

A NEW MANUSCRIPT OF *KNYGHTHODE AND BATAILE*

Knyghthode and Bataile is a fairly free Middle English verse rendering of Vegetius' *De re militari*, comprising in its fullest form 3,028 lines in eight-line and rhyme royal stanzas. The poem was initially addressed to Henry VI, by one who describes himself as a 'person of Caley's' (line 33), and possibly presented to the king in 1460.¹ It is the second English translation of Vegetius' treatise on warfare, after a prose version commissioned by Sir Thomas Berkeley in 1408.² Hitherto, it has been known to survive in three manuscripts: Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 243; London, British Library, Cotton MS Titus A. xxiii, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 45 (Part II), an imperfect copy.³ Now, through the alertness of Dr Nigel Ramsay, it is possible to add another manuscript to the record of the circulation of this work.⁴

London, College of Arms MS R. 25 is a composite manuscript containing texts of different kinds from different periods, the contents of which were put together in the eighteenth century by the herald John Anstis (1669–1744); there is no catalogue description. On fols 24^r–62^v, as the manuscript is now foliated in modern pencil, occurs a copy of *Knyghthode and Bataile*.⁵ It is written throughout in a single, fluent anglicana, with some secretary features, in a hand of the late fifteenth century;⁶ as we show below, it cannot have been copied before 1461. The manuscript is on paper, measuring roughly 270–80 × 180 mm.⁷ The poem is set out in single columns, with five spaced rhyme royal stanzas to a page.⁸ In the first quire there is a frame roughly ruled in plummet; this disappears in the rest of the manuscript. The manuscript is undecorated, entirely lacking in rubrication or illumination; there is nothing to indicate it was intended to be decorated. There is a single running title, 'Of knyghthode', on fol. 24. The only marginalia are the possible owner-marks 'Iohn' on fol 30^v, repeated on 34^v; and, in a different hand, on fol. 35^r beside the line 'And a choors of cohortacioun' (line 1037), 'maria'.

The manuscript is quired in gatherings of eight leaves, each of which is signed by letter and arabic numeral 1–8 in the lower recto outer margin. The first gathering has only six leaves (signed a3–a8). The following gatherings are signed bi–b8 (fols 30–7), ci–c8 (fols 38–44), di–d8 (fols 45–52), ei–e8 (fols 53–60), fi–f2 (fols 61–2).⁹ Hence, apart from the loss of the opening two leaves, the physical integrity of the manuscript is clear.

The contents of these missing opening leaves invite some speculation. In the Pembroke manuscript, the poem opens with eleven eight-line stanzas (lines 1–88) dedicated to Henry VI. Since the text in the College of Arms manuscript

begins at the top of the recto of fol. 24 at line 89, the start of Part I of the poem, the evidence of the surviving quire signatures would seem to suggest that these opening stanzas were originally part of the manuscript.

Such an assumption may not be secure, however. Other textual evidence suggests that these stanzas may never have been present. Like the College of Arms manuscript, Cotton and Ashmole omit the Lancastrian prologue to Part I (1–88), and remove further Lancastrian references. A prologue to Part III in praise of Henry VI (lines 978–1026) found only in the Pembroke manuscript is also excised, and two addresses to Henry VI (r. 1422–161, 1470–1) in lines 121 and 2880 are replaced with Edward IV (r. 1461–70, 1471–83). Since the College of Arms manuscript follows Cotton and Ashmole in all these revisions, it does not seem likely that the prologue to Part I was originally part of its text.¹⁰ This does not explain the missing leaves, however, and it is ultimately not possible to know what, if anything, they contained. The textual correspondences between all three manuscripts also establish a *terminus a quo* for the College of Arms copy of at least 1461 since it too must have been copied after the coronation of Edward IV.

In some other respects, however, the College of Arms manuscript stands apart from the other three manuscripts. The uniform characteristics of the design of these other copies have been defined by Wakelin as consisting of identical size and the ‘regularly disposed verse in eight rime royal stanzas to a leaf, with marginal letters marking them *a* to *d* on the recto and *e* to *h* on the verso’.¹¹ The standardized format of these manuscripts is not evident in the College of Arms copy. Not only does it have ten stanzas to a leaf, it also lacks the Latin and English glossatorial apparatus found in the other manuscripts. Nor does it have the index after the text that appears in both Pembroke and Cotton (Ashmole is imperfect).

