

Basingstoke, John of [John Basing] (*d.* 1252), scholar and ecclesiastic, takes his name from the town of Basingstoke in Hampshire. Two contemporary sources speak of him: the chronicler Matthew Paris, and Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln (*d.* 1253). Basingstoke was closely associated with Grosseteste, and was a friend of Simon de Montfort and an acquaintance of Paris. According to John Leland (*d.* 1552) he studied at Oxford. Matthew Paris notes that he both studied and taught at Paris, without specifying whether he taught the arts or theology there. The only dates known for him concern his appointment as archdeacon of Leicester (1236) and his death (1252).

Basingstoke spent a period of unknown length in the Byzantine territories, which the capture of Constantinople had opened up to soldiers, colonists, and clerics from western Europe. He became proficient in the Greek language and sojourned at Athens. Matthew Paris, who admired him, recounts that Basingstoke spoke of a girl, Constantina, who at nineteen was learned in the trivium and quadrivium and whose knowledge exceeded that which Basingstoke himself had from the University of Paris. Paris refers to Constantina as the daughter of the archbishop of Athens. In a letter (*Roberti Grosseteste ... epistolae*, ep. 17), Grosseteste invokes Basingstoke as a witness, along with the Dominican Roger Bacon, the Franciscan Adam Marsh, Robert Marsh, and Thomas Wallensis. This reference, to be dated near the beginning of Grosseteste's episcopate (*c.*1236) thus places Basingstoke within the bishop's inner circle. About 1242, according to Paris, Grosseteste acquired from the Byzantine area a codex containing the 'Testaments of the twelve patriarchs', a work of whose existence Basingstoke had learned at Athens and reported to Grosseteste. The codex, which Grosseteste sent for, survives in Cambridge University Library as MS Ff. 1.24. It is the oldest witness (late tenth-century) to the text of the 'Testaments'. It may have been in the library of Michael Choniates, archbishop of Athens, up to the Latin invasion of 1204. Grosseteste translated it into Latin, with the help (according to Paris) of Nicolas the Greek of St Albans. The version was widely read (seventy-nine known copies survive), and was to be frequently translated into the vernacular languages and published in early modern times.

Matthew Paris attributes several works to Basingstoke, none of which has been identified: the Latin version of a Greek writing on the order of the gospels; *Templum domini*, a piece of scholastic analysis; and a compendium of Greek grammar which Basingstoke himself apparently referred to as

'the Donatus of the Greeks' (Paris, Chron., 5.286). It is tempting to think that the latter work may have constituted at least part of the basis of Grosseteste's knowledge of Greek, which was to result in numerous translations and retranslations of Greek and Byzantine writings. Grosseteste certainly had a source in England who illustrated for him the Byzantine pronunciation of Greek and instructed him in the use of accents. He named Basingstoke acting archdeacon of Leicester for the first year of his episcopate (he was consecrated on 7 June 1235), and appointed him permanently, giving him the prebend of St Margaret's, Leicester, which he himself had retained up to his election to Lincoln diocese. Basingstoke's knowledge of the Byzantine world and of the Greek language formed the basis of their relationship.

Matthew Paris credited Basingstoke with the knowledge of a Greek system of representing numbers by the employment of a system of strokes. He records his death in the year 1252.

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