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## Newly discovered fourteenth-century polyphony in Oxford

Joseph W. Mason

The history of medieval music has always rested on fragmentary sources, and polyphony in medieval England is no exception to this. Ernest H. Sanders and Peter M. Lefferts describe this as a 'lamentable' state of affairs: English polyphony is found plentifully in liturgical manuscripts and miscellanies, but is not the sole contents of any surviving codex between the Winchester Troper and Old Hall.<sup>1</sup> For evidence of the existence of large anthologies of polyphony in medieval England, we must instead look to fragments of these manuscripts that have been bound into or wrapped around other books. Sometimes these fragments are tiny, damaged or illegible: the reconstruction of a large source from such small fragments is often frustrated by the patchy survival of a manuscript that has been cut up, and the fact that fragments might be sewn or glued into a book, difficult to remove without damaging the host volume.

New discoveries of fragmentary polyphonic sources from England arise with some frequency.<sup>2</sup> The focus of this essay is the very small fragments of medieval music bound in Lincoln College, Oxford, LC/A/R/1, which came to light in 2018.<sup>3</sup> Lindsay McCormack, the college archivist, alerted me to the presence of music notation on the sewing guards of the oldest register of the college, the *Vetus Registrum* (hereafter *VR*). These pieces of parchment, sewn outside and within each paper quire to strengthen the binding, are very small indeed, measuring 29 cm in width and approximately 3 cm in height. (Precise measurements are difficult because the fragments have not been removed from the binding.) Comparable cases include the vertical strips of parchment removed from Cambridge, Jesus College MS QB1 and the vertical strips bound in Oxford, All Souls College, MS 56.<sup>4</sup>

The *VR* consists of sixteen paper quires (irregularly foliated), fifteen of which have a parchment sewing guard around their spine; all quires have a parchment sewing guard inside them, stitched in the middle bifolium of the gathering (except quire ix).<sup>5</sup> Table 1 summarises this information. The *VR* has recently been digitised and images of the source are available online.<sup>6</sup>

## Newly discovered fourteenth-century polyphony in Oxford

Gathering	Fragment	Relation to gathering	at (fols.)	♪	Music hand	Text
	Front flyleaf		[lost]	y		
i	1	outside	1r/14v	y	1	
	2	inside	6v	y	1	
ii	3	outside	15r/29v	y	1	y
	4	inside	21v	y	1	y
iii	5	outside	30r/53v	y	1	y
	6	inside	35v	y	1	
iv	7	outside	54r/66v			y
	8	inside	59v	y	2	y
v	9	outside	67r/74v	y	1	y
	10	inside	74v	y	1?*	
vi	11	outside	82r/95v	y	1	y
	12	inside	89v	y	1	
vii	13	outside	103r/109v	y	1	y
	14	inside	105v	y	1, 2	
viii	15	outside	115r/126v	y	1?*	y
	16	inside	120v	y	1, 3	
ix	17	outside	129r/139v	y	1	y
	18	inside	130v/132v	y	1	y
x	19	outside	141r/147v	y	1	
	20	inside	146v	y	1	y
xi	21 (lost)	outside	159r/166v			
	22	inside	161v	y	1	y
xii	23	outside	169r/178v			
	24	inside	176v	y	1	y
xiii	25	outside	178v/199v	y	1	y
	26	inside	192r	y	1	y
xiv	27	outside	201r/215v			
	28	inside	206v	y	2	y
xv	29	outside	216r/225v	y	1	y
	30	inside	222v	y	1, 3	
xvi	31	outside	231r/241v	y	1	
	32	inside	236v	y	1	

Table 1: Sewing guards in the VR. The hypothetical fragment 21 and the front flyleaf are lost. \* indicates that only stave lines and tails are visible on the fragment.

Of the 31 surviving parchment fragments, at least 28 have visible music notation of some kind (either noteheads, note tails, stave lines, or all three of these). 18 have Latin text underlaid beneath a musical staff (though the staff has been trimmed away on some fragments); the script is mostly a large and formal gothic *textualis* that is easily legible where letters have not been cut in half. Stave lines are ruled—whether individually or with a rastrum is not clear—and at least three music hands are visible on the fragments (see table 1 and figure 1). Notation hand 1 is a large and formal black-full mensural notation with ligatures and an “e”-shaped custos on red staves. Notation hand 2 is smaller and less formal, black-full mensural notation with

## Newly discovered fourteenth-century polyphony in Oxford

ligatures, a slender, sideways “y” custos, and lead-point staves. Notation hand 3 is black-void mensural notation with no ligatures on the surviving fragments, a “v-with-tail” custos and red staves. Notation hand 1 is often accompanied by text; notation hand 2 may have been accompanied by text, since a few letters are visible beneath the notation on one fragment. There is no evidence for text accompanying notation hand 3. No decoration, such as the pen-flourished initials found in many English fourteenth-century sources, appears on the fragments.



Figure 1: Three notational hands in the *VR*. Copyright Lincoln College, 2021.

These Latin texts and snippets of mensural notation are the remnants of a source of motets (and perhaps other types of polyphony too), copied in the fourteenth century. The text and notation for three known motets can be identified in thirteen fragments, which are listed in table 2; the text and notation on fifteen further fragments have yet to be identified (in addition to the text and notation on the reverse of the thirteen fragments with known concordances).<sup>7</sup> The English origin of the three identifiable motets, the English provenance for all three concordant sources, and the style of notation in the *VR* fragments all suggest that the original source was also produced in England.<sup>8</sup> The following examination of the fragments argues that this original source was a large collection of motets, copied in the fourteenth century and possibly created or used in Oxford.