Another distinctive aspect of the three previously recorded manuscripts is what Wakelin has termed the ‘scribal endeavor in transmitting the poem’s linguistic and literary niceties with care’.¹² The scribes of the Cotton and Ashmole manuscripts work to preserve the orthography and punctuation found in the earlier Pembroke manuscript, demonstrating a commitment to reproducing *Knyghthode and Bataile* as ‘a metrical and verbally distinctive literary work’.¹³ This process manifests itself most clearly through a programme of scribal correction found in Cotton and Ashmole, enabling Wakelin to posit a striking intimacy between the previously known manuscripts.¹⁴

The practice of the scribe in the College of Arms manuscript is markedly different. On occasions, accuracy or intelligibility disappears: thus, where the other manuscripts read ‘A Mesurer’ (line 789), College of Arms has ‘Ain essure’; where the others read ‘The fifthe cours’ (line 1846), College of Arms reads ‘The first cours’.¹⁵ There are also variations in word order. For example, at line 2175

the manuscript has 'ha no^t a knyght to fight vnexercissid'; the other manuscripts read: 'Ha not to fight a knight vnexercised'.¹⁶ Similarly, line 2455 in the manuscript reads 'mustule is good eke the way tamende' whilst the others have 'The muscul eke is good, the way to mende'.¹⁷ At times the apparent difficulties in following his exemplar were considerable for the scribe. Thus, on fol. 55^v at lines 2491–6, after accurately writing out the opening line of the stanza and the first two words of the second line, he abruptly changes his mind and departs from the line-order of the other manuscripts. Instead, he shifts to the next line of the stanza, writing the third line above the struck-through opening words of the second line. He then inserts the missing line three lines later. Dyboski and Arend print this stanza as follows:

A malliol, a bolt of wilde fier is,
 A fallary, a shafte is of the same;
 Thorgh felt & hide hem shoote: al on a fier is;
 But shoote hem thorgh into the tymber frame;
 With myghti alblastris go to this game,
 Brymston, rosyn, glewe, oyle incendiary
 With flax doon on this shafter is necessary.¹⁸

In College of Arms the corresponding stanza reads:

A malliol a bolt of wild fier is
~~A fallery~~ throwe felt and hide hem shete all on a fier is
 bot shoot hem throwe in to the tymber frame
 w^t myghty Alblastris go to the game
 A falliry a shafte is of the same
 Brymston Rosyn glewe oile incendiary
 w^t flux doon on this shafte is necessary.¹⁹

The College of Arms manuscript differs from the previously known manuscripts in its demonstrable loss of the careful control over material form that all the other manuscripts share. In its evident scribal vagaries, it offers an ironic comment on the poet's final prayer to its copyists that

Thi writer eek, praye him to taken hede
 Of thi cadence and kepe Orthographie,
 That neither he take of ner multiplie.²⁰

But, despite its lateness and evident textual inferiority, the College of Arms manuscript does provide an additional indication of both the late medieval English interest in vernacular forms of Vegetius' work in general, and of *Knyghthode and Bataile* in particular.²¹

NOTES

¹ *Knyghthode and Bataile: A XVth Century Verse Paraphrase of Flavius Vegetius Renatus' Treatise 'De re militari'*, ed. R. Dyboski and Z. M. Arend, EETS, OS 201 (London, 1935). Line references are to this edition. On the manuscripts of the poem see Daniel Wakelin, 'Scholarly scribes and the creation of *Knyghthode and Bataile*', *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700*, 12 (2005), 26–45. Critical treatment of the poem has been sparse, despite its manifold interest. For a broad assessment of the work, see Wakelin's 'The occasion, author, and readers of *Knyghthode and Bataile*', *MÆ*, 78/2 (2005), 260–72, and Catherine Nall, 'Sacralizing warfare', in *Reading War in Fifteenth Century England: From Lydgate to Malory* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 114–38. For an overview of Vegetius' importance in the Middle Ages, see Christopher Allmand, *The De re militari of Vegetius: The Reception, Transmission and Transmission of a Roman Text in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2011). Allmand discusses *Knyghthode and Bataile* at pp. 187–93.

