

Distinctiones (alphabetical collection of distinctions by an unknown author)

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment

England, c.1380-1425

135 folios on parchment, modern foliation [cited in this description] in pencil, in Arabic numerals, upper fore-edge recto, 1-135, previous modern foliation in pencil, in Arabic numerals every ten folios from f. 20 to f. 120, with errors at 80 (on f. 81), 90 (on f. 91), 100 (on f. 101), 120 (on f. 122), faded or effaced medieval signatures at lower fore-edge recto, starting with 'g' in the current first quire, eighteen quires of eight [though quire xviii may be a quire of six missing its 1st and last leaves] and one quire of ten (quire iii), lacking text at the start (six quires) and an additional 17 leaves (collation i^s [-8, lacks one leaf after f. 7 with no loss of text] ii^s iii¹⁰ [-3, leaf after f. 17 with loss of text] iv^s-v^s vi^s [-1, leaf before f. 41 with loss of text] vii^s viii^s [-1, leaf before f. 56 with loss of text] ix^s x^s [-8, leaf after f. 77 with loss of text] xi^s-xiv^s xv^s [-6 and 8, one leaf before and one after f. 115 all with loss of text] xvi^s [-5, leaf after f. 119 with loss of text] xvii^s xviii^s [-1, 2, 7, and 8, two leaves before f. 131 and two after f. 134 all with loss of text] xix^s [-2 through 8, seven leaves after f. 135 with loss of text]), catchwords in ink, those on ff. 15v, 32v, 40v, 47v, 70v enclosed in ink boxes, ruled in plummet (justification c. 120 × c. 70 mm.), pricking visible at fore-edges on most leaves, written below top line in a cursive Gothic bookhand (*cursiva antiquior* or *Bastard Anglicana*), with variable letter-forms, in dark brown ink in 30 lines, cadels at top line on most leaves, including one elaborated into a human head in profile (f. 126), majuscules and cadels heightened yellow, paraps in red or blue, one ILLUMINATED CHAMP INITIAL, 4-line, in gold on blue and pink ground outlined in black with fine white penwork (f. 15), numerous PENWORK INITIALS, 2- to 3-lines, in blue flourished red, with guide letters visible in margins, initials cut out at ff. 22, 80, 88, interlinear (e.g., f. 2) or marginal (e.g., ff. 47, 93, 101v, 114) scribal corrections, marginal annotations by at least two hands, one 14th century (throughout, e.g., ff. 18v, 23v, 33, 73v), the other of the 15th or 16th century (e.g., ff. 84v-86v), one manicule (f. 130v), cockling and buckling throughout, staining throughout, especially ff. 68-74 and ff. 106-172, medieval sewn repair (f. 67), loss of text due to missing leaves at start, end, and within quires i, iii, vi, viii, x, xv-xvi, and xviii, flaking ink with further loss of text at ff. 115v-119v, ff. 1-2 fully detached, first quire and f. 135 partially detached, remaining text legible. EARLY BINDING of limp vellum reinforced with cardboard inserts with oblique overlapping corner turn-ins, remboitage with head-band from previous codex still partially attached to inner spine of binding and five pairs of slits (for tail-band and four stations) visible, fully detached from text block revealing spine with six split thongs with packed straight sewing. Dimensions c. 180 × c. 123 mm.

For medieval readers, collections of "distinctions" – alphabetical listings of varied senses of words – served many purposes. The impressive number of such collections, many of which circulated widely, testify to their great popularity, particularly among preachers, who used them as an aid to draft sermons, but also among university students, teachers, and theologians. This collection is currently unidentified. Its English origin and evidence of later Irish ownership add to its interest.

PROVENANCE

1. Details of the script and decorated initials suggest this was copied in England in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, c. 1380-1425.

