

ATTRIBUTION OF THREE WORKS TO JOHN VICCARS (c. 1604-53?)

In a recent note Sheldon Brammall established that three seventeenth-century royalist prose works have been incorrectly attributed to the presbyterian poet, translator and chronicler John Vicars (1580-1652).¹ The same evidence that disproves the attribution to Vicars reveals the true author to be his namesake John Viccars (c. 1604-53?), a twice ejected minister best known for his multilingual psalm commentary Decapla in psalmos (London, 1639; repr. 1655).

The title-pages of the works in question – A Discovery of the Rebels and The Great Antichrist (1643; Wing V301), and The Opinion of the Roman Judges (1643; Wing V320) – name the author as ‘J. V. Prisoner’. There are three seventeenth-century witnesses who attest that ‘J. V.’ stands for ‘John Vicars’ or similar. George Thomason annotated his copies of these texts by writing ‘Vicars’ to the right of ‘Prisoner’ on the title-page of The Opinion (and the date ‘Feb: 6th 1642’), and ‘Vickars’ in a similar place on A Discovery (and the date ‘1642’, ‘March. 6’).² The second witness is the East Anglian bibliographer William Crowe: in his index of several thousand English scriptural commentaries and sermons which was published in 1663, ‘John Vicars, quarto 1643’ appears three times under headings which match the biblical passages quoted on the title-pages of these works: 2 Timothy 3:1-6 (Great Antichrist), Luke 19:12-28 (A Discovery) and Acts 25:27 (The Opinion).³ Finally, there is one source that specifically (and wrongly) attributes The Opinion to the elder Vicars: one of Samuel Pepys’s

I am deeply indebted to G. J. Toomer (particularly, but far from exclusively, in the paragraph on Arabic and Syriac types) for discussing this topic with me, and for commenting on an earlier draft; his contribution strengthened this note considerably. Thanks also to Sheldon Brammall and Nick Hardy for their assistance.

¹ Sheldon Brammall, ‘Deattribution of Three Works Attributed to John Vicars (1580–1652)’, N&Q, lx (2013), 526-9.

² Thomason Tracts, E.88 (16) and E.92 (1). G. K. Fortescue, Catalogue of the Pamphlets, Books, Newspapers, and Manuscripts relating to the Civil War, the Commonwealth, and Restoration, Collected by George Thomason, 1640-1661 (London, 1908), I, 225 and 240. The index (compiled by Fortescue and three assistants) places Discovery with works by the presbyterian Vicars, but attributes Opinion to ‘J. Vicars’ under a separate heading (see II, 749); on Thomason’s annotations, see Lois Spencer, ‘The Professional and Literary Connexions of George Thomason’, The Library, xiii (1958), 102-18 (102).

³ William Crowe, An Exact Collection, or Catalogue of our English Writers on the Old and New Testament (London, 1663), Q6r (and T1r), S7v and S8r; Simon Lancaster, ‘Crowe, William (1616–1675)’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB), online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6825, all web-links last accessed December 2013].

clerks inscribed the title-page of the copy in the Pepys library with the phrase ‘J. Vicars, School-ma^r at Christ’s Hospital’.⁴

The current attribution of these works to the presbyterian Vicars in the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC citation nos R20945 and R4189) is based on a bibliographical conflation of the identities and oeuvres of John Vicars and John Viccars (spelt differently here for disambiguation, though the latter’s surname is also spelt ‘Vicars’ in at least one document from the 1640s).⁵ The first edition of Pollard and Redgrave’s Short-Title Catalogue (1926) only recognized one John Vicars, and mistakenly attributed Decapla in psalmos (STC 24696) to a poet who, as Brammall points out, possessed no knowledge of Eastern languages.⁶ Wing perpetuated this error in the first edition of his Short-Title Catalogue (1951) by attributing the 1655 re-printing to Vicars (as Wing V300), and consequently listed the three ‘J. V.’ works to the same man.⁷ Decapla is correctly attributed to ‘Vicars, John, Linguist’ rather than ‘Vicars, John, Poet’ in the second edition of Pollard and Redgrave’s catalogue, as it is in Wing’s, where Decapla was re-entered under Viccars’ name (with a double ‘c’, as Wing V335aA).⁸ The authorship of Vicars’ other works was presumably not re-assessed at that time, even though Great Antichrist (formerly Wing V310) was re-classified as part of A Discovery.

