and Thomas Aquinas' Early Education

**Michael Dunne**

***Abstract*** This article revisits the life and academic career of Peter of Ireland (Petrus de Hibernia, ca. 1200-1260) whose Opera Omnia were edited by the author (Louvain-Paris, 1993, 1996). A recapitulation is also given of a recent debate as to whether the early sources for the life of Thomas Aquinas were right in stating that Peter of Ireland taught the young Aquinas when the latter was a student at the University of Naples in the years 1239-44. While acknowledging that it is now impossible to be absolutely certain of this, the author argues that the likelihood remains that Aquinas was introduced to philosophy by an Irishman.

The story of the relationship between Peter of Ireland and Thomas Aquinas is a rather complex one and perhaps has become even more so of late, as will become apparent in the course of this paper. What has emerged are some important matters regarding how we should treat sources concerning the early life of medieval thinkers. These hermeneutical matters also bring up some related epistemological problems regarding the assent one should give to statements which cannot be shown to be conclusive.

The relationship between these two thinkers begins in the early years of Aquinas' life. Thomas Aquinas was sent at the age of five to the Benedictine Abbey of Montecassino where one of his relatives was abbot, the intention of the powerful Aquino family probably being that Thomas would, one day, become abbot in his turn. Some nine years later Thomas was expelled together with most of the monks under the orders of the Emperor Frederick II, owing to conflict between the Empire and Papacy since they were regarded as 'foreigners'. The abbot advised Aquinas's parents that he should continue his education and so Thomas Aquinas, aged about 15, went to the University of Naples in 1239.[1]

[1] In recent years there has been great increase the number of books available dealing with medieval philosophy and on St. Thomas in particular. On St. Thomas, one of the best available is J.-P. Torrell, *St Thomas Aquinas. The Person and His Work*, Vol. 1, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1996). Most books deal with Thomas's early life in a brief way with only a cursory mention of Peter of Ireland. However, note the following from the otherwise excellent study by Aidan Nichols OP: 'Thomas was introduced by one *Michael the Irishman* [italics mine] to the latest

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the southern kingdom of which Naples became the capital, was the scene of a unique fusion of civilisations, Latin and Greek, Norman and Saracen. In the reign of Frederick II, Greek, Latin and Arabic were in constant use, in speech and in official documents. As was the case in Spain, here was an interface with the riches of ancient culture as transmitted through Arabic and Greek. Already in the twelfth century Henry Aristippus (d. 1162), Archdeacon of Catania and minister of State, made translations of the *Meno* and *Phaedo* of Plato as well as of the *De generatione et corruptione* of Aristotle and part of the *Meteors*. The greatest of the translators in Sicily was Michael Scotus who came to the court of Frederick II with the official title of philosopher but whose function was that of Court Astrologer. Thus Dante placed Scotus in hell among the cheats, he who 'knew the game of magical deception'.[2] Among other things, he translated Averroes which undertaking was 'the major event of the history of translation during the first half of the thirteenth century'.[3]

Frederick II, that *stupor mundi et immutator mirabilis*, although a despot had a great interest in science and philosophy, encouraging the study of Averroes and of Moses Maimonides. His *De arte venandi cum avibus* shows a familiarity with scholastic terminology and classification and a not uncritical admiration for Aristotle:

> In writing We have also followed Aristotle when this seemed opportune. However, on some matters We are of the opinion, on the basis of our own experience that as far as the nature of some birds are concerned that Aristotle deviated from the truth. Because of this We did not follow the Prince of the Philosophers in everything since he never, or only rarely, practiced hunting with birds, whereas We have always loved and practiced it. For Aristotle narrates many things in his book *On Animals* saying that other people said them. However, that which others held, he himself perhaps did not see nor was it seen by those others—certainty is not gained through hearing.[4]

ideas in the shape of the natural philosophy of Aristotle' in *Discovering Aquinas*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002) p. 3

[2] My translation. Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, (Testo Critico della Società Dantesca Italiana, Ventunesima Edizione, Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1985) *Inferno*, XX, 117, p. 166: 'delle magiche frode seppe il gioco'.

