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Locating Anglo-Italian Communities in *Bevis* and the Naples Manuscript

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Abstract
This article contextualises the Anglo-Italian aspects of Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29. This fifteenth-century paper miscellany contains *Bevis of Hampton*, Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, *St Alexius*, *Libeaus Desconus*, as well as a recipe collection, a section of Lydgate's "Doublenesse", and a fragment of *Sir Isumbras*. The book is among a very select number of codices containing Middle English texts that are presently preserved in an Italian institution. Previous research has demonstrated XIII.B.29 must have travelled to the Italian peninsula at a relatively early date, but the exact reason behind its compilation and the method by which it arrived in Italy remain uncertain. This article reviews the manuscript's design, provenance, and contents, arguing the book is not just an English manuscript in Italy, but also to some degree an English manuscript about Italy and Italian experiences. Specifically, the article contends that an episode in the manuscript's *Bevis*, which describes a street fight near Lombard Street in London, benefits from a reading that acknowledges late medieval developments in finance and long-distance Anglo-Italian commerce, as well as the emergence of Italian communities in Southampton and the capital.

Keywords *Bevis of Hampton* · MS XIII.B.29 · Chaucer · *The Clerk's Tale* · Anglo-Italian Communities · Lombards · Middle English Literature · Medieval London · Medieval Southampton · Maritime Trade

Introduction

The story of Sir Bevis of Hampton has appealed to a broad range of audiences from the Middle Ages to the modern period and remains a popular subject among scholars of medieval literature. Recent studies have focused in particular on the intertextuality of the various narratives in which Bevis appears and how these articulate

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preoccupations with the construction of regional and national identities (Bateman, 2023; Blurton, 2019; Campbell, 2006; Dolmans, 2020, 2023; Düzgün, 2018; Rouse, 2008; Stoyanoff, 2017). The figure's elusive relationship with both modern and medieval categorisations that are predicated on linguistic or cultural differentiations is traceable to the first text in which he appears, an Anglo-Norman *chanson de geste* called *Boeve de Haumtone*.[1] This poem was probably composed in the late twelfth century for a French-speaking aristocratic patron in England.[2] That this composition specifically speaks to the interests of a bicultural elite is evident from its opening address "[S]eingnurs barons, ore entendez a moi" (Lords and barons, now listen to me) (l. 1), as well as the compound appellation of its protagonist: "Boeve" has a French name yet he hails from "Haumtone", an English city (see further Forest-Hill, 2021; Weiss, 2008: 35–36).[3] Over time, processes of translation and adaptation have rendered Bevis' transregional status even more multifaceted.[4] Versions of his adventures have been written down in Middle English, Italian, Welsh, Old Norse, Yiddish, Romanian, Dutch, Irish, Continental French, and Russian (Fellows, 2017: xv–xvii). In addition, oral narratives about Bevis appear to have circulated since at least the Early Modern period and several sites in and around Southampton have been associated with him through local legends (Fellows, 1986; 2017: xxxix–xliv).

This article contributes to the ongoing discussion about how Bevis' character negotiates and articulates medieval understandings of regionality by contextualising the Anglo-Italian aspects of the Middle English *Bevis* preserved in Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (hereafter: XIII.B.29). The codex is remarkable in that it is preserved in what Laing (59) described in 1845 as an "unlooked-for place". The book is one of very few collections of Middle English poetry in an Italian library (cf. Khalaf & Cioffi, 2018: 139). The exact process that facilitated the transport of XIII.B.29 from England to Naples remains unclear (Cioffi et al., 2015: 354–355). The manuscript's journey, however, seems to have occurred sometime during the late medieval or Early Modern period. As will be argued below, the historical events that occurred prior to and during the time window in which XIII.B.29 must have travelled, combined with the book's focus on themes that relate to the Mediterranean and the Italian peninsula, provide a novel perspective on the reception of Bevis' narrative by the manuscript's earliest potential readers. In addition, the same factors raise new questions about the possible motivations behind its compilation. This article's key proposition is that XIII.B.29 is not just a collection of English texts *in* Italy but also, to some degree, a collection of English texts *about* Italy and Italian experiences. The presented argument explores the manuscript's

[1] The argument for this article was developed in collaboration with Miriam Edlich-Muth. Her guidance and numerous suggestions greatly improved this work. Remaining errors are my own.

The genre label "chanson de geste" has been challenged in this context: see Blurton (2019: 465, n. 1); see further Ailes (2008).

[2] Legge (1963: 159) has made a tentative connection to the second earl of Arundel based on the name of Bevis' horse. Weiss (1986: 240) has since argued either the complete or sections of the poem refer to the third earl of Arundel. Both were called William de Albini; see further Fellows (2017: xix, n. 20).

[3] Citations by line numbers are from Martin (2014). For an older edition, see Stimming (1899).

[4] For a theoretical approach to this subject, see Sunderland (2012).

design, provenance, and text selection, highlighting the book's diverse relations to both historical and literary Anglo-Italian communities.

Manuscript Properties and Provenance

In order to indicate the Naples manuscript's Anglo-Italian resonances proficiently, it is helpful to commence this discussion with an introduction into the current state of research regarding the manuscript. XIII.B.29 is a paper manuscript numbering 73 paginated folios and two flyleaves. A scribal colophon on page 146 records that the final text in the codex was transcribed in the year 1457.[5] The book can be subdivided into three parts. The first (pp. 1–20) is a (mainly gynaecological) recipe collection of unknown origin.[6] The second (pp. 21–22) consists of originally blank pages which are currently filled with what Manly and Rickert have described as "crude but spirited" post-medieval pen drawings (1940: 378). The third (pp. 23–146) is a collection of literary compositions in Middle English. The first and longest poem in the compendium is *Sir Bevis of Hampton* (pp. 23–79). The other texts are an account of the life of St Alexius (pp. 80–86); *Libeaus Desconus* (pp. 87–113); a fragment of *Sir Isumbras* counting 122 lines (pp. 114–115); a truncated (missing ll. 1–91) version of Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* (pp. 119–146); and, added in the manuscript's last remaining empty space, the envoy (a short stanza at the end of a poem used to address an imagined audience) to Lydgate's "Doublenesse" (p. 146).

