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EVERYDAY SERMONS FROM WORCESTER CATHEDRAL PRIORY

AN EARLY-FOURTEENTH-CENTURY COLLECTION IN LATIN

Edited with introduction and commentary by

JOAN GREATREX

with the assistance of Sam Kennerley

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vii

Abbreviations viii

General Introduction to Worcester Manuscript Q. 18 1

Manuscript Q. 18 9
- Sermon 1 9
- Sermon 2 16
- Sermon 3 18
- Sermon 4 21
- Sermon 5 25
- Sermon 6 26
- Sermon 7 29
- Sermon 8 30
- Sermon 9 34
- Sermon 10 40
- Sermon 11 44
- Sermons 12 and 13 48
- Sermon 14 50
- Sermons 15 and 16 52
- Sermon 17 54
- Sermon 18 56
- Sermons 19 and 20 57
- Sermon 21 59
- Sermon 22 60
- Sermon 23 61
- Sermon 24 62
- Sermons 25 and 26 63
- Sermons 27 and 28 65
- Sermons 29 and 30 67
- Sermons 31 and 32 69
- Sermons 33A and 33B 71
- Sermons 34 to 37 73

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Sermons 38 to 41 77
Sermons 42 to 44 82
Sermons 45 to 47 86
Sermons 48 to 50 89
Sermons 51 to 54 92
Sermon 55 96
Sermon 56 97
Sermon 57 97
Sermon 58 103
Sermon 59 110
Sermon 60 113
Sermon 61 120
Sermon 62 125
Sermon 63 130
Sermons 64 and 65 134
Sermon 66 138
Sermon 67 146
Sermon 68 148
Sermon 69 156

Select Bibliography 159

Index 163

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Chapter House, Worcester Cathedral viii

Worcester Cathedral Library MS Q18, fol. 13v ix

Worcester Cathedral Library MS Q18, fol. 38v x

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I was greatly relieved and thankful when Sam Kennerley appeared on the scene. Without his masterly detection of the majority of these elusive and often vague and inaccurate references to named authors, I would not have succeeded in completing the footnotes.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BRECP	J. Greatrex, *Biographical Register of the English Cathedral Priories of the Province of Canterbury, c. 1066–1540*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis. Turnhout: Brepols, 1971–.
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vienna 1892–.
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1954–.
PG	*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, accurante J.-P. Migne. Series Graeca*, 166 vols. Paris, 1857–1883.
PL	*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, accurante J.-P. Migne. Series Latina*, 221 vols. Paris, 1844–1865.
RB	Rule of Saint Benedict.

The Chapter House, Worcester Cathedral. Photograph by the Michele Meller and reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Worcester Cathedral.