[3] Fernand Van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West; The Origins of Latin Aristotelianism*, (Louvain: Nauwelaerts; 2d edition, 1970), p. 93

[4] My translation. See, Frederick II, *De arte venandi cum avibus*, (ed. Carl A. Willemsen, Insel-Verlag Leipzig 1942) Vol. 1, p. 1: In scribendo etiam Aristotilem, ubi oportuit, secuti sumus. In pluribus enim, sicut experientia didicimus, maxime in naturis quarundam avium, discrepare a veritate videtur. Propter hoc non sequimur principem philosophorum in omnibus, raro namque aut nunquam venationes avium exercuit, sed

It is not surprising that such a person would consider founding a University. His action, however, was unprecedented—his foundation at Naples is the first university established by civil charter. Universities such as Bologna and Paris had been founded as a recognition of previously established or existing schools. Naples was different. It was founded as an act of deliberate policy to provide administrators, jurists, *dictatores*, and scholars for the southern kingdom. Frederick gave the *studium* at Naples a monopoly on higher education within the kingdom. Frederick wrote in his charter establishing the University:

> We have therefore decided that in the most pleasant city of Naples that there should be the teaching of the arts and all disciplines, so that those who are starved of knowledge will find it in their own kingdom, and will not be forced in their search for knowledge, to become pilgrims and to beg in foreign lands.

He then goes on to order that no student should dare to leave the kingdom and that all students already abroad should return. There are to be doctors and teachers in every faculty—and special loans are to be made available to students as well as cheap accommodation. Invoking his Imperial power, Frederick deprived Bologna of its *studium*, ordering teaching to cease within four months under the penalty of *infamia* and invited the students and professors to come to Naples.[5]

One scholar who arrived at Naples to teach was Peter of Ireland sometime after 1224. Thomas Aquinas we are told was a student in the Arts faculty aged between 15 and 20 and it was during this time that he encountered the Dominican Order and made his decision to enter this mendicant community—a decision which was very much against his parents' wishes. The earliest sources for the life of St. Thomas do not mention his teachers at Naples. But these authorities with the exception of Bartholomew of Capua do not refer at all to his life before he became a Dominican. Nonetheless, we are told by two of Thomas' biographers that Aquinas was taught by Peter of Ireland during his time at the

---

nos semper dileximus et exercuimus. De multie vero, que narrat in libro animalium, dicit quosdam sic dixisse, sed id, quod quidam sic dixerunt, nec ipse forsan vidit, nec dicentes viderunt, fides enim certa non provenit ex auditu.

[5] *Epistolarum Petri de Vineis libri sex*, ed. J.R. Iselius (Basle, 1740; reprinted with an introduction by H. M. Schaller, Hildesheim 1991), III, 11 and 12, my translation. This extreme measure proved unsuccessful since this constitution was revoked in 1227. In 1234, Frederick wrote 'opus manuum nostrarum memorabile turbatione inter ecclesiam et imperium penitus dissolutum'. In 1253 Conrad transferred the *studium* to Salerno but in 1258-59 Manfred returned it to Naples.

University of Naples. Writing some 40 years after the rather early death of Aquinas both William of Tocco and Peter Calo tell us something about Aquinas' teachers at Naples. William tells us that at Naples, Thomas was educated in grammar and logic by Master Martin and in natural philosophy by Peter of Ireland. Peter Calo varies the story slightly and in view of later discoveries seems to have recorded correctly that since Aquinas soon learnt all that Master Martin could teach him in grammar (Aquinas had had ten years of education with the Benedictines) he was then transferred to Master Peter the Irishman who taught him logic and natural philosophy.