Weldon (2009: 705) has argued XIII.B.29 was "carefully designed as a 'whole book'", with its three sections bound together as they are currently from the beginning.[7] The codex' separate sections appear indeed to have all been produced by the same scribe, who refers to himself once as "more" (p. 113) and once, in code, as "mprf" (p. 146).[8] However, the possibility remains that the remedies and the literary texts were combined later, and that the originally empty pages that now separate the two sections formerly served as a covering (Mosser, 2023). Regarding the identity of the scribe, Manly and Rickert (1940: 378) have followed Koch (1902: 266) in conjecturing that the copyist was called "Harry More". The proposed first name is based on the drawing of a miniature rabbit or a hare (suggesting "Harry") that follows the coded spelling of the copyist's name in the manuscript's final colophon on page 146.[9] The same scholars have also listed potential candidates from existing archival records; these are a "John More" (a stationer in Oxford), a "Richard More" (a stationer in London), and a "William More" (a scrivener in Bristol) (Manly &

[5] The colophon is transcribed in Mosser's catalogue (2023): "Hic pennam fixi penitet mi si male scripci qd mprf [a sketch of a rabbit] A° d[omi]ni 1457 | 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10." [Here I lay down my pen; I regret if I have written badly, as said by More in the year of our Lord 1457].

[6] For an edition, see Vallese (1940).

[7] The "whole book" presented in quotation marks is here a technical term that designates a mode of analysis that prioritises the reading of medieval miscellanies and the literature contained therein as integrated "wholes". See further Nichols and Wenzel (1996).

[8] Mills (1969: 7) identified two scribes; Adams (2022: 170) prefers interpreting Mills' change in scribes as a change in ink. Fellows (2017: li) proposes the recipes were written by a different scribe.

[9] For an image of the colophon, see Weldon (2009: 719).

Rickert, 1940: 378; see further Salisbury & Weldon, 2013: 183). None of Manly and Rickert's identifications is based on conclusive evidence, and, as Mosser (2023) has noted, "the matter needs further investigation".

Various forms of additional information suggest the manuscript's provenance should still be sought in the southwest of England. The first of these is that the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Middle English* (*LALME*) has identified the dialect of the manuscript's *Clerk's Tale* as that of Dorset.[10] The second involves a short verse that appears in More's colophon terminating the transcription of *Libeaus Desconus*:

> He that louyth welle to fare.
> eur to spend and neuer spare.
> But he haue the more good.
> His here wol grow throw his hood. (p. 113)
>
> [He who loves to fare well,
> Always to spend and never to save,
> Unless he has great wealth,
> His hair will grow through his hat.]

This text, which presents an image of someone on the road to ruin, that is, someone whose "hood" is in danger of becoming so threadbare that it will no longer cover the "here" underneath, has been catalogued as the earliest attestation of a certain proverb (Apperson, 1929: 278). Similar idiomatic expressions appear in slightly later texts. John Skelton's satirical poem *The Bowge of courte* (*c*. 1498) includes the line "His here was growen thorowe oute his hat" (Scattergood, 2015: l. 350) and Thomas Deloney's *Thomas of Reading* (before 1600) contains the phrase "out you durty heeles, you will make your husbands hayre growe through his hood I doubt" (1612).[11] However, as Adams (2022: 170–171) has demonstrated, the stanza's origins are made more complex by the fact that another version of the text appears to have been part of a more extensive series of verses that decorated the dining hall of the now ruined priory of St. Stephen in Launceston, Cornwall (see further Robbins, 1963: 342; Rose-Troup, 1937). The manuscript which records transcripts of the no-longer-visible graffiti is Oxford, Bodley MS 315.[12] This codex in turn includes a colophon that states it was ordered to be chained in the common library of Exeter Cathedral after the passing of its owner, Roger Keys, in 1477.[13] Whether More was directly inspired by the walls of the priory in Launceston or whether he acquired the text through some other means remains unclear (cf. Adams, 2022: 171). Nevertheless,

[10] The *LALME*'s LP no. for the Naples manuscript is 9490. An earlier assessment also places the dialect in the south of England and gives additional examples. See Koch (1902).

[11] Both examples are from Apperson (1929: 278).

[12] The Bodley version runs:

> Who so loueth wel to fare.
> Euer spend and neuer spare.
> Bot he haue the more good.
> His heer wol growe thurgh his hood. (Robbins, 1963: 342)

[13] This is clear from the colophon (Craster & Madan, 1922: 509).

Launceston, Exeter, and Dorset are all in relative proximity, and it is possible the text circulated in the region, either orally or textually, during the fifteenth century. Finally, a name, presumably an ownership mark, appears in a sixteenth-century cursive script on the first flyleaf: "Hampton Henry". The appellation's local derivation, possibly once again indicating a southwest provenance (depending on whether this refers to the town of Southampton), is particularly intriguing because it matches that of the manuscript's predominant literary protagonist, Sir Bevis of Hampton.

One of XIII.B.29's first known modern readers was Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) (Lockhart, 1837: 717; Scott, 1910: 872–873).[14] A celebrated aficionado of chivalric romances and antiquities, the Scottish author was informed about the presence of a compilation of medieval English literature in the Royal library of Naples when he visited the city "for the dead months of winter" in 1831–1832 (Grierson, 1932–1937: 28, vol. 12). In a letter dated October 22, 1801, Scott had described *Bevis* to George Ellis (1753–1815)—later to become one of the Middle English text's first modern editors (1805)—as "the dullest Romance of priis which I ever attempted to peruse" (cited in Mitchell, 1987: 13).[15] While examining the manuscript in Naples, however, Scott appears to have long since changed his mind about the significance of the narrative.[16] He decided to commission a copy of the text for a friend in Edinburgh, who seems to have been in possession of another edition already (Lockhart, 1837: 717). A journal entry from William Gell (1777–1836), an authority on the archaeology of Pompeii and a friend to Scott, describes several humorous interactions between the esteemed author and Sticchini, a young Neapolitan priest who, aside from acting as Gell's own amanuensis, had been appointed to replicate the medieval text (Lockhart, 1837: 717; also see Scott, 1910: 873). Sticchini is said to have ultimately produced a facsimile-like transcription, an extraordinary achievement, given he was copying, as Scott noted in a letter, "a language of which he [did] not understand a word" (Grierson, 1932–1937: 47, vol. 12).[17] The linguistic confusion between Scott and Sticchini is of particular interest because it contextualises the current back of the codex, which bears the label "MS. Di Poesie Tedeschi" (manuscript of German poems), as well as a note on the first flyleaf that was recorded by one of the manuscript's post-medieval Italian possessors (Laing, 1845: 59). The inscription claims its anonymous author owns the manuscript and that "Questo manoscritto" was written "in lingua

[14] Scott's engagement with the manuscript is also discussed briefly in Khalaf and Cioffi (2018: 142).

