

Ranulphus Higden, *Polychronicon*

fol. 1v. This flyleaf is blank but for a few lines in an Elizabethan hand giving some biographical information on Ranulf Higden, that he entered the Benedictine abbey of St Werburgh's at Chester in 1299 and died around the feast of St Gregory (12 March) 1362/3 at a 'good old age' (*in senectute bona*) having lived for sixty-four years in the habit. It was perhaps copied from Bodl. MS Laud Misc. 619 (s. xv, from Fountains abbey), the only other manuscript which has such a colophon.

**1** (fols. 1r–8v) Abraham 2 10 — De zoroabel 3 10.

*Tabula* to Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* (item 4).

**2** (fol. 8va–b) Prima etas seculi ab adam vsque ad diluuium per x generationes — verissimos v. c. xcvi.

A brief summary of authorities on the six ages of the world, apparently owing its structure to Hugh of Saint-Victor's *De arca Noe mystica*, c. 4 (*PL* 176. 687D–688A), but augmented by other authorities, including Isidore and Iosephus.

**3** (fol. 8vb) Beatus Augustinus 2<sup>o</sup> de mirabilibus sacre scripture capitulo 4<sup>o</sup> dicit sic ciclorum ab inicio conditi orbis — fluxerunt anni 5195. 4 dies et dimidia.

Perhaps to be taken as the conclusion of the preceding piece, and running on from it, a calculation of the age of the world in years, drawing insights from Augustinus Hibernicus (*ps.* Augustine), *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, Bk II c. 4 (*PL* 35. 2175–6).

fol. 9 is ruled but blank.

**4** (fols. 10ra–159ra) Post preclaros artium scriptores quibus circa rerum noticiam aut [–aut] morum modestiam dulce fuit — per orbem ab australibus et orientalibus plagis incipiens vt vix media pars hominum remaneret in quibusdam autem religiosis domibus de xx, nisi duo remansuerunt.

Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*: ed. C. Babington & J. R. Lumby, 9 vols, RS 41 (1865–86); J. Taylor, *The Universal Chronicle of Ranulf Higden* (Oxford 1966). A copy of the 'AB' version, aligning with B. Leaves bearing the start of Bks III, IV and VI have been robbed for their illumination, with consequent loss of text.

**5** (fols. 159ra–165va) Die sancti Nicholai obiit papa clemens 6<sup>us</sup> — non plus vigit in discrecione quam vnus puer octo annorum. *Expliciunt cronice de tempore nobilis regis Edwardi tercii.*

An unusual amalgamation of two of the continuations to Higden's *Polychronicon* down to 1377, continued without break or signal from the end of Higden's text. Beginning with the text of the continuation known as 'B' (pr. by Lumby, as above, 8. 407–428, from Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 82/164), which, at the words 'Eodem anno apud Auinionensi' (fol. 159va, edn, p. 358), is silently run into the continuation ascribed to John Malvern (pr. Lumby, 8. 355–406, from CUL MS li. II. 24). The text breaks at the end of Book VII (edn, p. 393), communicating nothing of Book VIII. It is interesting to note that it is John Malvern's text that carries a slighting description of the Founder, William of Wykeham (see note below), the third annal after the introduction of Malvern's text.

fol. 165v. The text ends at the top of col. a; the page is otherwise blank but for inscriptions at the foot, reported below under *History*. fol. 166 is ruled but blank; fol. 167 is an added singleton, a blank flyleaf.

¶ It is of note that John Malvern's continuation to the chronicle contains a passage describing the College's Founder, William of Wykeham, and his activities at Windsor when he was the king's clerk of works there (fol. 159vb, edn, 8. 359–60). It is a somewhat slighting passage, which has been suffered to remain here with the exception of the statement 'fuerat autem dictus Willelmus de infimo genere, ut puta, ut dicebatur seruilis conditionis', in which the words *seruilis conditionis* have been neatly erased by a loyal Wykehamist.

*Construction*: Parchment. i + 165 + ii (foliated 1–167; fol. 1 is a medieval flyleaf, formerly pastedown, the first of a quire of four of which the other three are stubs). Modern pencil foliation. *Dimensions*: 377 × 250 mm, written space 253–60 × 151–6 mm. *Collation*: 1–6<sup>8</sup> (fols. 2–49) 7<sup>8</sup> (5 robbed, fols. 50–56) 8–9<sup>8</sup> (fols. 57–72) 10<sup>8</sup> (5 robbed, fols. 73–79) 11–14<sup>8</sup> (fols. 80–111) 15<sup>8</sup> (5 robbed, fols. 112–118) 16–20<sup>8</sup> (fols. 119–158) 21<sup>8</sup> (+ 1 after 8, fols. 159–167, fol. 167 formerly pastedown). Quire signatures are marked in black ink on the first four rectos of quires, in the lower outer corners, taking the form 'a j', a ij', etc. The alphabet of letters *a* to *v* are used; the first quire, containing the table, is marked 'I j', I ij', etc. Catchwords are given horizontally in the inner margin at normal text size, empanelled in elaborate cartouches drawn in black with red touching, with tripled pendants of three lines ending in trefoils and a fish lying across the top. Parchment is pliant, white and regular, the hair-sides somewhat more ivory in colour, the nap a little rough. Arranged flesh to flesh, hair to hair, flesh-side outermost. *Layout*: Two columns of 51 lines with an interlinear space of 13 mm, ruled in pencil, the vertical bounding rules at each side going to the edges of the page, likewise the doubled horizontal rules at top and bottom. Prickings are mostly still visible at the outer edge. Written below top-line. Fols. 1–8 are separately ruled for the table: like the text, 51 lines and two columns within the same written space, but each column is ruled for six boxes, to contain the initial (decorated) D, the letter *e*, the chapter heading, and then three columns for book and chapter with an intervening blank.