And that remained that—Peter became a footnote to the early years of Aquinas, repeated over and over again in biographies of Aquinas for the next 600 years. An attempt was made in the eighteenth century by the Dominican, Bernardo Rossi (de Rubeis) to identify him.[6] He discovered that a Benedictine monk had been at Naples around the time that Thomas was there who was called Petrus de Donis and described as *Ultonienis*. This might be a Petrus de Dunis, a member of the Benedictine community of Down, founded about 1177-78 by John de Courcy who brought Anglo-Norman monks from Chester. Rossi, however, rejects this Peter and instead chooses another. In the *Epistolary* of the Imperial Chancellor, Pier della Vigna, there is a letter from 1224 addressed to a *Magistro Petro de Hybernia de studio Neapolitano*. In a form of work contract, Master Peter is praised for his *experta scientia, probitas cognita, doctrina probita* and is bidden to preside over the new *studium generale* at a stipend of twelve ounces of gold a year.[7] As it turns out Rossi was mistaken, the professor addressed in the letter was a jurist, a former student from Bologna and was not *de Ybernia* but *de Ysernia*.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note the presence of an Anglo-Norman monk from Down at Naples. Clemens Baeumker suggested that our Peter of Ireland might have been introduced to the Sicilian court by his fellow countryman, Michael Scotus. It is unlikely, however, that Michael Scot was Irish. Again, it is unlikely that an Irish man of Gaelic race would have had a career that would take him to probably Oxford, Paris, and then to a distinguished chair in Naples (there was no university in Ireland in the Middle Ages; Trinity College was founded by Elizabeth I in 1592, the Royal Catholic College of St Patrick was the second, founded

[6] B. de Rubeis, *De gestis ac scriptis ac doctrina S. Thomae Aquinatis Dissertationes criticae et apologeticae*, Venice 1750, I; reprinted in *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII. P. M. edita*, t. 1 (Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae, 1882) pp. 45-346; see, pp. lxv-lxvi

[7] Petri de Vineis, *Epistolarum libri sex*, ed. J.R. Iselius (Basle, 1740). III, p. 10

by George III in 1795). The name Peter was not used among the Gael at this time, so it would seem that Peter was a Norman by birth with connections to the Norman kingdom of Sicily.

However, from the 1920s on works were discovered which were attributed to Peter of which only three have been so far judged to be authentic: a *Determinatio magistralis* and two commentaries on Aristotle. The first of these, the *Determinatio magistralis* was discovered by Clemens Baeumker (1853-1924) in a manuscript of the Stadtsbibliothek of Erfurt and he published this rather short text in 1920. It begins:

> King Manfred wondered and asked the professors whether the bodily organs are made on account of their functions or whether the functions happen because of the organs. And the arguments were made for and against. The solution was however given by Master Peter of Ireland … He said that the problem was metaphysical rather than scientific and that its solution was to be found in Book XII of the *Metaphysics* and that related to the care of the First Cause regarding those things which are in the universe because it is not proper for the Wise and Omnipotent One to tolerate evil or to act unjustly but rather to arrange everything in the best way through which everything can be preserved in respect of the eternal permanency of the universe.[8]

The King Manfred in question was the illegitimate son of Frederick II and ruled from 1259-1266. Like his father, Manfred was interested in promoting scholarship. Arising from the text of Aristotle Peter concentrates upon the preying of one animal on another and refers to various birds of prey, noting that it is because they have an irascible and angry nature that they are provided with sharp beaks and talons so that they can kill and hold onto their prey. This preying of one thing upon

[8] My translation. See, C. Bauemker, 'Petrus de Hibernia. Der Jugendlehrer des Thomas von Aquino und seine Disputation vor König Manfred'. *Sitzungsberichte der Bayernischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Philos.-philolog. und hist. Klasse. Heft 8 (1920), pp. 41-49; p. 41. Reprinted in Magistri Petri de Ybernia*, Expositio et Quaestiones in Peryermenias Aristotelis*, edited by Michael Dunne, Louvain-la-Neuve, Editions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, *Philosophes Médiévaux* Tome XXXIV, Editions Peeters, Louvain-Paris, 1996, xvii + 258 pp; pp. 246-250: Dubitatuit Rex Manfridus et quesiuit a magistris utrum membra essent facta propter operaciones uel operaciones essent facte propter membra. Et fuerunt raciones ducte pro et contra, sed determinauit Petrus de Ybernia, gemma magistrorum et laurea morum. Dixit ergo quod questio ista esset metaphisicalis pocius quam naturalis, et esset determinate in fine undecimi *Prime Phylosophie*; et quod esset questio de sollicitudine cause prime circa res que sunt in uniuerso, quia non est sapientis et omnipotentis relinquere malum nec facere aliquid iniuste, sed omnia meliori modo quo possunt saluari ad permanenciam eternam uniuersitatis.