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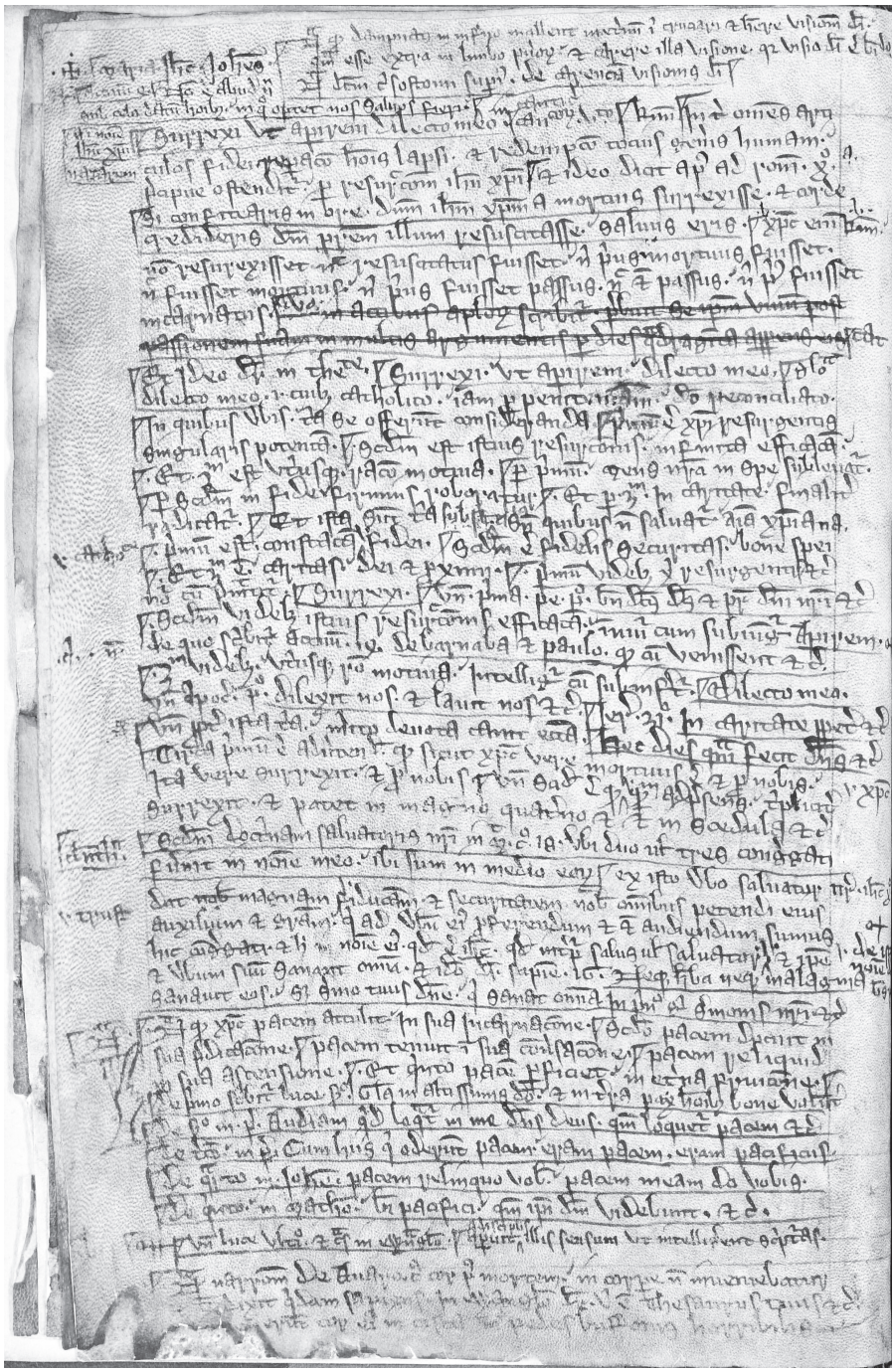

Worcester Cathedral Library MS Q18, fol. 13v. Photograph reproduced by permission of the Dean and Chapter of Worcester Cathedral.

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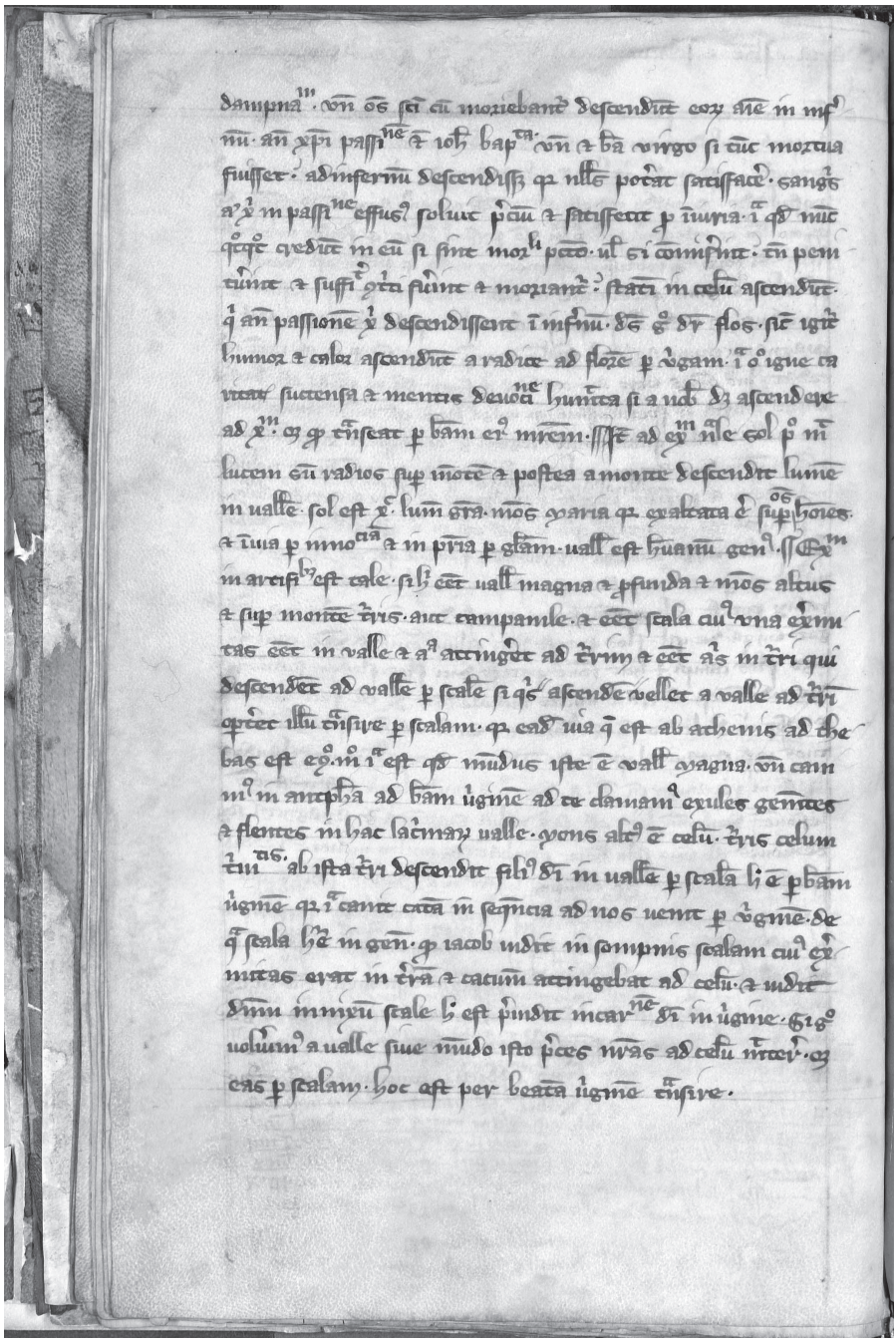