## Newly discovered fourteenth-century polyphony in Oxford

Motet	Fragments	Concordances
<i>Tu civium primas / O cuius vita / Tu caelestium primas / Congaudens super te</i>	<b>1<sub>i</sub>, 4<sub>i</sub>, 6<sub>i</sub>, 8<sub>i</sub>, 11<sub>i</sub>, 15<sub>i</sub>, 18<sub>o</sub>, 20<sub>i</sub>, 24<sub>o</sub>, 29<sub>o</sub>, 32<sub>i</sub></b>	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College ( <i>GB-Cgc</i> ), MS 512/543, f. 252v
<i>Virgo Maria patrem parit / O stella marina nos a / Virgo Maria, flos divina / Flos genuit regina qui</i>	<b>25<sub>o</sub></b>	<i>GB-Cgc</i> 512/543, f. 248v Cambridge, Pembroke College ( <i>GB-Cpc</i> ), MS 228, f. i verso
<i>Veni creator spiritus eximie / Veni creator spiritus</i>	<b>26<sub>i</sub></b>	Cambridge, Corpus Christi College ( <i>GB-Ccc</i> ) MS 65, f. 135v
<i>Ave maris stella (?)</i>	<b>13<sub>o</sub>, 22<sub>i</sub></b>	
Unidentified text or music (on both sides of fragment unless specified)	<b>1<sub>o</sub>, 2, 3, 4<sub>o</sub>, 5, 6<sub>o</sub>, 7<sub>o</sub>, 8<sub>o</sub>, 9, 11<sub>o</sub>, 12, 13<sub>i</sub>, 14, 15<sub>o</sub>, 16, 17, 18<sub>i</sub>, 19, 20<sub>o</sub>, 22<sub>o</sub>, 24<sub>i</sub>, 25<sub>i</sub>, 26<sub>o</sub>, 28<sub>o</sub>, 29<sub>i</sub>, 30, 31, 32<sub>o</sub></b>	

Table 2: Concordant motets and unidentified texts in the *VR*. The side of the fragment is indicated by the letter 'i' (inside) or 'o' (outside), where the outside of the fragment is closest to the spine and the inside of the fragment is closest to the centre of the gathering.

### Reconstructing the fragments

All evidence suggests that the fragments were present in the *VR* when it was originally bound between 1480 and 1520.<sup>9</sup> The *VR* was the first record book of Lincoln College, founded by Richard Fleming in 1427 with the mission of counteracting Lollard heresies.<sup>10</sup> The earliest entry dates from 1472 and entries continue until around 1640.<sup>11</sup> The paper of the volume, which may have been left to the college in 1452 by one of the fellows, John Shryburn, has the same watermark (a fleur-de-lys and a capital letter M) throughout.<sup>12</sup> The stitching and supports are original, while the covers of the book (parchment leaves wrapped around alum tawed) are a later addition, replacing earlier covers of the book which no longer survive.

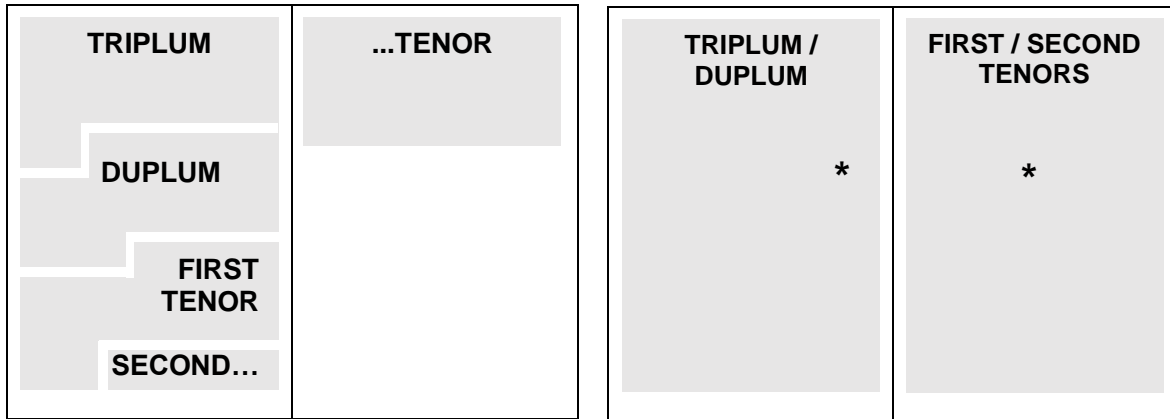
When the book was first made, all 16 extant paper quires (and possibly more, now lost) were bound together, with sewing guards in the centre of each gathering and also around the outside of each gathering. The sewing guards were cut horizontally (parallel to the stave lines) from the original music manuscript, folded in half and then mounted sideways.<sup>13</sup> Quire xi lacks its outer sewing guard but retains its inner guard. It is likely that quire xi was part of the original volume because its inner sewing guard bears black-full mensural notation in notational hand 1,

and therefore originated from the same manuscript as the other sewing guards with music notation. At some point in the book's history, quire xi came loose from the binding and was kept separately from the rest of the book. Its outer leaves are very dirty, more so than the outer leaves of other quires. At this point, the sewing guard around quire xi, if one ever existed, probably fell away. Later, quire xi was hitched into the binding using a sligher thread.<sup>14</sup>

At one point during its history, the *VR* also had at least one parchment end leaf placed at its beginning; this end leaf, now lost, was from a music manuscript, since traces of red stave lines are visible on the inside of the left board, probably imprinted from the facing end leaf. The end leaf was probably part of the original binding and stayed in place when the covers were replaced. It is probable that the end leaf belonged to the same manuscript of polyphonic music. From the traces of red stave lines on the cover of the *VR*, the spacing of the visible lines at 6 mm intervals matches the red stave lines on the extant fragments.

My reconstruction of the original source for the fragments is based on their transmission of one motet, *Tu civium primas / O cuius vita / Tu caelestium primas / Congaudens super te*, which otherwise exists in full only in *GB-Cgc 512/543*, a small collection of polyphonic pieces appended to a fourteenth-century text on the see of East Anglia and cathedral of Norwich.<sup>15</sup> This is an unusual motet, with all four voices carrying different texts, and is paralleled only by *Virgo Maria patrem parit / O stella marina nos a / Virgo Maria, flos divina / Flos genuit regina qui*. Both *Tu civium* and *Virgo Maria* are found in *GB-Cgc 512/543* and both motets consist of two pairs of voices, each pair occupying the same registral space. In the presentation of these motets, the scribe responded in different ways to the challenges posed by four fully texted voice parts. Voice exchange motets could be presented in 'long-form', where all the musical material to be sung by a single voice part is written out, or 'short-form', as we find in *GB-Cgc 512/543* and the *VR* fragments.<sup>16</sup> In *GB-Cgc 512/543*, the four voices of *Tu civium* are laid out consecutively (**figure 2a**), while for *Virgo Maria*, the two pairs of voices face each other across an opening (**figure 2b**). In *Virgo Maria*, each pair of voices is copied as if it is a single voice part, with a siglum halfway through to indicate where the second voice of the pair begins. Frank Ll. Harrison shows through his edition of *Virgo Maria* (which he does not consider to be a motet) that it uses voice-exchange technique: each voice sings one of the two notated parts, but singing the material in different orders, that is, singer 1: triplum-duplum; singer 2: duplum-triplum; singer 3: first tenor-second tenor; singer 4: second tenor-first tenor.<sup>17</sup> This layout is matched by *GB-Cpc 228*, which transmits only the triplum and duplum for *Virgo Maria*, and also has a siglum (five red dots) above the opening of the duplum.