In one of the only critical comments on J. V.’s works, Monicka Patterson-Tutschka notes in parenthesis that the author of A Discovery must be ‘royalist John Vicars (not to be confused with John Vicars, the parliamentary propagandist)?’, but does not make the

⁴ Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge. Supplementary Series. Volume 1: Census of Printed Books, ed. by C. S. Knighton (Cambridge, 2004), 111 (item 1186(2)). I owe this reference to Prof. M. Feingold (via Prof. Toomer).

⁵ Entry for 27 June 1646 in the Journal of the Committee for Plundered Ministers, British Library, Add. MS 15670, fol. 137r. Historical Manuscripts Commission: Thirteenth Report, Appendix, Part I: The Manuscripts of his Grace the Duke of Portland, Preserved at Welbeck Abbey. Vol. 1 (London, 1891), viii; G. J. Toomer, ‘Viccars, John (*bap.* 1604, *d.* 1653?)’, ODNB [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28267>].

⁶ A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640 (London, 1926), 575; Brammall, ‘Deattribution’, 529.

⁷ Donald Wing, Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of English Books printed in other Countries, 1641-1700: v. 3. P1-Z28 (New York, 1951), 420.

⁸ Pollard, Redgrave and others, Short-Title Catalogue, second edition (London, 1976), II, 423; Wing, Short-Title Catalogue, second edition (New York, 1988), III, 615-6.

association with the author of Decapla nor draw attention to the need to review other works attributed to the poet Vicars.⁹ This note demonstrates that all three works should (as Decapla was) be re-attributed to John Viccars.

J. V.'s works and Decapla in psalmos have striking similarities. J. V. cites a formidable range of learned material in his works: he refers to the scriptural commentaries (found in 'Rabbinical Bibles') of medieval Jewish philosophers and grammarians including David Kimchi (e.g. Antichrist, D2r), Levi Ben Gershon ('Rabag', Antichrist, D4r) and Abraham Ibn Ezra (Discovery, B1r); to early and medieval Christian thinkers such as John Chrysostom (Opinion, B3v), Gregory of Nazianzus (Discovery, B4v), Eusebius (Opinion, A3v), Epiphanius of Salamis (Opinion, A3v), Nicholas of Lyra (Opinion, A4r), and Tertullian (Discovery, B3r); to the Magdeburg Centuries and Cesare Baronius' response, Annales Ecclesiastici (Antichrist, D1v); to the fifteenth-century historian Johannes Nauclerus (Antichrist, D1v); and to the classical writers Herodotus (Antichrist, F1v), Plutarch (Discovery, B3r) and Josephus (Antichrist, E3r). John Viccars was one of few individuals in England who possessed the necessary linguistic knowledge and access to books and manuscripts to allude to all these works: the preface to Decapla (A4r-5r) names many of these authors (including Ibn Ezra, Kimchi, Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, Plutarch and Herodotus), and specifies which continental manuscript collections he has consulted. The affinity with Horace is especially close: Viccars' frequent quotations from the Roman poet (e.g. D4r-v and E2r) correlate with J. V.'s occasional references to the Odes (Opinion, C1v; Discovery, C2v; Antichrist, E2v).

The Arabic and Syriac types common to Decapla in psalmos and these three works are decisive evidence that J. V. must be John Viccars. The many marginal annotations in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac found throughout J. V.'s works (e.g., Opinion, A4v-

⁹ Monicka Patterson-Tutschka, 'Honour Thy King: Honouring as a Royalist Theory of Praxis in Civil War England, 1640-60', History of Political Thought, xxxii (2011), 465-98 (480; see also 466 and 489).

B1r; Discovery, B3r; and Antichrist, D2r-3r) indicate not only the author's exceptional language skills, but also his access to particular types. There were just two Arabic founts in use at this time in England; these are distinct from each other, though both are based on the Dutch scholar Thomas Erpenius' types.¹⁰ The 'Selden types' initially appeared 'almost exclusively in books written by [John] Selden', who probably had 'considerable influence on their original creation'.¹¹ The other set was prepared for John Viccars and first used in Decapla: the title-page advertizes new Arabic and Syriac type-sets ('novis typis Arabica & Syriacus donatus') which, according to the preface, Viccars had purchased at no small expense ('sumptibus haud exiguis', A3r).¹² Specimen alphabets are printed immediately before the commentary on Psalm 1 (A6v), and both sets are used throughout this book – and in J. V.'s works too. These were the first Arabic and Syriac types cut in England, and Viccars and his brother Samuel undoubtedly paid for and owned them; although Archbishop William Laud, the work's dedicatee, had sought to stimulate the study of Arabic studies and must have welcomed Decapla's publication, he probably made little or no contribution to Viccars' project.¹³ The match between the founts in Decapla and The Opinion, A Discovery and Great Antichrist proves that John Viccars is 'J. V. Prisoner'.