Worcester Cathedral Library MS Q18, fol. 38v. Photograph reproduced by permission of the Dean and Chapter of Worcester Cathedral.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO WORCESTER MANUSCRIPT Q. 18

AT FIRST GLANCE this small, untidy quarto size manuscript appears to be merely an unremarkable collection of early fourteenth century Latin sermons. However, a prolonged scrutiny reveals their interest and significance. Their importance lies in the fact that they appear to be a rare, if not unique, example of working copies of sermons, and thus they can provide us with a glimpse into the mind of the writers and the mentality of the hearers. In so doing they afford us an opportunity to discern, albeit tentatively, a few moments of daily life in a medieval monastic community. We may begin with the cautious assumption that many or most of the sermons were prepared and preached by unnamed priests, almost certainly monks of Worcester cathedral priory, to an unknown congregation which, in many if not in most cases, would have comprised their monastic brethren.

It is equally remarkable that this particular sermon collection appears to be unique among the surviving sermon manuscripts from cathedral priories and major Benedictine abbeys. All the others had volumes containing collected sermons of notable figures like Augustine, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, and Bernard of Clairvaux. In striking contrast Worcester MS Q. 18 is without doubt a home-grown production consisting only of homilies prepared by mostly anonymous members of the Worcester monastic community, and haphazardly bound together to be placed in the monastic library for future consultation.

The Worcester monks appear to have been assiduous collectors of sermons of saints and other notable preachers. In the introduction to his *Descriptive Catalogue* Professor Thomson has counted some thirty-eight volumes in this category, one of which is noteworthy in that it appears to have been copied by the Worcester monk, John de Dumbleton, while he was a student at Oxford between ca. 1290 and 1301.[1] The monastic library was also well supplied with works of reference as aids in sermon preparation, biblical commentaries and concordances, for example, and distinctions and florilegia.[2] In the late thirteenth century eleven monks contributed their pittances toward the purchase of the *Distinctiones Mauricii*, one of the burgeoning genre of aids for preachers and students of scripture; and the florilegium known as the *Manipulus Florum* compiled by Thomas of Ireland was in the library by the early fourteenth century.[3]

---

1 Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, xix. The manuscript in question is Q. 46 in the cathedral library. For further biographical details of John de Dumbleton see my *Biographical Register of the English Cathedral Priories of the Province of Canterbury c.1066–1540* (Oxford, 1997), 800 (hereafter *BRECP*).