Harrison believes that *Tu civium* would have been performed in the same way; since the motet is so similar to *Virgo Maria* in its ranges and unusual texting, Lefferts, who identifies the two compositions as motets, goes so far as to call them ‘virtually twin compositions’.<sup>18</sup> This would mean the triplum and duplum of *Tu civium* being conceived as a single voice part (likewise the two tenors), with one singer singing the triplum and then duplum, and another singer singing the duplum and then the triplum. The sole extant complete version of *Tu civium* does not have sigla like *Virgo Maria*, precluding any firm conclusions. The presentation of *Tu civium* in the *VR* fragments, however, may strengthen Lefferts’s hypothesis.



(Fig. 2a)

(Fig. 2b)

Figure 2: Layout of *Tu civium* (a) and *Virgo Maria* (b) in *GB-Cgc 512/543*

The version of *Tu civium* in the original source for the *VR* fragments was also across a single opening but laid out differently from *GB-Cgc 512/543*, with the triplum (*Tu civium*) and duplum (*O cuius*) on facing pages. The first tenor (*Tu caelestium*) was likely copied directly beneath the triplum. The second tenor (*Congaudens super te*) followed it immediately without changing line and continued on the facing page underneath the duplum (**figure 3**). This hypothetical layout can be deduced from the eleven fragments that transmit part of the text or music notation for the motet, with six fragments providing crucial evidence for the *ordinatio* of the original source. The position of these fragments in this opening of the original source is shown in **figure 4**. The notation for the beginning of the duplum is preserved on fragment **32**, which is preceded by blank parchment. On fragments where a line of music and the text for the line above is given, very little space is left in between; the blank parchment on fragment **32** thus suggests that the duplum is at the top of a page. Unlike *GB-Cgc 512/543*, the *VR* source cannot have presented the triplum and duplum consecutively on the same page because of the way

that the two tenor voices must have been placed. Fragment **29** gives the text for the final words of the first tenor (bar the final three words, which are on fragment **15**) and, underneath this text, the opening notation of the second tenor, demonstrating that, as in *GB-Cgc* 512/543, the two tenor parts are copied consecutively without a change of line. The first tenor thus ends on the same folio as the beginning of the second tenor. The division between the two tenor parts is marked by two circular sigla on fragments **29** and **15**.<sup>19</sup> The text for the end of the duplum, 'canunt hodie collegia gaude dicencia', is on fragment **18**, and below this is the top of a stave, on which a C2 clef and several noteheads are visible, including one semibreve-semibreve-breve ligature. This notation cannot correspond to the start of the second tenor, whose notation is on fragment **29**. (The s-s-b ligature for the start of the second tenor is visible on the part of fragment **29** on the spine of the *VR*). Nor can it be the beginning of the triplum or first tenor, since neither of these voices has a s-s-b ligature of the same shape in its first line; notation for the first line of the triplum is, in any case, on fragment **24**. The notation on fragment **18** is likely that for the second tenor text, 'confirma per te firmata in fide catholica ubi preconia laudum', whose text is on fragment **11**. This indicates that shortly after the start of the second tenor, the scribes continued the voice on a facing page directly underneath the duplum. The end of the second tenor is found on fragment **8** and is followed by blank parchment, an indication that the second tenor finishes at the bottom of the page.

The layout of *Tu civium* in the *VR* fragments therefore presents a mixed conception of the motet. On the one hand, with the triplum and duplum on facing pages, the two upper parts do not seem to have been understood by the scribe to be a single voice part to be sung by two singers in voice exchange. They appear as separate entities, arranged in such a way as to be distinct from one another. On the other hand, the consecutive copying of the two tenor parts, just as in *GB-Cgc* 512/543, might argue for the opposite: there is essentially one tenor part divided into two halves, whose division is marked by two circle sigla.