another is seen as part of the good ordering of the universe where the lower exists for the higher, a notion which presumably impressed the king. Peter's choice of examples must also have been made in the knowledge that Manfred was in the course of preparing an edition of his father's *On the Art of Hunting with Birds* with additions by Manfred and over 900 illustrations of birds, of remarkable quality and detail of observation—a book which survives to the present day in the Vatican library. So Peter seems to have been extremely successful in his academic career and also politically astute in aiming to please his lord and master.

The text of the *Determinatio* is from the late 1250s to early 1260s and the other two extant works, a commentary on the *De interpretatione* and another on the *De longitudine et brevitate vitae* date from a similar time frame, i.e., some ten to twenty years after Aquinas was a student at Naples. Although some continuity is to be presumed in a lecturer's teaching (it is not unheard of that a lecturer might use the same notes more than once), Peter's extant works are not a record of exactly what he might have taught Aquinas. Nonetheless, we can presume that at a time when it was banned in Paris that the public teaching and study of Aristotle happened at Naples and the study of Averroes as well. As we have already observed, Frederick II had encouraged that remarkable man, Michael Scot to translate Averroes and also Moses Maimonides as well. Indeed, we know from a Jewish source that Peter must have had an open and enquiring mind since he was part of a Jewish-Christian group which met to study the thought of Moses Maimonides in the 1250s.

The source for this information on Peter of Ireland is from the edition of *A Hebrew-Italian Philosophical Glossary of the Thirteenth Century* by Giuseppe Sermoneta in 1969.[9] He notes that Moses Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*, written between 1185 and 1290 was translated into Hebrew by Samuel Ibn Thibbon at Arles in 1204. His son-in-law Jacob ben Abba Mari Anatoli moved from Marseilles to Naples in 1230, probably at the invitation of Frederick II and became a collaborator with Michael Scotus. The Latin translation was completed by 1240 and Frederick II is recorded by Anatoli as interpreting scripture according to the teaching of Maimonides, comparing him with Aristotle and Averroes. Thus, we have the foundation of a Maimonidean tradition in Southern Italy and one not limited to Jewish circles. Indeed, for Christians as well as Jews, the *Guide* offered a way to absorb the new Aristotelianism without excessive compromise of revealed truths. This offered an alternative to the emanationist doctrines stemming from Avicenna and

[9] Giuseppe Sermoneta, *Un glossario filosofico ebraico italiano del XIII secolo*. (Olschki Editori: Florence, 1969).

the more radical Aristotelianism found in the new commentaries of Averroes. It also perhaps explains why the *Guide* was accepted by Italian Jews whereas in France it met with hostility and condemnation among the Hebrew community. Another link in the chain comes with Moses ben Solomon of Salerno (d. 1279), friend of the son of Anatoli, Anatolio, who was a doctor and an 'official' translator at both Salerno and Naples. Moses read the translation of the *Guide* around 1250 together with some Dominicans of the *studium* of Naples and some other scholastics, which included Peter of Ireland. Moses sought to counter the arguments of the Dominicans who identified the Trinity with the intellect, the intelligible and the thing understood, by basing himself on the common ground of the principles enunciated in the *Guide*. As Sermoneta points out (pp. 41-42), it is an interesting connection to note the importance of the influence of Rabbi Moses on Aquinas, another Dominican of course, who is just about to begin upon his writing career.

In any case, Moses of Salerno records two precious statements of Peter of Ireland from this discussion group. The first is taken from his *Commentary on the Guide*:

> This is what the wise Christian Master Peter of Ireland has explained to me. He said that 'possible' can be predicated with two meanings. The first: everything can be or can not be. It is possible that in the month of Shevat that it will rain, but it is also possible that it will not. The other sense of 'possible' follows on from necessity. For example, Aristotle says that the world, inasmuch as it is, was possible and not impossible. Existing it is possible, inasmuch as if it were impossible, it would not have been.[10]