[15] The statement is with reference to an enclosed "packet of Sir Gy", which is described as the dullest romance second only to *Bevis* (cited in Mitchell, 1987: 13). "Romance of priis" is an allusion to a passage from Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*, which runs:

> Men speken of romances of prys,
> Of Horn child and of Ypotys,
> Of Beves and sir Gy … (Benson, Robinson, & Cannon, 2008: 216, VII. 897–899).

[16] Scott seems to have regained significant interest in the text in subsequent years, as he refers to "Ascapart and Bevis Bold" in *Marmion* (1809) (1899: 70, l. 5, introduction to first canto, xviii). He also discusses Bevis in the introduction to "Kempion" (1812); his edition of the Auchinleck version of *Sir Tristem* (1819); and his essay on chivalry (Mitchell, 1987: 13–14).

[17] The transcript still exists and is now preserved at Abbotsford, a heritage institution housed in Scott's former residence dedicated to preserving his collection, under the title *Old English Metrical Romances, transcribed from MSS. in the Royal Library at Naples, by Sticchini. MS. 2 vols. sm. 8vo.*

tedesca".[18] In this instance, however, the erroneous statement has been corrected by a later hand to "inglese" (Laing, 1845: 59; Schipper, 1877: 6).[19]

Early Readership and Text Selection

Upon its rediscovery by English-speaking scholars in the early nineteenth century, XIII.B.29 has been studied most extensively by *Bevis* and Chaucer experts. Fellows' (2017) two-volume edition of *Bevis* for the Early English Text Society includes a transcription of the manuscript, complementing Kölbing's edition (1885–1894) that uses the earlier Auchinleck codex (*c*. 1340) as its base version. Members of the latter group have also pointed out that XIII.B.29 can be contextualised against a literary tradition that becomes popular *c*. 1450, whereby single Chaucer tales are excerpted into larger literary compendia (Owen, 1991: 107–108). The book is one of five that extract the *Clerk's Tale* in this manner (Adams, 2022: 155–156; cf. Mosser, 2022: 287). Intriguingly, the ending of the *tale* in XIII.B.29 is more complete than other such Chaucerian extracts, its missing beginning possibly having been caused by the fact that More copied an incomplete exemplar (Owen, 1991: 107–108). The manuscript's version of *Libeaus Desconus* has been published twice in relatively recent times: once by Mills (1969) and once by Salisbury and Weldon (2013). Meanwhile, the manuscript's fragment of *Sir Isumbras* has received little attention since the nineteenth century (Kölbing, 1880). The same is true for the Middle English version of *St Alexius*, which was last edited in 1877 (Schipper).[20] A team of Italian scholars has published preliminary plans for a digital edition of the entire manuscript (Cioffi et al., 2015; Khalaf & Cioffi, 2018). However, such an online resource has at the time of writing this article not yet been realised.

Even if modern scholarship has focused mostly on *Bevis* and the *Clerk's Tale*, it merits emphasising that the interests of postmedieval researchers do not seamlessly align with those of medieval and early modern readers. All the literary texts in XIII.B.29 were read widely in late medieval England. *Bevis* appears in six manuscripts, several fragments, and at least twelve print witnesses from before 1580 (Fellows, 2008; cf. Mooney et al., 2023, no. 3250). In the same way, *Sir Isumbras* was, as Waugh has stated, "apparently popular and quite widely circulated" (2021: 461–462). It survives (partially) in nine manuscripts and at least four early print editions (Mooney et al., 2023, no. 1934). *Libeaus Desconus* exists in six manuscripts and, according, to Weldon, should again be counted "among the most popular of the Middle English romances" (Mooney et al., 2023, no. 2824; Salisbury & Weldon, 2013: 11); The manuscript's version of *St Alexius*, which belongs to the so-called six-line stanza subgroup, appears in four codices (Mooney et al., 2023, no. 4923);

[18] A photograph of the respective leaf is included as Fig. 1 in Cioffi, Geremia, and Khalaf (2015: 372).

[19] The early miscataloguing of manuscripts written in Germanic languages is more common in early Italian catalogues. For a further example, see Frank (1925: 100–101).

[20] Nevertheless, scholarship on the legend of St Alexius is marked by a "constant output of new research" (Golinelli, 2016: 141 n. 2). The Naples manuscript uses "Alex"; this article uses "Alexius" throughout.

other Middle English versions of the *Alexius* legend occur in eight more (Mooney et al., 2023, nos. 379, 382, 2572, 3102, 6486). Lydgate's poem "Doublenesse" appears in at least four manuscripts (Mooney et al., 2023, no. 5793); the envoy separately in an additional two (Mooney et al., 2023, no. 4120). Finally, while there is no clear evidence for direct transmission, some other codices do feature selections of the same texts as the Naples manuscript. London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A. ii and Oxford, Bodleian Library Ashmole 61 both preserve *Isumbras* and *Libeaus Desconus*. Cambridge, Gonville & Caius College 175/96 contains *Isumbras* and *Bevis* (see further Evans, 1995: 51–82).