2 A concordance provided an alphabetical list of words as an index to scripture; distinctions interpreted words and ideas according to the different senses of scripture; florilegia were collections of brief extracts from the teachings of the early church fathers.

3 The *Distinctiones* survives in the cathedral library as MS Q. 42, and the names of the monks with the amounts each of them contributed are listed on the end flyleaf. The *Manipulus Florum* is MS Q. 23 and was probably brought back from Paris by the monk, John de St. Germans, whose

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Some of the sermons within the unusually large collection available in the monastic library at Worcester would no doubt have been selected as sources for personal prayer and meditation by individual monks, but others would have served a more directly practical use for monks with preaching assignments outside and beyond the cloister. In the Rule of St. Benedict there is no reference to preaching since the monastic vocation is centred on the daily round of prayer within the cloister on behalf of the world outside the monastic enclosure. However, that the Worcester monks were accustomed to preaching assignments is clear as early as 1309 when the bishop of Worcester, Walter Reynolds, informed the cathedral prior that he was issuing indulgences to all penitent laity who listened to sermons preached by the monks.[4]

In fact, the advent of the newly founded orders of friars in the early thirteenth century, with their revolutionary aim to serve as itinerant preachers of the gospel, had already proved a challenge to the cloistered monks. It was a challenge to which they responded in several ways. The nine English monastic cathedral priories were, however, unique in being encumbered with an often secular bishop whom they were obliged to acknowledge as their titular abbot. Under these circumstances the monks found themselves sharing with him their monastic church *qua* cathedral since it was the focal centre for a range of episcopal and diocesan liturgical functions. These additional responsibilities inevitably entailed preaching assignments for the monks within and beyond the cathedral church. They were also accustomed on occasion to preach in the parish churches on their manorial properties and in those for which they had the responsibility of appointing the incumbent.

The third Lateran Council of 1179 had obliged all cathedral churches to appoint a master to teach secular clerks and poor scholars, and the fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required them to support a master of arts to give public lectures.[5] The aim in both cases was the urgent need to raise the standard of education among the secular clergy.[6] With regard to the situation at Worcester evidence survives in the form of correspondence from the abbot of Westminster as president of the General Chapter of the black monks in England. In 1305 he wrote two letters to the prior of Worcester, John de Wyke, asking him to restore the lectureship on Scripture in the cathedral which had apparently lapsed. He made it clear that the instruction of both secular and regular clergy was included, and the lecturer was expected to preach as well as to teach.[7] There is at Worcester one surviving piece of evidence from the middle of the fourteenth century

handwriting it contains. The latter volume was an early fourteenth century compilation of useful excerpts from classical, patristic and medieval authors. See R. H. and M. A. Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons*.

4 See Greatrex, "Benedictine Sermons," 259. Some, but by no means all, of these sermons would have been preached in the cathedral.

5 The two Lateran decrees are in Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 22:227–28, and *ibid*. 22:999.

6 See Greatrex, "Benedictine Monk Scholars as Teachers and Preachers in the Later Middle Ages," 213–25.

7 These two letters are found in Leach, *Documents Illustrating Early Education in Worcester*, 29–33.

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which refers to these public lectures. The monk, John de Preston, was pursuing his studies at Oxford when he was recalled to Worcester to deliver a course of public lectures on the Sentences of Peter Lombard in the chapter house.[8]

There had been a gradual shift away from the manual work prescribed by the Benedictine Rule and, at the same time, an increasing emphasis on the importance of learning and study as essential for deepening the understanding of the mystery of salvation. The persistent accumulation of manuscripts for the monastic library at Worcester is one of the signs of the recognition and acceptance of this change. The General Chapter of the English black monks in 1277 declared that in place of manual work monks could be assigned to perform a range of other occupations: these included regular study, the copying, correcting and illuminating of texts and their binding in book form.[9] Gloucester College had been founded in Oxford as a monastic house of study, and Worcester monks began to send their most promising monks there from 1291 onwards. However, statutes of the English Benedictine Chapter promulgated ca. 1343 and 1363, made it clear that the sole purpose of university studies for monks was to develop their skills in teaching and preaching.[10] In fact, they were sometimes recalled from Oxford to preach on the occasion of a solemn feast.

