

Richard III's Books: VII. Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*¹

ANNE F. SUTTON AND
LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS

IN THE MIDDLE AGES the legends of Troy formed one of the best-known, largest and most inspiring collections of stories. Some evidence of the variety of interest they aroused in the fifteenth century and later is given by the marginalia in the manuscript owned by Richard III.²

The stories about the siege of Troy, its prelude and aftermath were liked as literary entertainment, as were other 'romances' of classical origin, but the fall of the great city could also be interpreted as a moral tale. Comparison was made, for example, between Helen and Eve — the weakness and lust of the former were seen as the cause of everything that befell in the ensuing war. Troy was regarded as a symbol of the transitory nature of power and fame: both its ruins and Helen's vanished beauty were popular illustrations for the *ubi sunt* theme (. . . where are the snows of yester-year?).³ The ten-year struggle was also a vivid example of the evils of a war started for an insignificant reason. However interpreted, the events were considered true history: Hector and Troilus had been as much alive as David, Alexander and Caesar, and the deeds of all these heroes could be studied for military precedents and examples of chivalric behaviour.

The fact that the Trojan princes were dispersed after the destruction of their city moreover enabled nations and families all over Europe to claim descent from these men of ancient stock — so much so that a sceptical sixteenth century Dutch humanist commented vulgarly that 'the sow of Troy farrowed many pigs'.⁴ It was probably this historical aspect with its nationalist and propagandist possibilities that attracted any medieval English king, including Richard III, though every fifteenth century reader would also expect to learn from the stories and improve the mind: 'all that is wreton is wreton to our doctryne' was Caxton's comment in his edition of the story.⁵

The Tradition

Homer himself hardly plays a part in the medieval history of the Troy cycle. Apart from the Greek dramatists he is the ultimate source, but his *Iliad* was virtually unknown.⁶ He was effectively screened from medieval eyes by the work

attributed to two participants of the Trojan War: Dictys the Cretan, who fought on the Greek side, and Dares the Phrygian, who helped to defend Troy. Both were used as sources by medieval writers but Dares with his Trojan background was the favourite of medieval readers. Dares and Dictys were considered more trustworthy than Homer and the other classical poets, such as Vergil and Ovid, but in reality their 'reports' had been written in the first and fifth or sixth centuries A.D. in an attempt to improve on Homer by eliminating the supernatural and by making the narrative more impartial than he had. 'Dictys' wrote the first and the more extensive of the two accounts, to which 'Dares' made what was probably a 'reply' from the Trojan side. Only in the beginning of the eighteenth century were both 'eyewitness' accounts exposed as forgeries.⁷

Dictys and Dares were used by Benoît de Sainte-Maure, 'official romance historian' of Henry II of England, in about 1160 for his long verse romance, *Le Roman de Troie*.⁸ It was Benoît who created the story of Troy as it was known in the middle ages. He included Jason and the Golden Fleece and introduced the love story of Troilus and Briseis, who were to become Troilus and Cressida and have a long literary career.⁹

More than a century later the Sicilian, Guido delle Colonne,¹⁰ probably in the belief that Benoît's poem was merely a corrupt version of a more serious work, re-wrote it in Latin prose. Delle Colonne was a judge in Messina from circa 1259 to 1280; he may or he may not have been the man of the same name mentioned by Dante as a member of the Sicilian school of poets. This school was greatly influenced by French poetry and the author of the *Historia Troiae* must have known the *Roman de Troie* though he never mentions Benoît. Guido's exact purpose in writing is unknown, but his text, respectable, factual and moralising, was accepted as genuine, scholarly history. For centuries no one knew that Benoît was the source and Guido the imitator and not the other way round. The prose version was in its turn copied, translated, put into verse again, and became one of the first books to be printed.¹¹

Fifteenth-century Interest in the Story

Richard III and his contemporaries had several English verse redactions of Guido's 'chronicle' available to them (in theory at least): the *Gest Hystoriale* of the *Destruction of Troy* of 1350-1400,¹² the *Laud Troy Book* of about 1400,¹³ and Lydgate's *Troy Book*, begun in 1412 as a commission from the future Henry V.¹⁴ In prose there was Raoul Lefèvre's French version, made at the order of Philip the Good of Burgundy in the 1460s, which was conceived as an original work but ended up as a mixture of a new text and a translation,¹⁵ and secondly Caxton's English rendering of this, completed at the request of Margaret of York and printed in 1473-4.¹⁶ We do not know whether Richard owned or read any of these — his brother Edward IV owned an illuminated copy of Lefèvre — but it appears that the 'original' Latin text of Guido found favour in his eyes for this and its companion volume, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, are the only surviving books bearing his royal signature. Several reasons for why this should be so can be put forward.