2. Added Irish language marginal annotation – “An sgribh” (Irish “The stroke [of the pen],” i.e., a pen-trial) – written in an early modern (perhaps 17th- or 18th-century?) Irish script at f. 21v. This addition places our codex in Ireland, or in the hands of an Irish-speaking owner, for at least part of its earlier history (we thank Dr. Chantal Kobel (Department of Early Irish, Maynooth University) for sharing her expertise in correspondence).
3. 17th- or 18th-century inscription, “W: M^c G :” or possibly “W: M^c C =,” on exterior left board, in faded black ink. This addition may be related to the Irish language marginal annotation listed above, though our manuscript’s cover is not original to it.
4. Private collection.

TEXT

ff. 1-135v, incipit, “//christum cogita. Item Bernardus ad regem cilicie. Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperum. non super cupidum sed sum egenum et pauperum ... Timor filialis vel castus est timor quo caritativus timet bonam virtutis perdere ac malum culpe incurrere pure propter amarem [sic] iusticie//”

Anonymous (unidentified) alphabetical *Distinctiones* collection, now beginning and ending imperfectly, with roughly 190 entries, probably opening in the entry for Elemosina(?), then Epiphania, and ending in the entry for Timor. Given how few distinctions collections have been printed, and the fact that our copy lacks several quires at the beginning, we have been unable to verify which text this is, and whether it is a unique copy or one of many.

Entries include [uncertain (acephalous); probably Elemosina], Epiphania, Episcopus, Error, Etas, Evangelium, Eucharistia, Exaltacio, Excommunicacio, Fama, Fames, Familia, Festivitates, Felicitas, Fides, Fiducia bonorum, Figurativia locutionem, Filii dei, Fletus christi, Fortitudo, Frater, Fraus, Fures spirituales, Gaudium, Gladius, Gloria, Gratia, Histrio, Homicidium, Homo, Honorum, Humilitas, Iactantia, Ieiunium, Ignis, Ignorancia, Incarnacionis, Indulgencia, Indutie, Infamia, Infernus, Infidelitas, Infirmitas, Informatio, Ingratitudo, Inimicus, Innocentia, Inobedientia, Instabilitas, <Intellectione>, Intentio, Invidia, Ira, Irregularitas, Iudas, Iudex, Iudicium, Iuramentum, Ius, Iusticia, [uncertain (acephalous); probably Labor], Laus, Lectionem, Lex, Lex divina, Lepa cutis, Libertas, Libertas (second entry), Libido, Liber, Lingua, Littera, Locutionis, Locus, Lucerna, Lucrum, Ludus, Lux, Luxuria, [uncertain (acephalous); probably Maledicta], Malum, Mandata, Mansuetudo, Manuum, Maria, Martirii, Matrimonium, Medicina, Mendacium, Mendicatio, Mercatio, Mercenarius, Meritum, Militia, Miraculum, Miseria, Misericordia, Misericordiae, Missa, Monachus, Mors, Mulier, Mundicia, Mundus, Munerum, Murmurare, [uncertain (acephalous); probably Nativitas], Natura, Navis, Necessitas, Negligencia, Negacio, [uncertain due to mutilation; probably Obedientia], Oblatio, Obstinatum, Ocium, Oculus, Odium, Officium, Oppressio, Oracio, Ordo, Ornatus superfluum, [uncertain due to mutilation; probably Paciencia], Panis, Papa, Paradisus, Parentes, Pascha, Passio christi, Paterfamilias, Paupertas, Pax, Peccatum, Pena, Penitentia, Peregrinatio, Perfectio, Periculosa, Persecutio, Perseverancia, Pharisei saducei et essei, Pietas, Possessio, Potestas, Precarie, Predestinacio, Predicator, Prelatio, Privilegium, Procuratio, Prohibitio, Prophecia, Prudencia, Purgacio, [uncertain], Questus, Questores, [uncertain], Reconciliatio, Redemptio, Rex sapiens, Religio, Relinquere, Reliquiarum, Residencia prelatorum, Resurrectio, [uncertain (acephalous); perhaps Sabbatio], Sacerdotis, Sacramentum, Sal, Sanctificatio,

Sapiencia, Sanguis christi, Satisfactio, Scandalum, Scientia, Scisma, Scriptura sacra, Semen spirituale, Senectus, Sentencia, Sepultura, [uncertain (acephalous); perhaps Symonia], Sobrietas, Societas, Sortilegi, Spes, Spiritus sanctus, Superbia, [uncertain (acephalous); possibly Testimonium], Timor.