XIII.B.29 offers few unambiguous clues about its earliest intended audience and ownership. However, several indications do support the suggestion that the manuscript was initially envisaged as a so-called household book. This genre label, as defined by Boffey (2000), specifically signifies a manuscript designed to be of use to members of a medieval family. This proposition is attractive because it rationalises XIII.B.29's attentiveness to popular tastes, conduct literature, and practical information such as recipes. The codex' lack of decoration, its transcription by a single professional scribe, and its comparatively cheap materials and design further signify it should be contextualised against an emerging market of middle-class readers.

Weldon (2009) has argued that the texts in XIII.B.29 were selected with a female reader in mind. The argument, which was published in the wake of a broader development in medieval studies that focused on identifying female author- and ownership in anonymous manuscripts, provides a thought-provoking explanation for the juxtaposition and inclusions of specific texts.[21] The presence of gynaecological remedies, specifically, suggests some of the manuscript's content must have been of interest to women.

Meanwhile, it is important to point out that Weldon's female-readership hypothesis is based on the contents and the arrangement of the texts (2009: 703). The envoy to Lydgate's "Doublenesse", which addresses ''ye wymmen'' (p. 146) and which Weldon (2009: 706) reads in conjunction with the remedies as "a significant marker of the intended female audience", can equally have been selected by the scribe as a metatextual comment to be read in conjunction with the just ended *Clerk's Tale*: to avoid men like Walter, women should arm themselves with "A mighti schilde of doblenesse" (p. 146).[22] In this manner, the Naples excerpt from Lydgate would fit with a more widely attested contemporary custom whereby the unrewarding resolution of Griselda's perpetual endurance of domestic abuse ("Grisildis moot al suffre and al consente, / And as a lamb she sitteth meke and stille" [ll. 537–38]) prompted scribes to leave annotations in manuscripts.[23] As Clarke (2008; also see Green, 2012) has recently pointed out, a fourteenth-century Italian copyist, Francesco d'Amaretto Mannelli, made such marginal comments alongside his version of the *Decameron*, which includes Boccaccio's original version of the tale. Assuming the role of what Clarke (2008: 197) has described as an *altera*-Griselda, he—perhaps

[21] See further Purdie (1998). For some critical remarks about Weldon's arguments, see Adams (2022: 170–179).

[22] Here following the reading suggested in Owen (1991: 108). See further Adams (2022: 172–175).

[23] The text of Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* is cited throughout by line number from Benson et al. (2008).

in a comparable manner to XIII.B.29's More—provided a reaction that he felt was preferable to the tale's emotionally unsatisfactory conclusion. Francesco, however, opted to be less implicit than his English counterpart: "Pisciarti in mano Gualtieri! chi mi ristora di dodici anni? le forche?" (Piss in your hand, Gualtieri! Who'll give me back twelve years? The gallows? (cited in Clarke, 2008: 200; see further Green, 2012).

Anglo-Italian Communities

Moving beyond exclusively internal evidence, it is stimulating to notice that specific narratives engage thematically with the inhabitants and geography of the Italian peninsula. In this manner, Bevis and his son fight "A Lombard of London towne— / A nobil man of renowne" (ll. 4711–4712) during a street battle in England's capital.[24] In addition, *Bevis* contains a section that is not present in its Anglo-Norman source where two belligerent kings from "Calabre" (l. 3182) and "Poyle" (l. 3183) (Apulia) become "dragons vile" (l. 3203) for their sins. They move "Fro Tuskan into Lumbardy" (l. 3220) until one installs himself "into the court of Rome, / And flyȝe vndir Peteris brigge" (ll. 3223–3224); the other takes up residence "Vndir an hille […] Beside Coleyne cite" (ll. 3232–3233). The story of St Alexius begins and ends in Rome: "þer he was fed and boren, / þer his wonynge was biforen" (Schipper, 1877: 77, ll. 244–245). Sir Isumbras, in Ashmole 61's complete version of the text, boards a ship that "wente unto hethyn lond" (Shuffelton, 2008: l. 524). *Libeaus Desconus* features a "Sir Lambert" that is "Prowte as eny Lombard" (Salisbury & Weldon, 2013: 123, ll. 1652, 1655; also see the discussions on pp. 175–176). Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* ordinarily begins with describing that its action takes place "… at the west syde of Ytaille / Doun at the roote of Vesulus the colde" (ll. 57–58) and that Walter, Griselda's tyrannical husband, is "The gentilleste yborn of Lumbardye" (l. 72; see further Hardman, 1980). The Naples manuscript's *Clerk's Tale* lacks these specific lines as its opening is truncated. The text's north Italian setting is, however, consistently made clear on subsequent occasions: "deyntevous vitaille" (l. 265) is said to come "as fer as last Ytaille" (l. 266); Walter hides the children "at Boloigne" (l. 589); and when the female protagonist dies, it is said that "Grisilde is deed, and eek hire pacience, / And bothe atones buryed in Ytaille" (ll. 1177–1178).

The manuscript's inclusion of English texts that combine Italian themes has so far escaped scholarly attention. This fact is surprising, given that the manuscript itself travelled to the Mediterranean relatively soon after its production in 1457. The Early Modern aspect of the script that records the name "Henry Hampton" on the first flyleaf suggests the book may still have been in England at the beginning of the sixteenth century. A pen drawing on the second flyleaf, however, places it in Naples *c*. 1600. The sketch depicts a hand holding a bell. Manly and Rickert have argued that this is a rebus or visual word puzzle for Tommaso 'little bell' Campanella (1568–1639), a notable Dominican friar, poet, and philosopher who after spending

[24] The text of *Bevis* is cited throughout by line number from the Naples text in Fellows (2017), unless otherwise indicated.

twenty-seven years in prison for conspiring against the Spanish king (at this time also the king of Sicily and Naples) gained favour with pope Urban VIII (1568–1644) for his astrological abilities (Ernst & De Lucca, 2021). Manley and Rickert, with the assistance of Vallese, were able to determine that the Neapolitan author seems to have signed letters as "squilla" [little bell] (1940: 379; see further Vallese, 1939: 7–10). The same team of researchers established that the ownership note discussed briefly above presented another key insight, as it states that the book was once in the possession of "Diomede di leonardis" (fol. ii, for images see Cioffi et al., 2015: 372–373). This Diomede has not yet been located in any historical archive. Presumably, however, he acquired the book through some hereditary connection to Giovan Battista De Leonardis, who defended Campanella from November 1599, when the latter stood trial in Naples (Amabile, 1882: 71–72).[25]