The role of monk preachers and teachers in response to changing times and circumstances offers some insight into the presence of sermon collections in monastic libraries, but it is of little help in the attempt to explain the possible origin of MS Q. 18. The present overall arrangement of the sermons in this volume is haphazard, but it may have been intended that they were to follow the order of the liturgical year beginning with the season of Advent. This apparent plan was soon interrupted, however, by a series of short homilies for various feast days including some of the Virgin Mary, and a number of saints such as Stephen, Paul, Andrew and Lucy, forty-two in total. What at first sight seems surprising is that all of the sermons in this latter group appear to have been fairly close, or partial, copies, in a variety of mainly untidy hands, of homilies originating in another Worcester manuscript, namely Q. 12.[11] This latter is a collection of short sermons, also in Latin, interspersed with brief passages in French which served as summaries of the meaning. This is a massive volume which was intended as a handbook for preachers. It is the work of a Dominican friar, Guy d'Évreux (fl. 1290),[12] and it provides sermons for every Sunday of the year as well as for all the liturgical feasts; in addition it includes several complicated indexes as an aid for the prospective user. This manuscript was procured in Paris and brought back to Worcester by the Worcester monk, John de St. Germans, when he was a student and later doctor and regent in theology there ca. 1310–1315.[13] Such an all-encompassing sermon collection must have attracted great

8 Greatrex, *The English Benedictine Cathedral Priories*, 120, and *BRECP*, 865 under II John de Preston.

9 Pantin, *Documents Illustrating … English Black Monks*, 2:50–51.

10 Pantin, *Documents Illustrating … English Black Monks*, 2:55–58 (1343) and 2:76–82, esp. 76 (1363).

11 I am grateful to Professor Siegfried Wenzel for drawing my attention to this connection.

12 Some of Guy's sermons are listed in Schneyer, *Repertorium de lateinischen Sermones*, 2:319–65.

13 *BRECP*, 869–70.

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interest among his Worcester brethren since the volume was, as it were, "hot off the press". It contains annotations in the hand of St. Germans and notes penned by Henry Fouke or Fowke who functioned as the monastic librarian.[14] The latter may also be the writer of a sermon on the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on fols. 46v to 49v.

In addition, MS Q. 18 includes two sermons prepared for delivery on specific occasions. One of these is a sermon that was given at the opening ceremony of a monastic visitation in 1318/19, the Worcester monk officiating being Richard de Bromwych.[15] The other was probably delivered at the election of a prior of Worcester as bishop of the diocese of Worcester. Dr. Pantin has interpreted this to refer to the first and unsuccessful attempt of the Worcester monastic chapter to elect their prior, Wulstan de Bransford, whom they chose to succeed Thomas de Cobham in September 1327. Pantin suggests, on the basis of internal evidence, that it was a sermon probably preached by a Worcester monk graduate in the presence of Archbishop Walter Reynolds when de Bransford came to present himself as bishop-elect.[16]

An expanding series of problems arises as soon as we attempt to understand how these sermons came to receive their present form. Were the sixty-one leaves collected and put together by a single person, or are they the result of a haphazard binding together of loose scraps and folios of parchment? The latter possibility is suggested by the fact that a number of sermons appear to have been written on rough parchment trimmings indicated by uneven and cut away edges. There is also a fragmentary indication of a limp binding prior to the present early twentieth century tightly bound hard covers.[17] Moreover, there are a number of different hands involved, some of them very untidy, difficult to read and verging into scribbles; and there are also numerous changes, underlinings, corrections and unusual abbreviations as well as many additions in the margins. All of these suggest that many of the sermons consist of rough notes which seem to have been altered and improved for re-use. The frequent occurrence of abbreviations, in combination with some of the more obscure hands, is an additional frustration, compounded by the existence of some abbreviations unknown to Cappelli, and these may indicate a local and probably idiosyncratic origin.[18]

Possible reasons for the incorporation of sermons of Dominican origin into MS Q. 18 are numerous but on the whole unsatisfactory, as none of them is capable of offering a convincing explanation for all the unknowns. Perhaps unnamed monks may have been sufficiently impressed by the preaching skills of Guy that they wanted copies of selected sermons which could be adapted for their personal use when the occasion arose. This

14 *BRECP*, 807–8. Fouke's hand has been identified in at least twenty manuscripts: F. 2, F. 8, F. 16, F. 62, F. 124, F. 131, F. 141, F. 142, F. 146, F. 170; Q. 12, Q. 18, Q. 24, Q, 46, Q. 53, Q. 57, Q. 64, Q. 85.