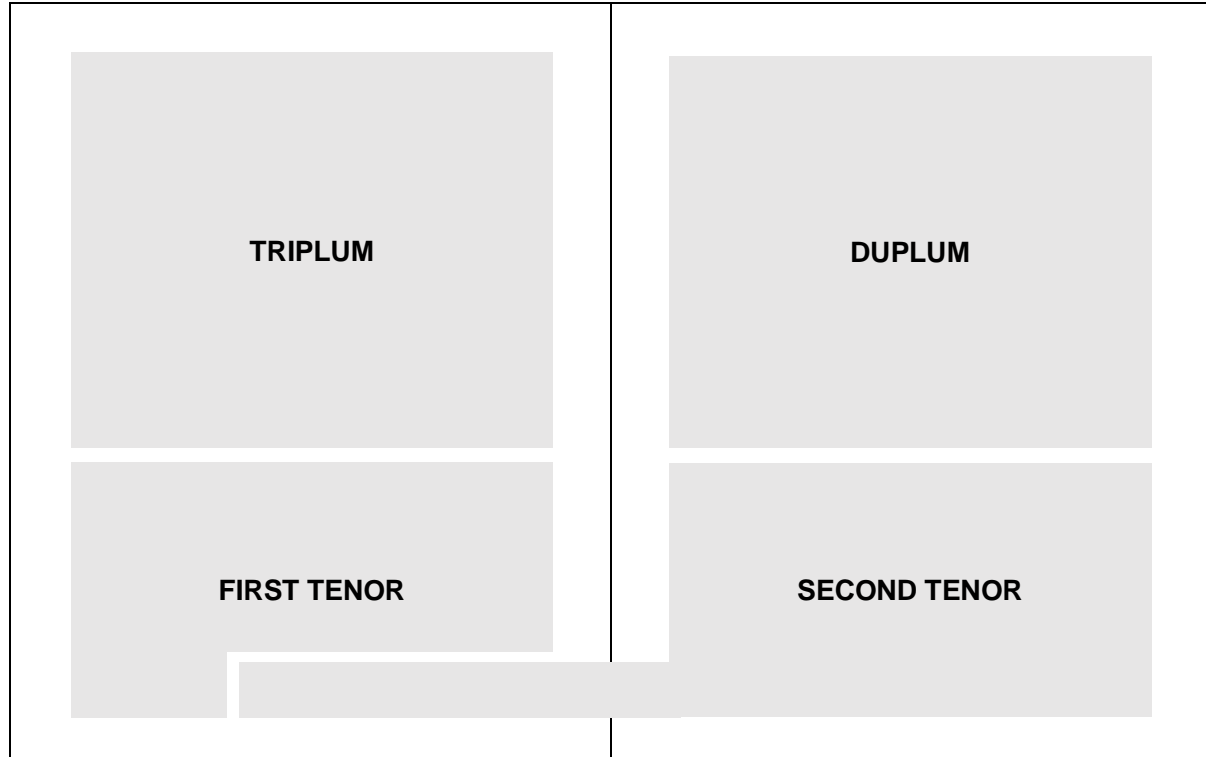


Figure 3: Layout of *Tu civium* in the original source of the VR fragments

From this reconstruction of *Tu civium* a number of conclusions can be drawn about the physical characteristics of the original manuscript. First, the source of the VR fragments was a codex, not a rotulus. This is indicated by the blank parchment above the start of the duplum and beneath the end of the second tenor. The continuation of the second tenor underneath the end of the duplum also proves that the motet was copied across facing pages of a codex of some kind. Second, the hypothetical layout of *Tu civium* points to a text block of ten staves. This can be approximated from the amount of text that fills the width of a fragment in comparison to the amount of space that the same text takes up in *GB-Cgc 512/543*. The triplum and duplum likely each took up six lines; the first tenor occupied three whole lines and a small amount of a fourth, while the second tenor occupied the remainder of this line and four whole lines on the facing page. The text block of the source must have been approximately 220 x 370 mm, and the VR source was thus a sizable music manuscript, larger (and more formal) than *GB-Cgc 512/543*. A text block of this size is not unusually tall, further indication that this was a codex rather than a rotulus. Text and music notation line up fairly closely on either side of the fragments, indicating careful ruling of the text block. **Figure 5**, for example, shows letters that have been cut about two-thirds of the way up on both sides of fragment **29**.

24<sub>o</sub> Tu civium primas per imp[er]ium summi celestium patris tu apo

29<sub>o</sub> mentum et documentum xpi tu Baronia cognominaris gracia in

15<sub>i</sub> tua memoria hinc [Start of second tenor (?), pasted down]

32<sub>i</sub>

4<sub>i</sub> ora filium supera regentem regem glorificatum domina

6<sub>i</sub>

20<sub>i</sub> milicie cum leticia de crimina modulamina per totum celica

18<sub>o</sub> canunt hodie colegia gaude dicencia

11<sub>i</sub> confinia p[er] te firmata in fide catholica ubi preconia laudum

1<sub>i</sub>

8<sub>i</sub> angelica conregnant

Figure 4: Placement of fragments on the opening for *Tu civium*

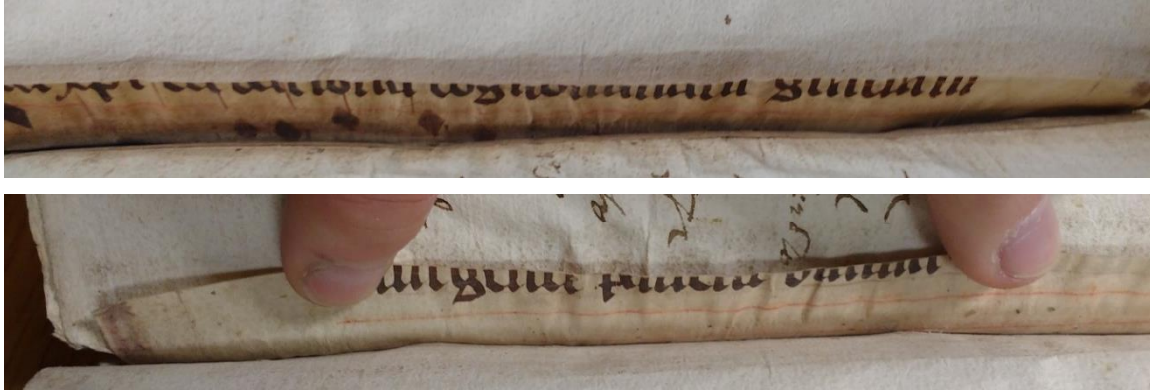


Figure 5: Two sides of fragment **29**. Copyright Lincoln College, 2021.

The reconstruction of *Tu civium* also provides important clues as to the number of motets that were part of the original source. Because of the text that is identifiable on both sides of each fragment, and in conjunction with the layout of *Tu civium* and the likely layout of *Virgo Maria* and *Veni creator spiritus eximie / Veni creator spiritus*, the fragments must come from at least six different folios, hence a booklet or booklets for which there were at least seven different openings. This information is summarised in **table 3** below. The fragments for *Tu civium* must come from two folios that were adjacent (but not necessarily joined as a bifolium). On the reverse of these fragments are texts that do not belong to either of the other motets that are recognisable from the fragments, *Virgo Maria* and *Veni creator*. A partial reconstruction of the text and music on the reverse of the duplum for *Tu civium* is provided in the **appendix**. Similarly, the text on reverse of the triplum of *Virgo Maria* (fragment **26**) does not belong to *Tu civium* or *Veni creator*; this fragment must be from the verso of a third folio. Facing this third folio must have been the remainder of *Virgo Maria*, probably the first and second tenor if the layout was the same as in *GB-Cgc* 512/543. Given that no fragments transmit any of the text for these fully texted tenor parts, it must be the case that this fourth folio has been lost. The fragment that transmits part of *Veni creator* must be part of a fifth folio since the text on its reverse does not relate either to *Virgo Maria* or to *Tu civium*. As in *GB-Ccc* 65, the triplum of *Veni creator* (to which fragment **26** belongs) was probably copied on the verso of the folio, with a facing page that transmitted the duplum and second tenor.<sup>20</sup> Whether any of the texts transmitted by the fragments are part of this lost duplum cannot be proven. Finally, there must have been a sixth folio on one side of which—perhaps the verso—was transmitted a setting of the text *Ave maris stella*, to which two fragments probably relate (**22** and **13**). However these six folios are arranged, given that A and B must remain contiguous, as must C and D, there are always seven openings and therefore there would have been at least seven motets in the original source. Add

## Newly discovered fourteenth-century polyphony in Oxford

to these the polyphonic pieces copied in notational hands 2 and 3, and the number of polyphonic works in the original source must have been at least nine.