And again, in the *Objections*, a brief polemical work written against the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, Moses reports a position of Peter's which seems nearly like process philosophy *ante litteram*:

[10] My translation of the text in: Giuseppe Sermoneta, *Un glossario filosofico ebraico italiano del XIII secolo*. (Olschki Editori: Florence, 1969) p. 45n: Ecco quanto mi ha spiegato il Sapiente cristiano, Maestro Petri de Bernia. Disse che 'possibile' potrà essere predicato in due sensi. Il primo: ogni cosa *può* essere e *può non* essere. Possibile è che nel mese di Ševàt [gennaio-febbraio] cada la pioggia, ma è anche possible che non piova. L'altro possible consegue dalla necessità. Ad esempio: il Filosofo dice che il mondo, in quanto c'è, *era possible* e non impossibile. *Essendo* è possible, in quanto se fosse stato impossibile, non ci sarebbe stato.

> … indeed, Master Peter of Ireland accepts that Christians in believing that the Divinity has become incarnate accept the necessary conclusion that the Name has undergone passion, movement and change.[11]

Thus, Moses of Salerno's endeavours consisted of two aspects. On the one hand, the collaboration with the Christian scholastics in the work of comparison, translation and analysis of this fundamental work of Jewish philosophy, and on the other hand, to bring to Jewish circles what he had learnt from Christian thinkers, such as Peter of Ireland, regarding problems arising from the *Guide*.

In concluding the section on the person of Peter of Ireland in my edition of his *Commentary on the Length and Shortness of Life* a book from Aristotle's *Parva naturalia*, I sounded the following optimistic note in 1993:

> Will more information [on Peter] come to light? It is to be hoped so. It is not improbable that in the mass of unedited manuscripts which have been handed down to us that new works and further information [on his life] may be discovered.[12]

Recently, however, it has been suggested that some of the information which we already have should be discounted and abandoned as fools' gold.

In an article entitled "'Neapolitan Gold": A Note on William of Tocco and Peter of Ireland' which appeared in the *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale*[13] of the SIEPM (International Society for the Study of Medieval Philosophy), Andrea Robiglio examined the claim that Peter of Ireland was the teacher of Thomas Aquinas at Naples. He noted that he regarded the authoritative source as an article by James McEvoy in 1994 where Robiglio regards McEvoy as setting the *status quaestionis*.

Robiglio points out that the late Père R.-A. Gauthier OP in his introduction to the revised Leonine edition of Aquinas's commentary on the *Peryermenias* shows that we have no evidence of Peter's activity before ca. 1250 and that a Peter of Ireland active as a jurist ca. 1239-44 turns out

[11] Ibid.: … già riconobbe il Maestro Petri de Bernia che i cristiani nel credere che la Divinità si sia incarnata accettano la necessaria conclusione, aver il Nome subito passione, movimento e mutamento (my translation above).

[12] Magistri Petri de Ybernia*, Expositio et Quaestiones in Aristotelis librum De longitudine et brevitate vitae*, edited with an introduction by Michael Dunne, Louvain-la-Neuve, Editions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, *Philosophes Médiévaux* Tome XXX, Editions Peeters, Louvain-Paris, 1993, 172 pp.; p. 9

[13] *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 44 (2002), pp. 107-111

to be a Bernardus de Isernia not a Petrus de Ibernia. Robiglio points out that this lack of evidence for Peter being in Naples in the 1240s 'is enough to cast doubt on the traditional claim derived from William of Tocco, even if the tradition of secondary literature until now has given full credence to his *Ystoria*'.[14]

Robiglio also points out that apparent internal evidence in Aquinas derived from his use of the examples of 'Peter and Martin' is no more significant than his use of 'Plato and Socrates'—both are commonplaces in medieval authors.

The fact that early writers such as Bartholomew of Capua are silent on Thomas' early education before he became a Dominican is regarded by Robiglio as significant and to be taken seriously.