A compilation of medieval English literature must certainly have been an extremely rare commodity in Early Modern Italy. The manuscript's transportation from England to the Italian peninsula has few straightforward parallels. Aside from the Vercelli Book, only an exceptionally small number of collections of English literature can be verified to have travelled to and remained in Italy during or shortly after the Middle Ages.[26] Following the dissolution of the monasteries, shortly before 1545, an unidentified individual at Cambridge sent around 200 manuscripts to Rome where they were acquired by Cardinal Marcello Cervini (1501–1555, later Pope Marcellus II) (Carley, 1986: 93; Crook, 1983; Frank, 1925: 101). At least some of these remain in the Vatican collection, and one, Ottoboni 626, includes a section that in the words of Frank (1925: 101) is "farced [i.e. 'crammed'] with English poems". Likewise, Pavia, MS Aldini 69, a mostly Latin manuscript that contains a marginal English version of The Lord's Prayer was brought to Northern Italy during the late thirteenth century (see further Opalińska, 2021: 88). Thomson (1934: 235) proposed it may have belonged to "a wandering English student or a returning Italian". Less comparable is Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS CCXXV, a fifteenth-century prayer book that contains three English devotional texts and appears to have been acquired by its Piedmontese donor in Paris between 1832 and 1836 (Rudolf, 2011: 419–420).

[25] The Neapolitan philosopher wrote late in life that his lawyer had purposefully chosen to mount a shoddy defense for the sake of a promotion: "più presto avvocò contra per diventar Consigliero" [he sooner advocated against to become a counselor] (cited in Amabile, 1882: 79). However, Campanella also dedicated a sonnet to De Leonardis where he likens him to "santo Leonardo", the patron saint of prisoners, and stresses the legal man's abilities: "da bocca gli esce vampa / di leggi, d'argomenti e d'altre prove" [from his mouth comes a blaze of laws, arguments, and other proofs] (Vinciguerra, 1938: 226, no. 14). Campanella had much to be grateful for, as the crimes he stood accused of carried the death sentence and De Leonardis was, as the sonnet's title describes, Naples appointed "avvocato de' poveri" [lawyer of the poor]—a title which the poem relates "gli è amico" [is dear to him] (Vinciguerra, 1938: 226, no. 14; see further Amabile, 1882: 71–72). Perhaps the manuscript changed hands between Campanella and De Leonardis around 1600 (see also Mills, 1969: 7). If so, there is a distinct possibility that the Italian philosopher acquired XIII.B.29 not in Naples but somewhere in the North of Italy. In the decade preceding his trial, Campanella had led a peripatetic lifestyle and he had spent time at major centres of learning such as Rome, Florence, and Padua; in the year preceding his arrest, however, he resided in his hometown Stilo, a small settlement on the Calabrian coast (Ernst & De Lucca, 2021). For an additional relationship between the Campanella and the Diomedis family, see Weldon (2009: 704 n. 4).

[26] On theories regarding the transportation of the Vercelli Book, see Halsall (1969: 1545).

Collections of medieval English literature in Italy are so unusual that the current presence of the book in Naples casts an alluring sidelight on the manuscript's thematic interest in Anglo-Italian communities. In this regard, it merits inspecting a specific passage (abbreviated for clarity) from the manuscript's version of *Bevis*. This describes the figure's involvement in a battle in the centre of London:

Beuys went throw Gose Lane;
Þer him was do moche schame—
Þerin he was so narow brouȝt
Þat he him myȝt defende nouȝt.
…
Furthe he passid into Chepe;
Ther gan many ayen him lepe.
…
Gy and Mylis ben armed wele,
Bothe in iren and in stele.
Sur Gy bistrode a rabite
That was moche and nouȝt lite,
That Sur Beuys with his hond
Had ywonne in paynym lond.
...
Sur Milis, withouten faile,
Bestrode a rabite London to assaile[.]
...
Over the Temyse thei come as swithe.
The portcolys ther were drawe,
And many men ther were slawe.
Ludgate thei sette on fire;
...
A Lombard of London towne—
A nobil man of renowne—
Had him gadrid a gret ost,
And come to Beuys with grete bost.
...
Tho come prekyng his son Sir Gy,
His douȝty fadir to socory,
With Randunay in is honde.
He smote the Lumbard and him fonde;
...
So hard thei gan togadir mete,
The blood gan renne in eche strete.
As it seieth in romaunce,
Bothe in Englond and in Fraunce,
So many men ther were dede
That the watir in Temze waxid rede.
From Seint Marie at Bowe. (ll. 4623–4757)

This passage is complex and to develop a nuanced interpretation of the described events it is helpful to begin with contextualising the various references to London's geography. At the beginning of the fight, Bevis, at this point isolated, wrestles his way through "Gose lane" (now Bow lane) and then reaches "Chepe" (now Cheapside) where he encounters "A Lombard of London towne" who has gathered "a gret ost".[27] When his two sons come "to socory", they traverse the "Temyse" and set fire to "Ludgate". This landmark, one of London's four ancient gates, no longer exists, as it was broken down in 1760; its former location is remembered, however, in the street name "Ludgate Hill" as well as in that of the nearby Church of Saint Martin Ludgate (Wheatley & Cunningham, 1891: 444). A postmedieval reconstruction of "Seint Marie at Bowe", built by Christopher Wren after the great fire of London, stands a few hundred metres to the east.

The places that *Bevis* mentions north of the river all fall within Cheapside, London's historical financial centre. The presence of a Lombard in this area is particularly appropriate, as one of the thoroughfares close to where Bevis and his sons end up fighting is called Lombard Street. Throughout the later Middle Ages, this was the main residential area of the city's Italian immigrant population (Bradley, 1992; Guidi-Bruscoli, 2016; Lambert, 2018). In his study of the Lucchese community in late medieval England, Lambert (2018: 91) provides several names of north Italian merchants who either owned residences or rented homes in the area. From 1378, Lombard Street also housed the City of London exchange, which was the foremost supplier of gold for the London mint (Allen, 2012: 220, 270).