Folio			
A	recto	text of unidentified motet voice	Must be contiguous
	verso	<i>Tu civium</i> triplum, first tenor, second tenor	
B	recto	<i>Tu civium</i> duplum, second tenor	
	verso	text of unidentified motet	
C	recto	text of unidentified motet voice	Must be contiguous
	verso	<i>Virgo Maria</i> triplum and duplum	
D*	recto	<i>Virgo Maria</i> first and second tenor	
	verso		
E	recto	text of unidentified motet voice	
	verso	<i>Veni creator spiritus</i> triplum	
F	recto?	text of unidentified motet voice	
	verso?	<i>Ave maris stella</i> (?)	

\* Fragment D is hypothetical as there are no surviving fragments for it.

Table 3: Minimum number of folios for the VR fragments

As Lefferts has shown, some fourteenth-century fragments of English polyphony came from large collections of motets. From their foliation, *GB-Onc* 362 must have had at least 90 folios and *GB-Ccc* 65 at least 100; *GB-Lbl* 24198 is arranged alphabetically, and within each letter section there may have been as many as eight motets.<sup>21</sup> Whether the VR fragments came from a codex of similar heft to these examples is difficult to determine. The motets that can be identified may indicate a codex that was, like *GB-Lbl* 24198, organised alphabetically. If this was the case, *Tu civium*, *Veni creator* and *Virgo Maria* would have been copied close together, perhaps even within the same gathering, since sections for T and V would be next to one another. The dimensions of the VR fragments indicate that this was a large-format polyphonic source and may have been a significant volume of polyphony. On some fragments, the entire width of a stave is preserved so that it is easy to determine the width of the text block for the fragments: 220 mm. Table 4 compares the width of the VR fragments' text block to those of several fourteenth-century English codices of polyphony.<sup>22</sup> The manuscript from which the VR fragments came is one of the largest in table 4, smaller only than the two Westminster Abbey manuscripts and of similar size to the Old Hall manuscript. In sum, the evidence points to a source of motets that was physically large and possibly extensive in its contents.

## Newly discovered fourteenth-century polyphony in Oxford

Source	Approx. width of text block (mm)
<i>GB-Lwa</i> 33327	255 (width of both columns)
<i>GB-Lwa</i> 12185	246
<i>GB-Lbl</i> Add. 57950 (Old Hall)	235
<i>VR</i>	220
<i>GB-Ccc</i> 65	200
<i>GB-DRc</i> C.I.20	185
<i>GB-Ob e</i> Mus 7	182
<i>GB-Lbl</i> 24198	180
<i>GB-Lbl</i> Arundel 14	>168
<i>GB-Cpc</i> 228	165
<i>GB-Cgc</i> 512/543	153
<i>GB-Onc</i> 362	>146
<i>GB-Ob Hatton</i> 81	139
<i>GB-Lbl</i> Sloane 1210	>130
<i>GB-Lbl</i> 62132 A	128

Table 4: Width of text block in a selection of fourteenth-century polyphonic sources

### Notation

The notation on the *VR* fragments provides important information about the provenance and dates at which the source was first copied, and for which it remained in use. The earliest notational hand, hand 1, is present on the most fragments (see **table 2** above). This music scribe wrote in black-full mensural notation, with a range of rhythmic values that indicate copying some time during the fourteenth-century: duplex longs, longs, breves presented as square noteheads (as opposed to the thirteenth-century English use of the rhomboid breve), rhomboid semibreves and up-stemmed minims (see further discussion below). Ligatures appear to be used following Franco's system of propriety and perfection. Where longs are divisible into three equal breves, the scribe sometimes uses dots to mark the end of long groups. I have found no cases of dots being used to separate semibreve groups, except for those in *Tu civium* and *Virgo Maria*, discussed below. No dots of addition appear to have been used, consistent with the lack of dots of addition in English sources until 1400 (although it is possible that there were dots of addition on parts of the manuscript that have not survived).<sup>23</sup> As with other English sources, semibreve rests are notated inconsistently, sometimes standing on a line (fragment **1**) and sometimes descending from a line (fragment **25**).<sup>24</sup> *Fa* and *mi* signs indicate the solmization of pitches (fragments **31** and **32**); the English *brevis erecta*, used in *GB-Cgc* 512/543 to indicate the raising of a pitch by a semitone, is not found in the fragments.

The notation of rhythmic values smaller than the breve in the *VR* shows that the original source of the fragments contained a variety of notational styles. Different sources of English

polyphony notate semibreves and minims in different ways. Where two semibreves occupied the space of a (ternary) breve, a downward stem could be added to a semibreve to show that it was the longer of the pair. Up to nine semibreves could fill the space of a breve, with stems and the *signum rotundum* sometimes used to clarify note lengths where context or convention did not provide sufficient information:<sup>25</sup> upward stems for minims (the shortest type of semibreve) are more widely used after the middle of the century, but were probably used before this too.<sup>26</sup>

In the *VR* fragments containing notational hand 1, there are no downward stems on semibreves. There are a handful of cases where upward stems are used, all outside of the three motets identified in the fragments and some of which are shown in **figure 6**. At least one of these upward stems appears to be a later addition (fragment **20**) in a lighter ink, suggesting that the scribe did not always distinguish graphically between *minima* and *minorata* semibreves. (The latter has two-thirds the length of a semibreve that can be divided into three minims.) In the second example from fragment **4**, the upward stem appears to be drawn as part of the notehead and is in the same ink; this would suggest that the scribe was aware of the practice of notating minims with upward stems. The other examples in **figure 6** show some informality in the placement and drawing of upward stems, which may indicate that these stems were added later. The first example from fragment **4** may even show a downward stem on a semibreve that was later erased, perhaps at the same time as upward stems were added to the noteheads either side of it. The practice of not differentiating between semibreves through the use of upward stems is also seen in the notation of *Virgo Maria* (fragment **25**) and *Tu civium* (fragment **32**). In these motets, pairs of semibreves are separated by short vertical strokes to ensure that each pair of semibreves is understood to occupy a full binary breve.