*Script and decoration*: One hand throughout, the work of a professional scribe (as with many of the surviving copies of this text). A *ferre-textura* script, textura in its module, proportions and finishing, but using certain cursive graphs, chiefly loops to the right of ascenders, *f* and tall *s* extending below the line, and an occasional double-backed *d*. Ink is good and black throughout. Punctuation is by medial point, with larger periods marked out by red or blue paraps. Books are numbered across the top of each page, in the form 'Liber Primus', each word centred above a column, each separately boxed in red. Chapter numbers are given in the outer margin, underlined in red, also by the main scribe. Decoration is extensive. An illuminated initial and box-frame once began each new book (surviving now on fols. 10r, 37r, 94r, 132v): the initials, where they survive, filled with heavily interwoven foliate vines in pink and blue with white modelling and gold infill; the foliate sprays picked out in pink and blue with some gold; the box-frame with panels of blue, pink or red grounds with white geometric or foliate patterning and floriate gold panels at intervals and at the corners. Chapters are marked by blue three- or four-line lombards with red-pen flourishing extending into the margins, rather well done; subordinated paraps alternate in red and blue, boxed in lines of the opposing colour.

*Annotations*: Although the manuscript has been quite heavily annotated by many different hands, this is almost entirely confined to Books IV and V, showing that the readers' main interest was in Roman and British history, and particularly the early history of Britain. Most wrote humanistic hands (s. xvi–xvii). Their interests were very variable. One had an interest in the saints (e.g. fol. 79r, v), one in the Roman emperors; there is a long annotation at the foot of fol. 80v (s. xvii) on the arrival of Joseph of Arimathea in Britain and the legendary origins of Glastonbury abbey. A clover-leaf *nota*-mark of the sort liked by sixteenth-century bibliographers has been drawn next to the name of John Wyclif (fol. 164v). A hand of s. xvii writing usually the laconic 'nota' is more or less the only annotator of Bk VII. His interest was in the date and location of church councils, as well as the related matter of the seizure by Edward I of the temporalities of criminous clergy, and the perhaps topical interest in the mortal heat of a summer season (fols. 156r, 155v). The slighting passage about Wykeham mentioned in the note above has seen an erasure but was not annotated.

*Binding*: Normal New College binding of reversed calf over pasteboard. Three-line blind fillets to the edges crossing at the corners; otherwise plain. Sewn on six raised bands. Remains of cord fastenings in two stations on the fore-edge of front and back covers (substantial lengths of tattered cord at the stations on the upper cover). Spine rebacked. Edges painted red.

*Labels and marks:* Parchment fore-edge ticket in usual position at top, 'Polychronicon Ranulphi Hickedon siue Hygdon lib. 7. 152'. Printed spine-label 'MS. New Coll. B 152'. On inside of front board the number '92' (black ink on top turnover), '152' (red crayon); fol. 1r at top, '113' (?s. xvi) and 'Policronicon' (s. xvii). New College library stamp at foot of recto of flyleaf and fol. 1r, but otherwise hardly at all.

*History:* At the foot of fol. 165v is drawn in the left-hand corner a notarial device, a trefoil knot over a simpler loop, with a banner inscription at the bottom, 'Grace ys best'. This was the device of the book's owner, William North, notary public; an inscription next to it reads 'Liber Magistri Willelmi North Vicarii de Noth Cory Bathon' et Wellen' diocesis'. William North, bachelor of both laws, was fellow from 1427 to 1437. He was vicar of North Curry in Somerset in 1446, when granted a papal indult for seven years to farm his benefice while studying at a university or absent in episcopal service; he had vacated the vicarage by May 1452, having earlier been collated to the rectory of Easton (Hants) on 12 March. He was dead by February 1462 (*BRUO* 1368). Since this inscription refers to North Curry and not Easton, his first ownership of the book must date from before 12 March 1452 and after he was made notary public, which had happened by 1449. Above this device in the outer margin is 'Liber collegii hom[[ ]] and 'liber collegii' and 'liber'. The book was the gift of William North, according to the Library's Benefaction Book (p. 24); he also gave one of his lawbooks, MS 191.

*Secundo folio:* De Brithewaldo resurgente (*table*) or romana. Paulus diaconus (*text*)

*Bibliography:* Coxe, p. 57; Alexander & Temple, no. 339.

**Status: first draft**