Significantly, the London passage differs slightly across *Bevis* manuscripts: Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck) adds a few more locations, recording the "gret bataile" (l. 4314) took place "Betwene Bowe and Londen ston" (l. 4315);[28] Manchester, Chetham's Library 8009 mentions Bevis "rode forthe in to Bredstrete" (l. 4101) before entering "Chepe" (l. 4113);[29] Cambridge, University Library Ff 2.38 states that "the watur of Temys" was not only red "Fro Seynt Mary at Bowe" (as described in the Naples manuscript) but from the church "to London Stone" (ll. 4756–4757).[30] Importantly, the characterization and role of Lombards is also not uniform across manuscript versions. As Pearsall (1997: 53) has pointed out, Chetham's Library 8009 gives a rendition of the battle in which north Italian immigrants are present from the start. As soon as Bevis begins fighting "Meny Lumbardis he gan mete" (l. 4102). The same manuscript also provides a unique and gruesome description of the battle site: "In euery strete men myght se / Lumbardys on hepys dede there lye" (ll. 4233–4234).

Auchinleck specifically mentions that the London passage was adapted from "the Frensche bok" (l. 4306), presumably indicating *Boeve* (XIII.B.29 instead says "As

[27] For the identification of Goose Lane as Bow Lane, see Wheatley and Cunningham (1891: 129).

[28] *Bevis* citations from Auchinleck are from Kölbing (1885–1894). For a discussion of this monument and its folklore, see Clark (2010). The monument, probably a Roman milestone, remains on Cannon Street (which connects to Bow Lane) at the time of writing, although neither in its original location nor in the location described by Clark.

[29] *Bevis* citations from Manchester, Chetham's Library 8009 are from Kölbing (1885–1894).

[30] *Bevis* citations from Cambridge Ff 2.38 are from Fellows (2017).

it seieth in romaunce, / Bothe in Englond and in Fraunce" [ll. 4753–4754]). Despite the reference to an act of translation, the original late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman poem does not contain the London episode. Like the story about the two Italian dragons that was discussed earlier, it is an interpolation found only in the Middle English adaptation (Kölbing, 1885–1894: xxxvii; Weiss, 1979: 73–74). The inclusion of a standoff between a British knight and a Lombard adversary, however, fits well with the thematic interests of other romances. A similarly worded encounter occurs, for example, in the couplet version of *Guy of Warwick*:

> With that come a Lombard ride,
> As a man of grete pride.
> …
> The Lombard was hote withoute lette,
> And Guy him hath with harme grette. (Zupitza, 1883–1891: 79, ll. 1359–1360, 1365–1366)

Comparably, in the late fourteenth-century *Sir Launfal* a passage runs:[31]

> A knyght ther was yn Lumbardye;
> To Syr Launfal hadde he greet envye—
> Syr Valentyne he hyghte. (Laskaya & Salisbury, 1995: 224, ll. 505–507)

The cited passages present Lombards in a negative way. They make "grete bost", are "of grete pride", and are characterised by "greet envye". The "prowte" knight Lambert we encounter in *Libeaus Desconus* and the oppressive Walter in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* also conform to this unfavourable stereotype (see further Hardman, 1980).

In his study "Zum Problem der feigen Lombarden", Henning Krauss (1971: 210; see further Lilian, 1962: 362–363; Olson, 1961: 259–261) argues that 'cowardly Lombards' become a prevalent cliché in long narrative poems that can be dated to around the turn of the thirteenth century. One of the main motivations behind the motif's development appears to have been the contemporary expansion of the financial industry in northern Italy. This economic change did not just destabilise and challenge feudal power structures, as Krauss (1971: 213–215) points out, but also precipitate the subsequent growth of north Italian immigrant communities in various European cities. The business activities of Lombards in London focused significantly on banking and money lending, which made them vulnerable to accusations of usury and fraudulence.

Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (Peck, 2013) contains a passage which discusses "… hem that duelle among ous here, / Of suche as we Lombardes calle" (bk. 2, ll. 2100–2101) and states they are "the slyeste of alle" (bk. 2, l. 2102) and particularly adept at "A craft which cleped is Fa-crere [deception]" (bk. 2, l. 2122; see further Olson, 1961: 261, n. 11). The fact that Lombards were resident aliens and immigrants from a distant location also conceptually likened them to people from outside

[31] The passage about the Lombard Sir Valentyne is neither in *Sir Launfal*'s source, the earlier Middle English poem *Sir Landevale*, nor in the inspiration for the latter work, Marie de France's *Lanval*. It has been suggested the passage was inspired by a now lost romance. See Laskaya and Salisbury (1995: 202).

Christendom. As Pearsall (1997: 53) has pointed out, several English texts from the late medieval period place north Italians in the same conceptual category as Jews and Saracens: Reason in *Piers Plowman* (Schmidt, 2011: 167, C IV l. 194) mentions "Lumbardus of Lukes, þat leuen by lone as Iewes". In the records of parliament from 1376, the Commons petition[32]:

> … qe touz les Lombardz queux ne usent autre Mestier fors cele de Brokours, q'ils soient deinz brief faitz voider la terre; issint come male Usure, & touz les subtils ymaginations d'icell sont par eux compassez et meyntenuz. Entendantz, tres-nobles Seign[eu]rs, q'il i ad deins la terre moult greindre multitude de Lombardz Brokours qe Marchantz, ne ne servent de rien fors de malfaire: Issint come plusours de eux qi sont tenuz Lombardz sont Juys, & Sarazins, & privees Espies… (Strachey, 1767: 332, no. 58)
>
> [That all Lombards who have no other trade than that of broker should quickly be expelled from the country in that wicked usury and all its misleading schemes are conceived and maintained by them. Understand, very noble Lords, that there are in the country many more Lombard brokers than merchants, who are not good for anything except misconduct; in this manner many of them that are taken for Lombards are Jews and Saracens, and secret spies.]