15 MS Q. 18, sermon no. 63, fols. 50r–51r.

16 MS Q. 18, sermon no. 69, fol. 60v. Pantin's conclusions are contained in a typescript tucked inside the manuscript which he sent to the Chapter Librarian in March 1942 after his visit to Worcester to examine it.

17 This description is the result of Michael Gullick's contributions concerning the bindings of the manuscripts in the Worcester catalogue of which details are provided in note 1 above.

18 Cappelli, *Dizionario di abbreviature latine ed italiane*.

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possibility is supported by the fact that this section of MS Q. 18 contains many underlined passages as well as marginal additions and corrections, an indication that the sermons were reused and adapted to suit the occasion as well as the congregation for whom they were intended. One might assume that Latin sermons prepared by monks would have been intended for a Latin literate audience and very likely for the instruction and encouragement of their brethren assembled in community in the chapter house. On the other hand, with the Latin text in front of him it would not have been difficult for the monk preacher to have given an English translation for the benefit of a less literate congregation, say in the cathedral or in a parish church. It is clear that Guy had prepared his sermons with an uneducated congregation in mind as biblical references predominate and there are very few references to patristic or other writers.

However, an examination of the contents of the sermons in MS Q. 18 with those of Guy d'Évreux excluded suggests that the listeners must have been monks, who were therefore familiar not only with the contexts from which the numerous biblical quotations were taken, but also with the writings of the many patristic and later authors cited. As a result of their studies under novice masters and other monk tutors, they would have appreciated the underlying significance of citations such as these. It seems evident, therefore, that allusions to fundamental principles of theological doctrine exemplified in the many references to other sources would have been readily grasped. Some of the longer sermons appear to be in the form of lectures[19] rather than sermons as they assume a fairly learned audience.

On the evidence provided by the survival of a substantial collection of manuscripts from the monastic library at Worcester Professor Thomson remarked on a prevailing conservatism of outlook among the cathedral community of monks which remained visible in the twelfth and continued into the late thirteenth century.[20] The impact of the monks who were sent for periods of study at Oxford is evident in the increasing number of scholastic texts that were added to the monastic library from the late thirteenth century onwards. By 1300, for example, there were four copies of Peter Lombard's Sentences available on the shelves.[21] Nevertheless, the emphasis in the sermons bound together in MS Q. 18 (excluding those copied from MS Q. 12), most of which can tentatively be dated to the first quarter of the fourteenth century, continues to be markedly conservative and traditional. The writings of St. Augustine, for example, are referred to fifty-four times and St. Bernard, often known as the last of the Fathers—and named most frequently in these sermons as "*beatus* B"—is quoted thirty-three times. Pope Gregory the Great is referred to nineteen times, and Saints John Chrysostom and Anselm thirteen times.[22]

---

19 For example, numbers 57, 58, and 60, and possibly 66.

20 Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, xxiv.

21 These survive today in the cathedral library as manuscripts F. 8, F. 46, F. 53, F. 64, F. 88, F. 98, F. 134, F. 176, and Q. 47. However, it should be noted that some of them were not in the library until a later date.

22 The reader needs to be alerted to the fact that the monks often quoted from memory in accordance with the contemporary teaching methods. Not infrequently their attributions are faulty as they rarely verified their sources.

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There were only three volumes containing the writings of Thomas Aquinas in the library in the early fourteenth century although several more arrived later.[23] These figures confirm the judgement of Dom Jean Leclercq concerning an undiminished patristic basis underlying monastic spirituality, which by and large strove to remain unaffected by the growing emphasis on the newer scholastic approach to the teaching of philosophy and theology in the schools and nascent universities.[24] The collection of sermons in MS Q. 18 (excluding those from MS Q. 12) thus suggests that in the Worcester community in the early years of the fourteenth century there remained an influential group of monks who continued to adhere to an outlook based on traditional monastic spirituality. Were they, perhaps, monks like Henry Fouke, who remained in the cloister and were not selected for study at Oxford? If so, they would nevertheless have benefited from having access to the increasing number of scholastic texts brought back from the university by their brethren who had been students there. This suggests that even in the seclusion of the cloister these monks would have been able to keep abreast of and to assess the changing perspectives in contemporary theological issues and concerns.

