

Ranulph Higden, *Ars componendi sermones*

by M. Jennings and S.A. Wilson

DESCRIPTION:

Ranulph Higden, monk of St. Werburgh's Abbey and well-known author of the *Polychronicon* and other treatises, penned a concise and user-friendly *Art of Preaching* about 1346. His *Ars componendi sermones* follows a schematic common to many members of this genre and includes attributes desirable or necessary in the preacher, methods for piquing an audience's interest, the process of effective repetition, and suggestions for creating rhythmic patterns in prose. Its major focus, however, is the clear and comprehensive discussion of each thematic sermon part: the theme or scriptural text, its development in protheme and introduction, its division, subdivision, and embellishment. In structure and content, Higden's prescriptive manual has affinities to contemporary rhetorical texts, especially the *artes poeticae* and *dictaminis*, and displays an analogous relationship with Ciceronian *dispositio* as developed in the *De Inventione* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. A few of the many items of interest scattered throughout the text are Ranulph's insistence that preaching be separate from university exercises and his comments about various subjects like direct entry into heaven post mortem, the scope of medieval optics, what and who compose the church, and the quadruple levels of scriptural exegesis.

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