The discriminatory friction between the groups which Gower divides as "ous here" and "em that duelle among ous" occasionally led to violent confrontations. Some of these remind of the street fight in *Bevis*. For example, Fabyan's *Chronicle* (Ellis, 1811: 630) records an occurrence in May 1456 (around the same time the Naples manuscript was transcribed) whereby "an Italye[n]s seruant walked throughe Chepe with a dagger hangynge at hys gyrdell". A servant of a textile merchant—who the text relates has himself been to Italy—alerts the "straunger" that carrying arms in public is illegal and after disliking how his comment is received, proceeds to break the Italian's weapon "vpon his hede" (1811: 630). The incident snowballs into a larger protest whereby "a multytude of rascall & poore people of þ[e] cytie" end up ransacking and looting "certeyn Italyens placis, & specially vnto þ[e] Flore[n]tynes, Lukessys, & Venycie[n]s" (1811: 630). In July 1457, renewed attempts to plunder the Italian colony again instigated "a grete and heynous riotte withyn the Cite of London ayenst merchaunt straungers" (cited in Ruddock, 1951: 164; see further Flenley, 1910: 652–654; Cohn & Aiton, 2013: 297). Finally, when the rebel Jack Cade had camped outside London in 1450, he had likewise sent a letter that charged "all Lumbardes & strangers, being marchaunts, Ienewies, Venetians, Florentines" to deliver weapons and clothing (Stow, 1580: 653). "[I]f this oure demaund be not obserued and done", the letter threatens, "we shall haue the heades of as many as we can get of them" (Stow, 1580: 653).

The encounter between Bevis and the Lombard has a remarkably detailed parallel in the assassination of Janus Imperial in 1379. This affluent Genoese merchant

[32] Other examples are also discussed in Pearsall (1997: 53).

owned a residence in St Nicholas Lane, a side alley of Lombard Street. The following is a testimony given in court by one of the two murderers:

> … in quodam vico vocato Chepe in London' obuiauerunt pariter post occasum solis et deinde porrexerunt usque in Lumbardstret et deinde vsque in quandum venellam prope Lumbardstrete vocatam seynt Nicholaslane hakun, vbi quidam Iohannes Imperial de Genua, mercator, erat hospitatus explorando prefatum Iohannem Imperial, et cum ibidem peruenissent et ipsum percepissent sedentem super quendam truncum extra portam… (Sayles, 1971: 40)
>
> [in a certain area called Cheapside in London they met after sunset and subsequently proceeded to Lombard Street, and then into a certain alley close to Lombard Street called St Nicholas Acons Lane, where Janus Imperial from Genoa, a merchant, was staying, in order to seek out the aforementioned Janus Imperial. And when they arrived there, they encountered him sitting outside the gate on a log.]

Paul Strohm (1996; see further Pearsall, 1997: 55–56) has gathered a broad range of sources to contextualise Imperial's subsequent murder, establishing that London wool merchants probably organised the assassination because they were apprehensive that the Genoese merchant's planned commercial projects would harm their business. What concerns us here specifically, however, is the similarity in the street plans and routes between the quoted court case and *Bevis*. Similar to the fictional knight, the murderers begin in "Chepe" and from there wander into the Italian district, walk through an alley, and ultimately single out "A Lombard of London towne— / A nobil man of renowne". The implication that emerges is that the poet who composed *Bevis*' London interpolation was not only intimately aware of the capital's geography but also specifically intent on staging a more common trope of contemporary romance within the realistic urban theatre of his own lived experience. If Bevis' fight in the capital is not based on a "distorted reminiscence" from London's past, as Judith Weiss (1979: 74) has argued, it is, to some degree, a topographically accurate and thematically pertinent literary imagination about London's late medieval present (see further Burge, 2016: 47–48).

Rouse (2008: 124) has argued that Bevis' battle in Cheapside is governed by a xenophobic subtextual conceit, whereby the protagonist's provinciality provides him with a suitable identity to rid London's cosmopolitan community of undesirable alien residents: "the emphasis is placed upon the contrast between Bevis, as provincial English, and the cosmopolitan, non-English nature of London". These arguments respond, as Rouse (2008: 114 n. 1) clarifies, to a broader tradition in scholarship, published mostly during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, that argues in favour of the development of an English national identity during the late medieval period.[33] In this context, the Middle English *Bevis* has indeed been hypothesised to belong to a contemporary rise in (proto-)nationalism. Turville-Petre (1996: 112), in his monograph *England the Nation*, has argued that the Auchinleck manuscript, which preserves an influential version of the *Bevis* text, may be interpreted

[33] For a counterargument, see Pearsall (2001).

as "a handbook for the nation". Campbell (2006: 206), in similar manner, has contended that the text's "construction of other nations and peoples, in particular a Saracen threat […] allowed an English identity to emerge in contrast to them".

Rouse's reading of the London passage is not readily applicable to the version of *Bevis* preserved in the fifteenth-century Naples manuscript, however, for several reasons. Primarily, the hypothesis that Bevis is a "provincial" individual, capable of mitigating non-Englishness is challenged by the figure's numerous exploits in distant lands and his persistently itinerant lifestyle. He has married the daughter of the king of Armenia, a "Saracen", and the narrative takes great care to characterise Bevis' family as Eastern (on this subject, see especially Calkin, 2004: 145–147). When Miles and Guy rush to assist their father in his street fight against the Lombard, they are both riding a "rabite", that is, an Arabian horse. One of these animals, the cited London passage explains, Bevis "Had ywonne in paynym lond". In the Auchinleck manuscript, the exotic nature of the mounts is stressed further, as Sir Miles rides a "dromedary" (l. 4301). It is thus important not to confuse the postmedieval popularity of Bevis of Hampton *in* Southampton with any "provincial" characteristics present in his character (see further Dolmans, 2023: 5). Indeed, one of the principal reasons why Bevis' presence in London's cosmopolitan centre is so pertinent is that he and his family have ancestral links to England but also belong to the group of international immigrants that inhabit the capital's commercial district.