Emerging in the later twelfth century, distinction collections (in Latin, *distinctiones*) swiftly became a popular medieval genre with multiple examples produced over the course of the next two hundred years. From the thirteenth century onwards, they played an invaluable role in sermon composition, while also seeing use in other genres of medieval writing. Narrowly defined, collections of *distinctiones* consisted of lists of words, most often from the Bible, often arranged alphabetically, with each entry providing different meanings of the word (in some collections, providing the four senses of meaning of scripture (literal, allegorical or typological, tropological or moral, and anagogical), a hermeneutic system which originated in early biblical commentaries, and persisted throughout the medieval era (Barney, 1989). Late collections, however, show greater flexibility, exploring word uses in a broad range of sources, including non-biblical and even non-Christian texts, and examining their meanings beyond established hermeneutic approaches. During the thirteenth century, entries gradually became more complex and pulled material from a wider range of sources, resulting in increasing length – with some entries (as seen in our copy) running to many pages (Rouse and Rouse, 1974; von Nölcken, 1981).

The entries in our manuscript draw upon biblical and patristic sources, particularly Augustine, along with others from Classical antiquity (e.g., Cicero), plus encyclopedic works such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, theological texts such as Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* and sermons by Hugh of Saint Victor, and legal texts such as the *Decretum Gratiani*. Organized in paragraphs, their length averages about 35 to 55 lines total, although some entries prove significantly shorter – e.g., Indutie: 5 lines (f. 26), Questus: 6 lines (f. 115), and Ludus: 8 lines (f. 52v) – whereas others are much longer, e.g., Predicator: 210 lines (ff. 106v-110), Iuramentum: 174 lines (ff. 36v-39v), and Peccatum: 153 lines (ff. 95-97v). A typical entry is that for "Sortilegi" (that is, a diviner or soothsayer) which lists a dozen types of magical workers defining each with a close quotation from book 8 of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* – identified by a curt parenthetical citation – with occasional cross-references to Augustine and to the *Decretum*. The entry then switches to the *Decretum* in earnest, giving five relevant excerpts (from C. 26, qq. 4–5), before ending with four Biblical quotations: Leviticus 19:26 and 20:27, Deuteronomy 18:10–11, and Isaiah 47:9.

Given the comparative rarity with which *distinctiones* collections enter the market – the Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts lists only nine sales over the past fifty years – our copy will be of special interest to collectors and reward study by researchers interested in the history of distinctions texts, their use by preachers and others, and the production and movement of late medieval books.

LITERATURE

Barney, Stephen A. "Allegory," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Strayer, New York, 1989.

Friedberg, E.A., ed. *Corpus juris canonici: Decretum magistri Gratiani*, vol. 1, Leipzig, 1879.

Isidore of Seville. *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, 2 vols., edited by W. M. Lindsay, Oxford, 1922.

Nolcken, Christina von. "Some Alphabetical Compendia and How Preachers Used Them in Fourteenth-Century England," *Viator* 12 (1981), pp. 271-88.

Rouse, R. H., and M. A. Rouse. "Biblical *Distinctiones* in the Thirteenth Century," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 41 (1974), pp. 27-37.

Wenzel, Siegfried. "Distinctiones and Sermons: The *Distinctiones Lathbury* (*Alphabetum morale*) and Other Collections in Fourteenth-Century England," *Mediaeval Studies* 78 (2016), pp. 181-202.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Distinctions and Medieval Preaching (Online conference), June 2020

<https://distinguo.hypotheses.org/131>

DISTINGUO: A Knowledge Base on "*Distinctiones*," the Backbones of Medieval Preaching, dir. Marjorie Burghart

<https://anr.fr/Project-ANR-19-CE27-0016>

Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts <https://sdbm.library.upenn.edu/>

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