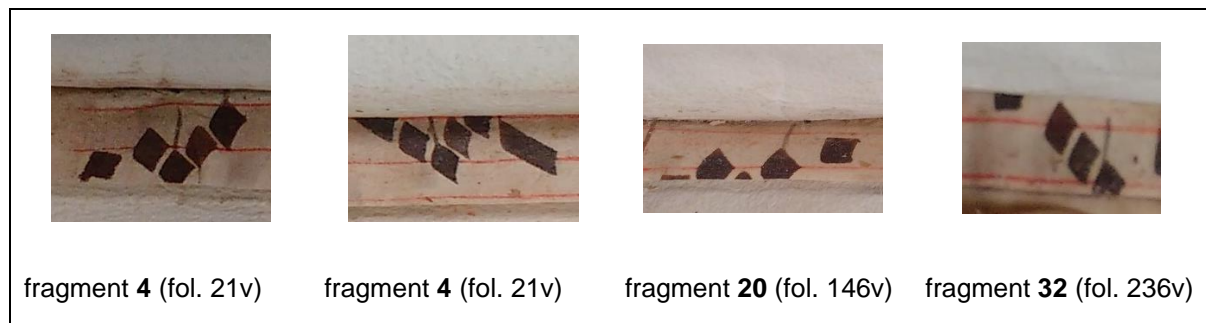


Figure 6: Examples of minim stems. Copyright Lincoln College, 2021.

There may therefore have been two or more stages to the copying of the notation that I have attributed to notational hand 1. In the first layer of copying, the music scribe may have

used downward stems to designate *minorata* semibreves (fragment 4) and may also have used upward stems for minims (also fragment 4). Later, more upward stems seem to have been added to the notation to designate minims, and downward semibreve stems may have been erased. *Tu civium*, *Virgo Maria* and *Veni creator* were copied in a post-Franconian notation that did not distinguish between *minorata* semibreves and minims. The original source of the fragments therefore showed a range of notational practices, from post-Franconian to something closer to French *ars nova* notation. This range of notation is not unusual for a fourteenth-century source, and does not clearly point to a more precise date of copying. The use of post-Franconian notation in a source does not mean that the source must date before the use of *ars nova* notation, while the presence of minim stems is a contested issue. *Tu civium* and *Virgo Maria*, in which there are no upward minim stems in the *VR* fragments, date from the first half of the century: Frank Ll. Harrison dates *GB-Cgc 512/543*, in which *Tu civium* and *Virgo Maria* are copied, between 1336 and 1355.<sup>27</sup> It is likely that the initial copying of the *VR* was carried out around this time too, with alterations to the first notational layer perhaps occurring in the second half of the century.

The subdivision of the breve in *Tu civium* remains an open question, one that is not solved by the *VR* fragments. At three points in the motet (twice in the duplum and once in the triplum) as it is notated in *GB-Cgc 512/543*, four semibreves are notated that together have the duration of a single breve. In his edition of *Tu civium*, Harrison transcribes these passages in *curta mensura*, that is, as four equal minims. As Lefferts points out, however, the lack of upward stems in *GB-Cgc 512/543* means that these four semibreves could be interpreted as equal or unequal (iambic/trochaic pairs), as *curta mensura* or as (*tempus imperfectum*) *prolatio maior* respectively. The passages corresponding to these semibreve groups in the duplum have been preserved in the *VR* fragments where, intriguingly, a different reading is offered (**figure 7**), sidestepping this question entirely.<sup>28</sup> Each group of four semibreves, plus the following two-note semibreve ligature, is replaced by a semibreve-semibreve-breve ligature. In the first of these instances, this change requires a redistribution of the text, with the text ‘tibi ne celat’ starting a semibreve later in the *VR* version and breaking up into two semibreves what had been a breve in *GB-Cgc 512/543*. This is the only significant difference in notation between the *VR* fragments and their identified concordances.

## Newly discovered fourteenth-century polyphony in Oxford

Figure 7: Variance in the triplum of *Tu civium*

Continuing use of the original motet manuscript, probably over a number of decades, is demonstrated by the presence of two further notational hands on the fragments. Notational hands 2 and 3 were almost certainly added after the first layer of copying. Hand 2 is found on two fragments: fragment **8**, on lead-point staves, and fragment **14**, on red staves. Because it carries the text for the end of the second tenor of *Tu civium* on its reverse, fragment **8** must have been at the bottom of a folio. The notation in hand 2 seems to have been added in the blank space at the bottom of the page, since staves have been ruled in lead-point and the notation is partly trimmed, indicating further blank space below fragment **8** on which the notation continued. The black-full notation of hand 2 is smaller and less formal than the notation in hand 1 and consistently follows the French method of notation. Notation in hand 3 is found on red staves on the reverse of fragments with notation in hand 1 (fragments **16** and **30**). These staves were likely from the original ruling of the source before notation was entered in hand 1. Hand 3 is black-void notation, for which the earliest English examples seem to have arisen around 1400.<sup>29</sup> Although it is difficult to date any of the notational hands with any certainty, the presence of both black-full and black-void notation in the same source indicates that the source was used and added to over several decades. The source was probably first copied before 1350—though this is not certain—and was added to at least until 1400.

### Provenance of the original source

The presence of fragments from a large codex of motets in late fifteenth-century Oxford raises the prospect that the codex might have been in Oxford as far back as the fourteenth century. To my knowledge, no fourteenth-century polyphonic source has as yet been attributed a provenance in Oxford with any certainty.<sup>30</sup> In her discussion of insular sources that contain motets of both English and French provenance, such as Durham, Chapter Library MS C.I.20, Margaret Bent has suggested that Oxford could have been a place where English musicians

first encountered French motets, while Christopher Hohler has suggested Oxford as the point of dissemination for English polyphony during the thirteenth century.<sup>31</sup> As Lefferts and William Summers note, however, these hypotheses are not widely accepted and are not supported by extant evidence.<sup>32</sup> The *VR* fragments may therefore yield important, new information on the presence of polyphony in fourteenth-century Oxford.

Although there is little evidence to link the *VR* fragments to any institution, either in Oxford or elsewhere, it is likely that the *VR* was bound in Oxford and that the binding strips were taken from a book that had also been in Oxford: from the evidence generated by his survey of pastedowns in books known to have been bound in Oxford between 1500 and 1640, Neil Ker argues that 'fragments used by Oxford binders are likely to be for the most part fragments of books removed from the Oxford college libraries, or, in the case of service books, from college chapels'.<sup>33</sup> However, this is not certain. An expensive production, with formal text and music hands that indicate a high level of craft, the original codex for the fragments almost certainly did not originate at Lincoln College, which was relatively poor throughout the fifteenth century. When the fragments were bound into the *VR* in the late fifteenth century, the college had made no provisions for music that were reported or stipulated in its early documents.<sup>34</sup> Whether the *VR* fragments were copied in Oxford or brought to the city some time afterwards is impossible to determine: almost two centuries may lie between the copying of the first layer of notation (first half of the fourteenth century) in the original polyphonic source and the eventual excision and sewing of the fragments into their current binding (before 1520), a substantial period of time during which the original book of music could have been brought to Oxford.

