**Introduction to Ranulph Higden’s *Distinctiones*,   
in the Earlier Version of MS. Worcester Cathedral F. 80**

By Eugene J. Crook

Ranulph Higden (d. 1364), Benedictine monk and chronicler, entered the abbey of St Werburgh, Chester, in 1299.[[1]](#endnote-1) In addition to his famous *Polychronicon*,[[2]](#endnote-2) he wrote a guide to composing sermons according to the latest methods entitled the *Ars componendi sermones*.[[3]](#endnote-3) The *Distinctiones*, an aid for composing sermons, is found in the longer version in the Worcester Cathedral MS F.128 and the earlier, shorter version in Worcester Cathedral MS F.80 (ff. 209-326) and MS Lambeth 23 (ff.202-254). Like the *Polychronicon* which appeared in three separate editions from the author, the *Distinctiones* may be seen in three similar stages of development. We can see that the author was very interested in the power of preaching from his stand-alone guide for composing sermons and the two chapters dedicated to good preaching in his *Speculum curatorum*: 3.42: “How one Ordained Should Instruct the People” and 3.43: “What Should be Communicated to the People.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

The version of the *Distinctiones* that appears in MS Lambeth 23[[5]](#endnote-5) seems to be his first attempt at composing his work. This manuscript has no paragraph markings (¶) like the latter two versions. It also lacks many short chapter titles that are found in most of the MS Worcester F.80[[6]](#endnote-6) chapters and with consistency in MS Worcester F.128. These short chapter titles give subsequent versions the appearance of alphabetical consistency which is lacking in Lambeth 23. There are chapters out of order (compared to MS F.80), divided, or combined:

* Chapter 22 Bellum follows chapter 20 Beatitudo. It has an entirely different head quotation (*Pugnemus aduersus nationes has que venerunt disperdere nos, et sancta nostra* [1] Macc. 3[:58]) before continuing with the similar text of the F.80 chapter (Homo constat ex duplici).
* Chapter 71 Fidelitas triplex is divided into two parts with the second part having its own rubricated capital (Inter omnes condiciones hominis fidelitas potissime laudatur).
* Chapter 87 Jejunium multipliciter commendatur is divided into two parts with the second part having its own rubricated capital (Triplex ieiunium commendatur vnum quod fit pro satisfaccione peccati).
* Chapter 94 Infirmitas is missed out in its alphabetical order and is picked up at the end of the words beginning either “I” or “J”, after chapter 103 Ira in Deo.
* Chapter 182 Pastoris boni is combined into the second part of the preceding chapter 181 Pastor bonus without any capital rubrication.

The scribe of MS Lambeth 23 renders a more accurate version of the intended text. His scriptural quotations are more accurate when compared to the Vulgate text. His readings of difficult words are more accurate. He takes care not to omit lines due to the same head words. He avoids repetition of words, a characteristic flaw of the F.80 scribe. However, the chief problem with the Lambeth version is that abbreviations are extremely compact. It would be necessary to gain a reading of the text of MS F.80 first before trying to decipher the script of the Lambeth scribe.

MS Lambeth 23 averages 8 words per line. Each rubricated capital occupies the space of 3 indented lines. Each column averages 67 lines. Each page has two columns (therefore, four columns for each numbered folio).

MS Worcester F.80 averages 6 words per line, Each chapter has a rubricated capital that occupies the space of 2 indented lines. Each column averages 52 lines. Each page has two columns (again, four columns for each numbered folio). All the rubricated capitals are in blue ink with red ornamental tracery. The paragraph markers (¶) alternate between red and blue. Between columns to the left of the rubricated capital letters are ornamental tracery lines in red.

The three manuscripts of Higden’s *Distinctiones* represent three different stages in his composition, with a much larger injection of new materials between steps 2 and 3 (between the two Worcester versions MS F.80 and MS F.128). In this process we have a mirror image of the three stage-composition of his *Polychonicon* that has been described in detail by V. H. Galbraith,[[7]](#endnote-7)

The table of comparisons between MS Worcester F.80 and MS Lambeth 23 delineates the differences between the first two stages of composition.