So far so good – it is always a good idea to subject medieval accounts of a saint's life to a critical examination. However, Robiglio then goes on to state the following:

> So I argue a different thesis: when he was a student at Naples, Thomas never had the philosopher Peter of Ireland as professor. Gauthier's data accord with my deflationary thesis. There was indeed a philosopher named Peter (some of his works are extant) who taught at Naples after 1250. Aquinas attended the courses at the studium before 1244 and therefore was not taught by him.[15]

My reaction upon reading the above was one of surprise, for two reasons. Firstly, the rejection of part of what is, by now, a near 700 year bibliographical tradition—and then why retain part of it such that Aquinas was at Naples at all. Secondly, I do not think that Robiglio is justified in enlisting R.-A. Gauthier in support of his deflationary thesis. When I visited Gauthier at the Leonine Commission at Grottaferrata in May 1988 both he and L.-J. Battaillon assured me that they were of the opinion that the Peter of Ireland I was working on was Aquinas's teacher. Indeed, so supportive of my work were they that Père Gauthier gave me his files containing what information he had collected on Peter of Ireland. Later, I was happy to acknowledge his help when I published my edition.

A curious thing is that the 'Neapolitan Gold' of the title is not explained in the text nor is its relevance made clear. I took it to mean 'false gold' or 'fool's gold' from the sense of the article. It seems that 'L'oro di Napoli' is the title of a book by Giuseppe Marotta and was made into a film in the 1950s by De Sica. The allusion would seem to indicate a certain desire for nobility among the poor. One of the actors in the film is

[14] *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 44 (2002), p. 108
[15] *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 44 (2002), p. 110

the great Italian comedian 'Toto' who claimed to be the long lost son of a prince (even though he was born in poverty in Naples) and styled himself 'Principe Antonio de Curtis'. Robiglio seems to imply that Tocco and Calo wished to improve upon the poor pedigree of the University of Naples by insisting that it was here that Aquinas had first studied philosophy and also to where he had returned at the end of his days. It does not seem very clear if he also wished to suggest that the association of Peter with Aquinas was an example of 'L'oro di Irlanda'.

In any case I wrote a response which was duly published in the next edition of the *Bulletin*[16] and in which I acknowledged that details concerning the early life of any medieval thinker are often largely a matter of conjecture. However, regarding Tocco's information we have to ask if it is possible that Peter was in Naples before 1250 and whether Tocco is a credible witness regarding this information since *ponderanda sunt testimonia non numeranda.* For all its faults, William of Tocco's work is the principal biographical document which we possess concerning Thomas's life. It was, however, written with an eye towards the process of Aquinas's canonisation and so emphasised his heroic virtues and the miracles associated with him. I can, therefore, agree with Robiglio's scepticism regarding the legend that Thomas was such a good lecturer that even the Apostle Paul appeared among the students to hear him speak. Again, some dubious stories concerning Thomas' infancy were included since they presented the candidate in the best light possible. If Tocco is the only source for certain information then it is natural to question its reliability. However, it still seems to me, and I wrote it at the time—the fact that Thomas was taught by a Master Peter and a Master Martin does not seem to serve any other purpose than to record something which Tocco had heard. Is it reliable or not? We cannot, of course, prove for certain that Peter taught Thomas but the real point is whether we have (as Robiglio suggests) good evidence or highly probable grounds to reject the 14th century written testimony of Tocco. For here we are not dealing with the raising of a prudent note of caution, rather Robiglio's thesis is to exclude completely and utterly that Peter taught Aquinas.

I went on to write that although it is impossible to obtain total reliability here (unless some very strong historical evidence is discovered, e.g., a fresco of Peter and Thomas at the Naples' Student Union Bar—dated of course) we might from the evidence we have reach a conclusion which is probable or even likely. The facts are as follows:

[16] M. Dunne, 'Concerning 'Neapolitan Gold': William of Tocco and Peter of Ireland. A Response to Andrea Robiglio', *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 45 (2003), pp. 61-65

1. Peter of Ireland lived in the Naples-Salerno region from around 1250-1265.
2. He taught logic and the philosophy of nature
3. Aquinas read him and was influenced by him
4. Tocco says that Peter taught Aquinas

It seems that it is point no. 4 which is at issue. Could Tocco have obtained his information from a reliable source? He could have had it from the Ox's mouth—Tocco was 30 when he met Aquinas in 1272-73. If we choose 1210 as an arbitrary date of birth for Peter—making him 30 when he taught Aquinas and 50 when he spoke before Manfred—Peter could still have been alive when Tocco was in Naples. Thus, it is at least possible that Tocco could have had first hand knowledge and was right in what he wrote. To prove the opposite thesis, that Thomas never had Peter as a teacher is what Robiglio has to do and this is precisely what he fails to do.