Little is known about the composition and/or performance of polyphony in Oxford before 1400. Katarzyna Grochowska has argued that the thirteenth-century motet and conductus source, *PL-STk Mus 9*, was likely copied at the Franciscan priory in Oxford.<sup>35</sup> The music theorist John of Tewkesbury, who had written his *Quatuor principalia* by 1351, left his treatise to the same priory in 1388.<sup>36</sup> Johannes Boen (d. 1367), Dutch theorist of the *ars nova*, studied in Oxford and Paris before settling as a priest in Rijnsburg in the Netherlands.<sup>37</sup> These pieces of circumstantial evidence may speak in favour of the hypothesis that polyphony was sung in Oxford. Of the institutions present in fourteenth-century Oxford, the monastic foundations are perhaps the most likely candidates.<sup>38</sup> As Lefferts has shown, many sources of fourteenth-century English polyphony are likely to have come from wealthy Benedictine, Cistercian or Augustinian houses such as Worcester cathedral or Fountains Abbey; all three of these monastic orders were represented in Oxford.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, *GB-Cgc 512/543*, one of the concordant sources for the *VR* fragments, is believed to have been copied at the Benedictine

foundation of Norwich cathedral.<sup>40</sup> Further research is needed here to establish whether Benedictine institutions (or those of other monastic orders) in Oxford might have cultivated polyphony in the same way as larger houses elsewhere in the country.

Whatever the precise provenance of the fragments, the sewing guards of the *VR* clearly once belonged to a large and handsome volume of motets that was in Oxford by the late fifteenth century. While conclusions as to the fragments' provenance can only remain tentative, they lend weight to Bent's hypothesis of the presence of polyphonic motets in fourteenth-century Oxford, and therefore are an important addition to our knowledge of polyphony in medieval Britain. As yet, only three known motets have been identified from the fragments, but more may be discernible in the snippets of notation that the fragments transmit. The remainder of the original manuscript may be irretrievably lost or, with luck, other fragments may surface in the future. The binder of the *VR* probably had many other fragments from the motet manuscript on their pile of parchment scraps, which may have been bound into other volumes. The prospect is tantalising, that other fragments might be waiting to be discovered, sitting in other books that were bound in late fifteenth-century Oxford.

APPENDIX

Reconstruction of the reverse of the duplum for *Tu civium*:

rium quedam firma[n]t connubium que ne sciunt divorcium in  
 vero (?) [con]vallium (?) candoris est sola enim decoris (?) .....  
 at in flo re tercium quietis re frigerium ad a nime

Unidentified text on the VR fragments:

Fragment	Text
3 <sub>o</sub>	rex fert et celi conditor
3 <sub>i</sub>	pro ... honor ...
4 <sub>o</sub>	laus mater ... virgo pro...
9 <sub>o</sub>	rex fert et celi conditor
11 <sub>o</sub>	...at in flore tercium quietis refrigerium ad anime
13 <sub>o</sub>	Sit laus deo patri summon Christo decus spiritui (unidentified <i>Ave maris stella</i> )
13 <sub>i</sub>	vota semper operanti ...
17 <sub>o</sub>	spes ...

17 <sub>i</sub>	tota ...
18 <sub>i</sub>	vero (?) convallium (?) candoris est sola enim decoris (?)
20 <sub>o</sub>	... rium quedam firmant connubium que nesciunt divorcium in
22 <sub>o</sub>	cum localis regnum (?) occupatis circa iam vineam licet tardi
22 <sub>i</sub>	celi porta (unidentified <i>Ave maris stella</i> )
24 <sub>i</sub>	vita purgavit fluxum et sanguinis mitigat panibus saturat
25 <sub>i</sub>	qui sunt consortes tractent ut pocula fonte de profundo cordis
26 <sub>o</sub>	...lium ad israel remedium intus mater fert prelium sic
29 <sub>i</sub>	virginum (?) pa...

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> P. M. Lefferts and E. H. Sanders, 'Sources, MS: VI. English Polyphony, 1270–1400', *Oxford Music Online*: <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.50158> (accessed 29 April 2020).

<sup>2</sup> For a record of sources of English polyphony and their discovery, compare G. Reaney (ed.), *Manuscripts of Polyphonic Music*, RISM B/IV<sup>1-2</sup> (Munich, 1966/1969) and the supplement to this volume in A. Wathey (ed.), *Manuscripts of Polyphonic Music: Supplement to RISM B IV<sup>1-2</sup>, The British Isles, 1100–1400* (Munich, 1993). Recent work on fragment discoveries includes ongoing work on the royal choirbook, outlined in M. Bent and A. Wathey (eds.), *Fragments of English Polyphonic Music c. 1390–1475: A Facsimile Edition*, EECM 62 (forthcoming) and the Dorset *rotulus*, treated in M. Bent, J. C. Hartt, and P. M. Lefferts, *The Dorset Rotulus: Contextualising the Early English Motet* (Woodbridge, forthcoming). Facsimiles of English polyphonic fragments may be found in F. Ll. Harrison (ed.), *Manuscripts of fourteenth century English polyphony*, EECM 26 (London, c. 1981); W. Summers and P. Lefferts (eds.), *English Thirteenth-Century Polyphony*, EECM 57 (London, 2016); and Bent and Wathey, *Fragments of English Polyphonic Music c. 1390–1475*. Readers are also directed to the relevant pages on DIAMM (<https://www.diamm.ac.uk/>).

<sup>3</sup> For a catalogue entry and description of the source, see L. McCormack and J. Eagan, 'Vetus Registrum, 1472–c.1640': <https://lincoln.epexio.com/records/LC/A/R/1> (accessed 29 April 2020). The music fragments are listed at 'GB-Olc LC/A/R/1 "Vetus Registrum"', <https://www.diamm.ac.uk/sources/4827/#/> (accessed 10 November 2020).

<sup>4</sup> On the reconstruction of the Jesus College fragments, see M. F. Bukofzer, 'Changing Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music', *Musical Quarterly*, xlv (1958), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> In quire ix, a parchment sewing guard was inserted in the middle of the gathering and a paper bifolium (fols 131 and 132) was then stitched inside the sewing guard, such that the sewing guard is no longer at the centre of the gathering.

<sup>6</sup> 'Vetus Registrum': <https://digital2.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/42c4a166-0083-408c-89da-8f0634577767/> (accessed 6 November 2020).

<sup>7</sup> *Tu civium* and *Virgo Maria* are edited in PMFC xvi, nos. 97 and 98. *Veni creator spiritus* is transcribed in P. M. Lefferts, 'The motet in England in the Fourteenth Century' (Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1983), pp. 460–2.

