

JOHANNES WALLENSIS (GALLENSIS, WALEYS, etc.), or 'John of Wales,' fl. c. 1260-1283; died perhaps c. 1285; a celebrated Franciscan friar and writer

**Name:** Johannes Wallensis  
**Date of death:** perhaps c. 1285  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Franciscan friar and writer  
**Area of activity:** Literature and Writing; Religion  
**Author:** William Hopkin Davies

who belonged to the custody of Worcester. His early career is unknown, but sometime before 1260 he became sixth regent-master of the Friars Minor at Oxford, where he had already taken his B.D., and later was a lecturer and Doctor of Theology at Paris, where he was regent, it seems, at the Franciscan centre in 1282. In October of this latter year archbishop Peckham of Canterbury used him as an intermediary between Edward I and [prince Llywelyn](#). Apart from a reference to his being chosen as one of five doctors at Paris to examine the doctrine of Peter John Olivi (Pietro di Giovanni Olivi) in 1283, nothing further is known of his life. After his death and burial in Paris he was honoured with the title of 'Arbor Vitae' - 'Tree of Life.'

John was a voluminous writer, but many of the works attributed to him are spurious. Among his most important writings are: (a) *Breviloquium de sapientia sanctorum*, a short discussion on Christian wisdom, immediately followed in a number of our printed texts by the *Breviloquium de virtutibus antiquorum principum et philosophorum*, which uses the lives of the great men of the ancient world to illustrate the four cardinal virtues; (b) *Summa collationum ad omne genus hominum or Communiolum*, a long treatise in seven parts and abounding in illustrations that instruct the preacher on how to address all kinds of men; (c) *Compendiloquium de vitis illustrium philosophorum et de dictis moralibus eorundem*, a treatise in ten parts, intended to afford stimulating examples for Christians from the lives and sayings of ancient philosophers. Other works include: *Summa de Paenitentia*, *Summa Iustitiae*, *Moniloquium* (on vices and virtues and their rewards), *Legiloquium* (on the Ten Commandments), some sermons, and perhaps some commentaries. John is also said to have begun the popular *Manipulus Florum or Flores Doctorum*, which was finished by Thomas of Ireland. These manuals are mostly compilations. They reveal no depth or originality of thought and show no interest in metaphysics, mathematics, or natural science, but give proof of John's wide reading and reflect the emphasis placed by him on practical teaching. He quotes from a wide range of Latin writers, classical, patristic, and medieval, including the works of Averroes, Avicenna, and others, but Greek authors and philosophers he knew through translations only. His favourite 'modern' is John of Salisbury. With rare exceptions, 'John of Wales' effaces himself almost completely; and the absence of an independent critical attitude towards his work leads him into many contradictions and absurdities. References to his own contemporary world are also rare. John's compilations were deservedly popular for several centuries, both for their fund of apt *exempla*, their sound practical morality, and their spirit of tolerance.

## Author

Professor William Hopkin Davies

## Sources

A. G. Little, *The Grey Friars in Oxford; part I: A history of the convent, part II: Biographical notices of the friars, together with appendices of original documents* (Oxford 1892) (Clarendon Press, 1892), 143-51

also his *Studies in English Franciscan History being the Ford lectures delivered in the University of Oxford in 1916* (Manchester 1917), 1917, 174-92

V. Scholderer in *The National Library of Wales Journal*, iii, 76-9

## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [John of Wales](#)

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