Viccars' biography corresponds with J. V.'s exactly. Viccars does not just hold initials in common with J. V.: he too was a former prisoner who announced his incarceration in print. In the dedication to Laud in Decapla (which was removed for the 1655 edition) Viccars refers to a seven-year term ('post septennii vincula captivo', A3r), which he would have served (if he did complete his full sentence) between 1628 and 1635. Viccars had been denounced by parishioners in Stamford, Lincolnshire, in 1628, and may have been imprisoned at that time.

¹⁰ Rijk Smitskamp, Philologia Orientalis: A Description of Books Illustrating the Study and Printing of Oriental Languages in 16th- and 17th-century Europe (Leiden, 1992), 331-3.

¹¹ G. J. Toomer, John Selden, A Life in Scholarship (Oxford, 2009), 623, n. 246.

¹² See G. J. Toomer, Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England (Oxford, 1996), 75-7.

¹³ Geoffrey Roper, 'Arabic Printing and Publishing in England before 1820', British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin, xii (1985), 12-32 (15, though cf. Toomer, Eastern Wisdom, 76-7, n. 112).

Viccars was tried before the high commission in November 1631, sentenced to seven years in Bridewell Prison (by Laud), and must have been in prison until he recanted in 1635 and was restored to the ministry.¹⁴ Viccars was possibly not in prison when writing as ‘J. V.’, since he was appointed rector at South Fambridge, Essex, in May 1640, and had seen Decapla published the previous year. ‘Prisoner’ may refer to his previous term of imprisonment which now demonstrated the author’s commitment to the royalist cause. This reading is attractive because it removes the need to explain why a serving prisoner had been allowed to deliver the sermon published as The Opinion, which was ‘[p]reached at the Abby of Westminster, at a late publique fast, Jan. 25. 1643’ (title-page; Thomason amends the date in his copy from New to Old Style dating, i.e. to 1642).¹⁵

J. V.’s and John Viccars’ political and ecclesiological convictions are broadly compatible. The indictment at Viccars’ high commission case in 1631 sought to expose the accused’s arrogant and idiosyncratic attempts to purify liturgical practices in the Church of England: Viccars was known for doctrinal independence tending towards sectarianism, and vigorous propagation of his views. One Dr Reeves charged Viccars with ‘making the pulpit a cockpit of contention’ and submitted ‘that Puritanisme breakes out in many botches upon him’; Thomas Morton, Bishop of Lichfield, concluded that Viccars was ‘a man egregiously proud and exported with a spirit of singularity’; and Richard Neile, Bishop of Winchester, found that ‘[h]e hath violated the unity of the Church, and by his seditious courses much disturbed the peace of it’.¹⁶ Among the twenty-five articles brought against Viccars were charges of holding conventicles, denouncing Christmas as a superstitious festival because it did not coincide with Christ’s true birthday (his defence was that he ‘onely fell into a question of astrologie’), and preaching that a man ‘ought not three dayes before and after the receiving

¹⁴ Toomer, ‘Viccars, John’; Reports of Cases in the Courts of Star Chamber and High Commission, ed. by Samuel Rawson Gardiner (London, 1886), 198-238 (238).

¹⁵ Cf. Jerome de Groot, ‘Prison Writing, Writing Prison during the 1640s and 1650s’, Huntington Library Quarterly, lxxii (2009), 193-215 (199, n. 34).

¹⁶ Gardiner (ed.), Reports of Cases, 213, 215 and 233.

the sacrament to knowe his wife'.¹⁷ The report characterizes Viccars very much as the sort of person who, ten years' later, would be motivated to contribute to the fierce public debate by publishing commentaries and a sermon, though he had by then apparently become a defender of Laudian principles.