<sup>8</sup> I thank Peter Lefferts for identifying *Veni creator spiritus*.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Eagan provides this date for the binding at McCormack and Eagan, 'Vetus Registrum'. She suggests the paper is probably late fifteenth century and Italian based on the watermark (as yet unidentified).

<sup>10</sup> V. H. H. Green, *The Commonwealth of Lincoln College, 1427–1977* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> McCormack and Eagan, 'Vetus Registrum'.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> The fragments do not appear to have been always bound the same way round.

<sup>14</sup> I thank Jane Eagan for her advice on the chronology of the book's history.

<sup>15</sup> See the description of the source at <https://www.diamm.ac.uk/sources/302/#/> (accessed 9 November 2020). The transmission of *Tu civium* and *Virgo Maria* in both an informal source like *GB-Cgc* 512/543 and more formal sources such as the *VR* fragments or *GB-Cpc* 228 is intriguing.

<sup>16</sup> Voice-exchange motets are discussed at length in the forthcoming Bent et al., *Dorset Rotulus*. The authors suggest that 'long-form' presentation of such motets was more likely for *rotuli*, whereas 'short-form' presentation was necessitated by copying into codex format. I thank the authors for sharing their monograph with me prior to its publication.

<sup>17</sup> Lefferts, 'The motet in England', p. 79.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> On the use of such sigla 'to mark off sections to which repetition would be applied', see M. Bent, 'Rota versatilis: towards a reconstruction' in *Source Materials and the Interpretation of Music: A Memorial Volume to Thurston Dart*, ed. Ian Bent (Southampton: Stainer and Bell, 1981), p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> Lefferts states that this motet is a4, with only the triplum and first tenor surviving in *GB-Ccc* 65: Lefferts, 'The motet in England', p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 317–8.

<sup>22</sup> Measurements for *GB-LWa* 33327, *GB-LWa* 12185 and *GB-Lbl* add. 57950 are taken from Bent et al., *Dorset rotulus*, chapter 8.

<sup>23</sup> M. Bent, 'Notation: History of Western notation: polyphonic mensural notation, c. 1260–1500', *Oxford Music Online*: <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.20114> (accessed 29 April 2020).

<sup>24</sup> The scribe does not differentiate between perfect and imperfect values of long, breve and semibreve rests, unlike the scribe of *GB-Ccc* 65: see Lefferts, 'The motet in England', pp. 306–8.

<sup>25</sup> On the use and later obsolescence of the signum rotundum, see M. Bent, 'A preliminary assessment of the independence of English trecento notations' in *L'ars nova italiana del trecento IV: Atti del 3° Congresso internazionale sul tema "La musica al tempo del Boccaccio e i suoi rapporti con la letteratura" (Siena - Certaldo 19–22 luglio 1975), sotto il patrocinio della Società Italiana di Musicologia (Certaldo, 1978)*, p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> Bent, 'Notation', suggests that minim stems seem to have been copied more widely after 1350. Andrew Wathey speculates that minims may have been notated with upward stems in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, français 571, as early 1326 while the book was England: A. Wathey, 'The Marriage of Edward III and the Transmission of French Motets to England', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, xlv (1992), pp. 21–22.

<sup>27</sup> F. L. Harrison, 'Ars Nova in England: a new source', *Musica Disciplina*, xxi (1967), pp. 68–70.

<sup>28</sup> The passage corresponding to the triplum does not survive. The passages of *Virgo Maria* in which four semibreves are to be fitted to the duration of a breve also do not survive on the fragments.

<sup>29</sup> Bent, 'Notation'.

<sup>30</sup> In *RISM B/IV*<sup>1–2</sup> (ed. Reaney, 1966/1969) and its supplement (ed. Wathey, 1993), no source is described as being from Oxford, or being bound into a host volume that was bound in Oxford. In both N. Ker, *Fragments of Medieval Manuscripts used as Pastedowns in Oxford Bindings, with a survey of Oxford binding, c. 1515–1620* (Oxford, 1954) and D. Pearson, *Oxford bookbinding, 1500–1640: Including a supplement to Neil Ker's 'Fragments of medieval manuscripts used as pastedowns in Oxford bindings'* (Oxford, 2000), no instances of medieval polyphony are listed.

<sup>31</sup> M. Bent, 'The transmission of English music 1300–1500: some aspects of repertory and presentation' in *Studien zur Tradition in der Musik: Kurt von Fischer zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. H. H. Eggebrecht and M. Lütolf (Munich, 1973), p. 75; C. Hohler, 'Reflections on some manuscripts containing 13th-century polyphony', *Journal of the Plainsong and Mediaeval Music Society*, i (1978), p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Lefferts and Summers, *English Thirteenth-Century Polyphony*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ker, *Manuscripts used as Pastedowns*, p. x.

<sup>34</sup> Green, *Commonwealth of Lincoln College*, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> K. Grochowska, 'Tenor circles and motet cycles: a study of the Stary Sącz manuscript [PL-SS Muz 9] and its implications for modes of repertory organization in 13<sup>th</sup>-century polyphonic collections' (PhD. diss., University of Chicago, 2013), p. 451.

<sup>36</sup> L. F. Aulas, 'The *Quatuor principalia musicae*: a critical edition and translation, with introduction and commentary' (PhD. diss., Indiana University, 1996), p. 13.

## Newly discovered fourteenth-century polyphony in Oxford

<sup>37</sup> G. Anderson and A. M. Busse Berger, 'Boen [Boon], Johannes', *Oxford Music Online* (2001): <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.03379> (accessed 09 September 2020).

<sup>38</sup> The secular colleges were probably too small and poor during the fourteenth century to support polyphonic singing: see R. Bowers, 'Choral institutions within the English Church: their constitution and development, c. 1340–1500' (PhD. diss., University of East Anglia, 1975), p. 2056.

<sup>39</sup> Lefferts, 'The motet in England', p. 29. See also Bent, 'The transmission of English music', pp. 73–4. A summary of monastic institutions in Oxford is given in W. Page (ed.), *A history of the county of Oxford: volume 2* (London, 1907): <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/oxon/vol2> (accessed 29 April 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Lefferts, 'The motet in England', p. 29. Reaney, *Manuscripts of Polyphonic Music*, p. 208, notes that *GB-Ccc 65* originated in a good scriptorium, tentatively assigning it to Worcester cathedral, another Benedictine foundation; there is no strong evidence for this provenance, however.