Robiglio replied in the next edition of the *Bulletin* 46 (2004) 'Concerning Michael Dunne's Opinion on Peter of Ireland'.[17] He states that I reject his doubts without producing any new evidence—but I don't reject his doubts, I simply maintain that he does not prove his thesis. He questions some aspects of my methodology which I accept in part but seems to miss the central point—I am not arguing from mere possibility to historical knowledge. What I am saying is that you cannot reject a historical document simply by doubting it. The kind of thing you should show is that Tocco perhaps contradicts other sources (which he doesn't) —the only thing we are offered is the 'significant silence' of Bartholomew of Capua on the matter. If this is not possible then you should set out to show that Tocco's testimony is impossible, or implausible, or highly unlikely. I don't think that Robiglio does any of the above. He has to concede that Tocco just might be right—which he doesn't. I, however, agree with Andrea Robiglio that we cannot be sure on the basis of what evidence we have.

And so there ends what the editor of the *Bulletin* Kent Emery Jr. termed our *disputatio parva*, writing:

> This on-going *disputatio parva* bespeaks how for modern students of medieval philosophy and theology (if not for medieval masters) Thomas Aquinas is truly the *Doctor communis*, in whose teaching all seem to have some vested interest, so that seemingly there is much at stake concerning each point of his intellectual career[18].

[17] *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale*, 46 (2004), pp. 191-194
[18] Kent Emery Jr, Editorial, *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 46 (2004), p. viii

In the paragraph which I quoted above from my introduction to the *De longitudine* commentary, I expressed the hope that more information might come to light on Peter's life. I followed this with an acknowledgement (implicit at least) that at the end of the day it is perhaps not all that important whether Peter taught Aquinas or not. I wrote that interest which had centred on Peter of Ireland because of his connection with Aquinas might shift to an interest in his writings for their own sake—for evidence of the circulation of philosophical works and ideas in the middle of the 13th century in Southern Italy, as an example of the scholastic method employed in lectures which Peter had actually given at the University of Naples and so on.

But in fact, it is not only Peter's influence at the beginning of Aquinas' career that is significant but also his influence at the end of Aquinas's life when he was engaged in his massive project of commenting on all of the works of Aristotle. When writing his own commentary Aquinas had Peter's commentary on the Peryermenias in front of him. Gauthier comments that although Peter's commentary probably dates from 1259-65 and contains a record of lectures which Aquinas could not have attended, yet

> It is nonetheless not impossible that he [Aquinas] had in his hands a *reportatio* of the course given by Peter of Ireland: we have noted many similarities between Peter's course and Aquinas's exposition – some of which are quite remarkable.[19]

Indeed, Aquinas sometimes places the authority of Peter's text together with the commentaries of Boethius and Ammonius. This is in marked contrast to Albert the Great's commentary from around 1260 to which Aquinas does not refer to at all.

*Conclusion*

It is always to be hoped that new information will be found regarding Peter of Ireland and Aquinas' educational formation at Naples in the years 1239-45. In any case, Peter has emerged as a figure of importance in his own right. As far as I am concerned, there is always the hope out there concerning the possibility of finding real gold. If Peter commented

[19] My translation. See, R.-A. Gauthier, Preface, Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, Expositio Libri Peryermenias,* Opera Omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita. Tomus I* 1, Rome-Paris 1989, p. 68*: Il n'est pas impossible cependant qu'il [S. Thomas] ait eu en mains une reportation du cours de Pierre d'Irlande: nous avons noté, entre le cours de Pierre et son exposition, plusiers rencontres, dont quelques-unes assez remarquables.

on the *De longitudine et brevitate vitae*, it is likely that he commented upon the other books of the *Parva naturalia* and the *De anima* as well. What if these writings survive, waiting in the corner of some library. What a discovery that would be!