² *The Earliest English Translation of Vegetius' De re militari: Ed. from Oxford MS Bodl. Douce 291*, ed. Geoffrey Lester (Heidelberg, 1988). See Ralph Hanna III, 'Sir Thomas Berkeley and his patronage', *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 878–916; and Nall, *Reading War*, pp. 16–29. For the translation of Vegetius into English, see Allmand, *The De re militari of Vegetius*, pp. 185–93. A Scottish prose version of Books I and III was also produced c.1494 by Adam Loutfut, Kintyr Pursuivant. See Diane Bornstein, 'The Scottish prose version of Vegetius' *De re militari*', *Studies in Scottish Studies*, 8 (1970–1), 174–83 and Allmand, *The De re militari of Vegetius*, pp. 235–8. Beyond such English translations, Vegetius also circulated widely within medieval England in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and French versions from the twelfth century onwards. See Charles Schrader, 'A handlist of extant manuscripts containing the *De re militari* of Flavius Vegetius Renatus', *Scriptorium*, 33/2 (1979), 280–305 (p. 283) and Nall, *Reading War*, pp. 11–47 (p. 13). For a synthetic assessment of the transmission of Vegetius' text, see Michael D. Reeve, 'The transmission of Vegetius's "Epitoma rei militaris"', *Ævum*, 74/1 (2000), 243–354.

³ See Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse* (London, 2005), no. 3185.

⁴ We are very grateful to Dr Ramsay for drawing our attention to this manuscript, and, with typical generosity, permitting us to report on his discovery.

⁵ It should be noted that one leaf is unfoliated, between the current fols 38 and 39. The manuscript comprises forty leaves as currently constituted.

⁶ One stanza, the last on fol. 27^v, is written in a different, more formal hand with textura features.

⁷ Horizontal measurements are approximate given the tightness of the present binding, which has also precluded study of any watermarks the manuscript might contain.

⁸ The only variation from this practice comes on fol. 51^r where the opening line of Part IV is written as two lines, 'This iij^{de} [*sic*] as longe | As the other tweyes.'

⁹ The signature number on f2 has been cropped.

¹⁰ The College of Arms manuscript also omits lines 866–977, lines that immediately precede the prologue to Book III. The lines amount to sixteen rhyme royal stanzas. Their absence suggests the loss of two leaves, with four leaves to a page. As noted above the collation is regular and the College of Arms manuscript consistently has five stanzas to a

page. Such facts may indicate that these leaves had become detached from the exemplar, or its ancestor, from which the College of Arms manuscript was copied. In addition, the penultimate stanza of the first part of the work is missing on fol. 31^r (lines 607–13). This allows Part II of the poem to begin at the top of fol. 31^v. The adjustment is necessitated by the scribe's decision to dispose the verse in five stanzas per page, as opposed to the four stanzas preferred by the scribes of the other manuscripts.

¹¹ Wakelin 'Scholarly scribes', p. 28.

¹² Ibid., p. 30.

¹³ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁴ Through his analysis of the careful programme of correction used by the scribes of Ashmole and Cotton, Wakelin develops the earlier claim by Dyboski and Arend, that 'as regards the text itself, *A* [Bodleian Library, Ashmole 45 (Part II)] and *C* [British Library Cotton Titus A. xxiii], when compared with *P* [Cambridge, Pembroke College 243], appear to be faithful transcripts of a copy perfectly concordant with *P*' (ibid., p. 36). *Knyghthode and Bataile*, xiv.

¹⁵ College of Arms, R 25, 33^v; fol. 45^v.

¹⁶ Ibid., fol. 51^r.

¹⁷ Ibid., fol. 55^r.

¹⁸ *Knyghthode and Bataile*, lines 2490–5.

¹⁹ College of Arms, R 25, fol. 55^v.

²⁰ *Knyghthode and Bataile*, lines 3026–8.

²¹ It may also offer further testimony to the early heraldic interest in Vegetius manuscripts, on which see Lester, *The Earliest English*, p. 17 and Nall, *Reading War*, pp. 31–3. The text on fol. 23 immediately preceding *Knyghthode and Bataile*, transcribed with the assistance of C. J. Lambert, appears to be related to visitations made by the herald Robert Cooke (who is named) in the sixteenth century.