These three works shed fresh light on Viccars' activities between the publication of Decapla in psalmos in 1639 and his removal from South Fambridge in 1644. A Discovery of the Rebels applies the parable of the ten pieces in Luke's Gospel to the domestic situation in England: the nobleman is like a king ('a Father of the Countrey', A3r) who after an internal rebellion 'rewards the faithfull and industrious in his service, and punisheth the disloyall' (A4r-v). After dwelling on shared attitudes and practices of 'delinquents' (B2r), J. V. concludes with an exhortation to 'feare the destruction from God and the king, and yeild such subjection as belongs unto them both' (C3v). The Great Antichrist examines the prophecy of 'perillous times' in 2 Timothy, finding that 'Antichrist is the great Hypocrite[;] Heretickes and Sectaries of these times are limbes of Antichrist' (D3r). This work enumerates the opinions and vices of the Brownists, Familists, Antinomians, Papists, Arminians, Anabaptists and other hypocritical groups, including their denial of such 'sound doctrine' as justification by faith, sanctification, and 'the doctrine of subjection to Kings' (see D3r-v).

The Opinion of Roman Judges, a sermon occasioned by the 'importunity of prisoners' (A2r), is the boldest of the three texts. J. V.'s political affiliation is declared most explicitly in the 'Prayer before the Sermon', in which he bemoans how 'happy England, the glory of Nations is now become the seat of Sects and Heresies' and prays for the royal family: 'Have mercy on our dread Sovereign Lord, CHARLES, by the grace of God, King of Great Britaine France and Ireland, Defender of the true ancient Catholike, and Apostolike Faith' (C5r). The link between J. V. and John Viccars increases the likelihood that both are identical with the

¹⁷ Ibid., 198-200, 202 and 219.

‘Master Vicars’ whose crimes, ‘which this insolent Rebellion disgust so much’, were listed in the royalist newspaper Mercurius Aulicus on 27 March 1645 (the twentieth anniversary of Charles’ accession): the principal charge was ‘praying for the KING and QUEENE’, and included an accusation – consistent with ‘Our Father, &c.’ (C6r) printed at the prayer’s conclusion in The Opinion – that Vicars ‘after his prayer ended doth ever conclude with the Lords Prayer, kneeling downe and making it an Idoll’, as well as that he ‘doth teach, and preach Jesuiticall, papisticall, and Arminian doctrine’.¹⁸ Viccars had indeed been sequestered from South Fambridge for being ‘suspected to be a Romish Priest, (for this wise Reason) that he had been once at Rome’ – a claim difficult to deny given that the preface to Decapla specifically mentions that he had studied manuscripts held at the Vatican.¹⁹

The same clues which now reveal Viccars as author of these works – shared initials, time spent in prison, similar political stance, distinctively wide range of literary reference (especially among Eastern texts), and above all use of particular Arabic and Syriac types – probably made his authorship obvious to early readers of these works too. Thomason, who imported Eastern books from Italy and was considered a ‘friend of scholars’, may have come into contact with Viccars through the latter’s involvement with Robert Young and other members of the London print-trade.²⁰ These three texts, which are Viccars’ only known vernacular works, provide new biographical details and allow us to trace how the opinions recorded in the high commission case of 1631 evolved in the subsequent decade alongside his work in Eastern languages.

Attributing these works to Viccars activates their true potential for learning about royalist apologetics in the early months of the Civil War. Viccars was committed to preserving the continuity of Christian tradition in England, and his writings suggest ways that his scholarship and beliefs reinforced each other over time. Knowing biblical languages, for

¹⁸ Mercurius Aulicus (Oxford, 1643-45), 23-30 March 1645, Q3v (p. 1524).

¹⁹ British Library, Add. MS Sloane 5829, fol. 83r and Add. MS 15669, fol. 158v.

²⁰ Spencer, ‘Professional and Literary Connexions’, 108 and 112.

example, was evidently central to his self-righteous indignation towards groups such as the Antinomians: ‘The Hebrew and Greek these unlearned men regard not, though they be the languages of the holy Ghost’ (Opinion, A3v). His learned activities continued until the end of his life: he is named among contributors to the Polyglot Bible in 1652 (coordinated by the Laudian sympathizer Brian Walton), though he may have died shortly afterwards.²¹ John Viccars emerges as a strong-willed and ambitious individual whose term of imprisonment ultimately increased his determination to condemn the bloody schisms which subsequently arose. The attribution made in this note is significant for seventeenth-century literary, intellectual and political historians because it provides new sources for understanding the learned and polemical writings of an innovative scholar who sought to protect established liturgical traditions as they came under increasingly grievous threat in the 1640s.

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²¹ H. J. Todd, *Memoirs of Brian Walton* (London, 1821), I, 49; Toomer, ‘Viccars, John’.