It is unfortunate that there is no surviving medieval catalogue of manuscripts that comprised the book collection at Worcester, but 249 volumes remain *in situ* to this day and some 120 more have been identified elsewhere.[25] Similar catalogues of other cathedral priories, such as those of Canterbury and Durham, also include references to sermons and sermon collections, but none of them mentions any manuscript that might resemble Worcester MS Q. 18.

It is unlikely that we will ever resolve all the questions that surround the origin and subsequent history of the changes that resulted in the form in which MS Q. 18 appears today. As stated above, its present state is probably the result of a gathering up of loose parchment folios found among the belongings of recently deceased monks, which were subsequently bound together for future use, with little concern for the order of the contents.[26]

Despite these remaining uncertainties there are benefits to be derived from a close study of the sermons in this collection. We are offered the possibility of exploring and uncovering new insights into the moral, spiritual and theological background on which contemporary fourteenth century teaching and preaching at Worcester were based. In so doing we should arrive at a more profound understanding of the underlying issues with which preachers, teachers and students were primarily concerned.

---

23 These are MS F. 107 and MSS F. 101 and F. 102.

24 Leclercq, *L'Amour des Lettres et le Désir de Dieu*, 105–6.

25 Sharpe et al., eds., *English Benedictine Libraries, the Shorter Catalogues*, 651–75, and Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, 210–15 with its *Supplement*, ed. A. G. Watson (London, 1987), 69.

26 Another example of this more or less random binding of loose folios is found in a former Norwich cathedral manuscript now MS 142 in the library of Emmanuel College Cambridge. In the latter case there are items pertaining to the Council of Basel bound in with details of masses celebrated in Norwich cathedral by Norwich monks.

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Editorial Method and Signs

The text of this sermon collection has undergone at least five successive transcriptions. This has been due to the presence of numerous difficulties the majority of which I hope that I have overcome. These include the prolonged and painstaking effort required in reading handwriting that is often barely legible, the frequent alterations to the text by means of crossings out and marginal additions, and the writers' use of numerous abbreviations some of which may have been confined to local use or, perhaps, a form of shorthand coined by the particular individual who penned the sermon.

Sentences for the most part lack punctuation which, by default, has become my responsibility. I have erred on the side of under, rather than over, punctuation in order to allow the phrases and sentences to speak for themselves without the imposition of additional and unnecessary pauses that could be misleading. Since the biblical references, which have been provided in the text by the writers, are often incomplete by modern standard requirements and are sometimes inaccurate I have inserted the full reference to the Vulgate[27] in round brackets within the text. Many of these "quotations" have been underlined by the writer or a later reader, but I have felt it unnecessary and, possibly, misleading to include them in my transcription.

With regard to sermons fourteen to fifty-six, which are fairly close copies of sermons from a collection produced by the French Dominican, Guy d'Évreux,[28] I have included in the end notes any significant alterations, some of which are the result of misreading or carelessness.

Some of the references to patristic and later authors remain untraced, the most probable explanation being that the writer is mistaken with regard to his source or that the quotation itself is too different from the original wording to enable it to be traced.

Medieval monk students and scholars, a group which included many, if not the majority of Benedictine or black monks, would have frequently resorted to their libraries and, as novices, they would have been trained in the art of mnemonics, a skill which Mary Carruthers has ably described in a recent book.[29] The skills thus acquired by the monk in that pre-electronic age enabled him to retain in his memory the substance of his reading which could be recalled when required for future use as, for example, in the preparation of sermons. This is surely a plausible explanation for the fact that some of the attributions in this sermon collection cannot be traced; the thought or statement ascribed to a named author would have been interpreted and expressed by the sermon writer according to his understanding and memory of it.

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27 The edition of the Vulgate used is *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, new ed. (Madrid, 1965).

28 See the introduction p. 3 for details concerning Guy d'Évreux.

29 M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990); see especially chap. 4.

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Signs in the Text

^ ^ These indicate the presence of an insertion, i.e., its beginning and end; they often occur above the line of the text.

"**va**" or rather "**ua**" followed, some words or lines below, by "cat," i.e., [ua] ... [cat], is the notice that the enclosed section is to be omitted presumably because the writer has changed his mind or a later reader/preacher has altered it for his use.

? indicates a doubtful or uncertain reading

[ ] encloses corrections to a word or phrase

and **+** in the text refer to notes similarly distinguished usually to be found at the foot of the folio.

***** implies the presence of one illegible word; *** *** implies the presence of two illegible words, and so on.

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