When we shift focus from literary evidence to archival sources, the impression again emerges that readers of XIII.B.29 most likely would have viewed a nomadic character from Southampton—particularly one with an international family—as unsuitable for embodying a provincial counter-narrative to the cosmopolitan commotion of London's merchant community. Certainly, it is accurate that only very few places in England during the late Middle Ages accommodated Italian immigrants (see further Guidi-Bruscoli & Lutkin, 2017: 92 n. 10). The *Calendar of the Close Rolls* (1908: 608) describes how in January of 1360 two "lawful merchants of Lombardy" by the name of "John Restor of Milan" and "Guidolus de Kancio" had even managed to get themselves arrested in York because they were "unknown and no one understood their idiom" (also discussed briefly in Guidi-Bruscoli & Lutkin, 2017: 91). Nevertheless, late medieval Southampton was in this instance explicitly unrepresentative of other English settlements: in the fifteenth century, the town's Italian community was the second largest in Britain, smaller only than that of London. The maritime trading hub was one of England's two main gateways to the Italian peninsula and the only one on the southwest coast (Guidi-Bruscoli & Lutkin, 2017: 91; Ruddock, 1951; also see Ruddock, 1946: 33–34). The earliest history of the Italian community in Southampton is unclear because of a lack of sufficient historical data (Ruddock, 1951: 120). The first galleys, however, appear to have arrived after the establishment of a sea route from Italy to England, around the turn of the fourteenth century (Ruddock, 1944: 195; 1951: 19–21). From the ports of Genoa, Venice, Florence, and Livorno, traders brought weapons, spices, textiles, and various victuals (Ruddock, 1944, 1951). To these places, they chiefly exported high-quality wool (Ruddock, 1944: 193). Registers and port books suggest that Italian must have been spoken on Southampton's streets, as these sources sometimes contain mercantile Italianisms (Trotter, 2011: 168; Tiddeman, 2023). Indeed, one of

the reasons behind Janus Imperial's murder appears to have been discontent among London mercers about the wealthy Italian's intention to purchase Southampton Castle and to use it as a storage facility (Strohm, 1996: 7).

Bevis contains a description of Southampton's seaside that specifically characterises the harbour as a multicultural meeting point: "On the [strond]. / [...] Marchauntes thei found many and fale / Of hethyn lond" (ll. 544–547). The narrative then proceeds to describe *B*evis' departure "ouer þe flood" (l. 551) on one of these merchant ships, bound for an uncertain life in the Mediterranean. Intriguingly, it is not entirely improbable that the Naples manuscript at one point undertook a similar journey to the Mediterranean as its main literary character, either aboard an Italian vessel returning home, or aboard an English vessel sailing out. This hypothesis must remain a suggestion. Nevertheless, the evidence gathered above implies that interpreting *Bevis* benefits from paying close attention to the associations its intended audience may have had with the changing multicultural subtexts of regional locations. London's Cheapside, with its Italian residents, is the most detailed and accurate setting in *Bevis*, advocating not only that the author of the interpolation was intimately familiar with the area, but also suggesting that the intended audience of the episode was imagined to appreciate the conflation of urban and narrative spaces and was receptive to the notion that the capital's commercial district was one of the few locations in England that facilitated encounters between English and Italians. However, fifteenth-century readers of XIII.B.29 may have discerned new layers of significance in the same episode: they would have been able to connect Bevis' anti-Lombard encounter in London not only to contemporary riots in the same area but also to the flourishing of an Italian community in his hometown of Southampton.

Conclusions

XIII.B.29 is a complex manuscript with a unique medieval and postmedieval history. Its material makeup, dialect, and texts—which range from secular conduct literature, to popular entertainment, to medical information—suggest it may have been initially created as a household book for a family living near the southwest coast of England. After it travelled to Italy either during the second half of the fifteenth or during the sixteenth century, however, it came into the possession of Tommaso Campanella. The philosopher, in turn, seems to have presented the codex to his Neapolitan lawyer, most probably around 1600.

In late medieval England, the intense rivalry between Italian and English merchants and specifically the financial activities of Lombard merchants in London generated various expressions of anti-Italian sentiments. In romance literature, north Italians start appearing as cowardly stock figures, often specifically to emphasise the bravery and fighting skills of British knights. In socio-political discourse, Italian merchants were described unfavourably; in everyday life, some became the victim of targeted riots and street attacks. The Middle English *Bevis* contains an episode concerning a battle in the heart of London that combines all these traditions, describing how the narrative's protagonist engages an

antagonistic Lombard and decimates the local population around Lombard Street. Overlaps between Bevis' fictional battle in London and later accounts from court records and chronicles indicate the passage is not just geographically accurate but also thematically apposite. Through the exploitation of the multicultural connotations of its setting and characters, the episode echoes thirteenth-century apprehensions about contemporary Anglo-Italian relations. The Naples manuscript, however, was transcribed in the mid-fifteenth century, when Southampton's Italian community had grown substantially and Anglo-Italian contact in London witnessed significant upheavals. Accordingly, the book's readers possibly interpreted Bevis' street fight in the capital against a Lombard differently than earlier audiences. The manuscript communicates a further interest in Italian subject matter through its inclusion of Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* and *St Alexius*, the former of which is set in Piedmont and the latter of which is set principally in Rome.

XIII.B.29 is among a very select number of codices containing English literature that travelled to the Italian peninsula during or shortly after the Middle Ages. While the exact way in which the manuscript was shipped from England to Italy remains uncertain, the extensive commercial maritime contact between various Italian cities and London and Southampton during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries raise the possibility that the manuscript arrived in Italy through this flourishing socio-economic transportation network. Two factors link the manuscript to Southampton specifically. The first is the name of the protagonist in the manuscript's longest text, *Sir Bevis of Hampton*; the second is a name that appears on the first flyleaf: "Hampton Henry". Regardless of the exact manner in which XIII.B.29 ultimately arrived in Naples, reading its contents against a background of broader developments in international commerce and the concomitant presence of Anglo-Italian communities in London and Southampton helps provide a more expansive assessment of the potential thematic interests governing its compilation.

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