The table of “Authorities Cited” list only the verified sources cited by name of the original author (when this is wrong the correct author is listed in its place), title, or some reference such as the name of a person or genre (example, narration, fable, etc.). The end notes to each chapter detail many other probable references not cited by the author. These will include:

* The *Compendium Theologiae Veritatis* of Hugh Ripelin of Strassburg (1205-1270), published under the works of Bonaventure, *Opera omnia*, ed. Adolphe Charles Peltier. Vol. 8, Paris 1866.
* The *Dietae salutis* of William de Lancea (ca. 1310) published under the works of Bonaventure, *Opera omnia*, ed. Adolphe Charles Peltier. Vol. 8, Paris 1866.
* Various works of Peter of Blois (Blesensis) (1130-1211) published in the *Patrologia Latina* vol. 207.
* Writings of Innocent III (1161-1216), particularly *De sacro altaris mysterio, De quadripartita specie nuptiarum,* and *De miseria humanae conditionis* (*De contemptu* mundi) published in the *Patrologia Latina* vols. 214-216
* Works by Albertanus of Brescia (1195-1251) published in various places as noted.
* Many hymns and chants, some referred to as Psalms by the author, can be found in *Cantus: A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant—Inventories of Chant Sources* to be found on line at [Cantus: A Database for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant - Inventories of Chant Sources | Cantus Database](https://cantusdatabase.org/)

Although Higden hardly ever refers to his own writings in any of his works, here singularly he refers to his own *Speculum curatorum* in chapter 19: Fides where he refers the reader to a more expansive exposition of “the articles of the faith.[[8]](#endnote-8)

As in the edition of the *Distinctiones* of MS Worcester F.128, I have not included the plethora of Biblical citations in the “Authorities Cited” because the purpose of the work is to go from an idea or topic to the many places in the Bible that contain the word in its various meanings or distinctions.

1. John Taylor “Higden, Ranulph” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* Published online: 23 September 2004 <https://www-oxforddnb-com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13225> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi Cestrensis*, ed. C. Babington and J. R. Lumby, 9 vols., Rolls Series, 41 (1865–86). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *The Ars Componendi Sermones of Ranulph Higden, OSB,* ed. Margaret Jennings (*Davis Medieval Texts and Studies*, 6) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991) and *Ars componendi sermones,* trans. Margaret Jennings and Sally A. Wilson (*Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations*, 2) (Leuven: Peeters, 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ranulph Higden, *Speculum Curatorum: A Mirror for Curates* ed. and trans. Eugene Crook and Margaret Jennings (Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 13.1: *The Commandments*; 13.2: *The Capital Sins*) (Leuven: Peeters, 2012; 2016). Book III: *The Sacraments* is forthcoming. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Lambeth Palace: The Medieaeval Manuscripts,* by Montague Rhodes James, (Cambridge: University Press, 1932)p. 38:

   Item 3:

   3. Distinctiones Cistrensis valde utiles .... 202 (199)  
   So the Table.  
   Apparuit gratia dei. ad tit. Apparicio Christi triplex est.  
   Ends with Christus: et deorsum ruens. Expl.  
   Attributed to Ranulph Higden by Bale and Tanner (who  
   mentions this MS.).

   4. Bromyard ......... 250  
   Quod in sequenti tractatu iura canonica adducuntur  
   —predicta conuertantur. Inc. tract, iuris canonici et ciuilis ad  
   moralem materiam applicati sec. ord. alphabeti fr. loh.  
   de Bromyard de ord. fr. pred.  
   Abbas...monasteriis presidere.

   Although the above catalog entry and subsequent authors reference this third item as occurring between folios 202 and 250, my own count of the *Distinctiones* would make it between 202ra and 254ra [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. *Catalogue of Manuscripts preserved in the Chapter Library of Worcester Cathedral*, compiled by the John Kestell Floyer and edited and revised throughout by Sidney Graves Hamilton (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1906), p. 39-41:

   Item 10:

   10. On f *209* begins another (theological) dictionary without title.

   Inc. ‘*Apparuit* gratia dei ad titum. *Apparicio* Christi,’ etc

   Expl f 326 ‘vel deorsum rues.’

   Rebound in brown leather 328 folios

   Red and blue initials. Good A at beginning. The following ff cut: 95, 108, 137, 141, 149, 156, 179, 201, 203, 222, 234, 266, 303, 308, 321, 322. Good initial on f 138. List of titles on f 325b and underneath partly rubbed out, ‘Thomas Blockley.’

   On f 325b. ‘Liber ecclesie cathedralis beate marie Wygornie in quo continentur opuscula subscripta. (List follows.)

   This in same hand as ‘Thomas Blokley,’ but not as book. xv cent [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. V. H. Galbraith, ‘An autograph manuscript of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon*’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 23 (1959–60), 1–18. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ranulph Higden, *Speculum curatorum* 1.7 (ed. 2012 pp. 89-99), (72 note 19 *Fides*) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)