It is possible, but unlikely, that these two are the only manuscripts he ever signed as owner and king. In more ornate manuscripts his badges, arms or signature may have been erased or painted over to record new ownership, and

perhaps his signature in the present manuscripts only survived because no one was sufficiently interested in this simple Latin copy to clean it up. As time passed the royal signature would, of course, *add* to the value of the book. Richard's ownership and signing of both texts suggest at the very least that he was interested in the material *and* able to read Latin.

There are two ways to try and find out how people in the late middle ages used and 'lived with' the legends of Troy and Guido's version in particular. The authors who re-interpreted them can be considered, as their work must give some indication of what they enjoyed and were interested in, and it is also possible to examine what non-literary users did with the contents of the stories.

The three authors of the principal middle English versions, Lydgate and his two anonymous predecessors evidently regarded Guido's text as a genuine chronicle — as the author had probably intended his readers to do — and all express their admiration and indebtedness to him in their prologues.¹⁷ They are careful to preserve his facts and at times cleverly divide fact from fantasy and ornament, and even clear up some of Guido's inconsistencies. They are equally careful to make the story more attractive to their audience by bringing details up to date, inserting new Christian elements, emphasising knighthood and chivalry and generally making use of contemporary ideas. They don't seem to have been particularly interested in Guido's astronomical, geographical and moral digressions, and as regards his recurrent expressions of misogyny, for example, they either leave them out as irrelevant, give women a role more in keeping with courtly convention as inspirers of acts of chivalry, or, as Lydgate did, add a touch of humour or absurdity to Guido's remarks.

The emphasis on individual deeds of valour is very marked. The *Laud Troy Book* at first has Hector as the main hero, towering over all others, and after his death Achilles and others are successively given special treatment. The author evidently thought that his audience needed a central figure to focus on. Treating the heroes as individuals enabled the author to make them into concrete examples of how a soldier should behave. The battle scenes also become more attractive to the reader when they are centred round one distinct protagonist.

All three middle English versions, for all their prolixity, are more readable and entertaining than Guido himself. We can conclude that the *Historia Troiae*, if read in the original, was read more for its historical facts and the deeds of individual heroes, and that Guido's literary style and moralising additions, though not unacceptable to medieval readers and listeners, were not regarded with particular interest or uniform approval. Medieval response to Guido's work was perhaps not that different from ours. People may well have found the same passages boring and pedantic, but they needed his work as an historical source and had no means of knowing that events did not happen as he described. (For his style see the examples given below, which in translation do not quite convey the incredible affectation of Guido's language.)

Most educated, literate people in the fifteenth century must have been very familiar with the Troy stories. They were probably as vivid to them as the saints' lives of Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* and, because they were seen as actual history, they aroused a practical antiquarian interest.

When Waleran de Wavrin, the nephew of the Burgundian historian Jean de Wavrin who dedicated his 'Chronicles of England' to Edward IV, visited the

Levant in 1443, he inquired about the exact site of Troy and especially the place where the Greek ships had beached. When told that it was quite near and that he could not miss it, he expressed a fervent wish that the Turkish army would land in the very spot and that he could 'have at them' (*davoir a faire a eulz*).¹⁸ He, like his countrymen and the rest of Western Europe, favoured the Trojan side. The Trojan War had always been the symbol of the conflict between East and West: to the Greeks the Trojans had been the Eastern enemy; the Romans, descendants of the Trojan Aeneas, saw the Greeks as their adversaries and the medieval West took the same stance, equating Greece with Byzantium until the crusades and the Turkish advance confused this notion and the fall of Constantinople in 1453 gave a new dimension to the story. The position of East and West was clear enough but the conqueror of Constantinople, the 'Great Turk', then added to the confusion by claiming that he, too, had Trojan blood in his veins. As the heir of Priam he stated his intention of rebuilding Troy-the-Great and avenging Hector on the ancient enemy of Greece.¹⁹ He protested against the plans for a new crusade on the grounds that he was related to the Italians who were preparing war against him. The pope was not convinced by his argument! Nor were the other princes of the West who, like Philip the Good and Richard III, still dreamed and talked of a real crusade.

The English claims of Trojan descent and use of this as propaganda can be illustrated from the work of William Worcester, whose interests were certainly antiquarian and practical. He describes the English nation as 'havyng theire first originalle of the nacion of the noble auncient bloode of Troy more than ML. yere before the birth of Christ'. Elsewhere in his book encouraging a war against France he refers to the English king's descent from 'the valiant knight Hector of Troy', whose deeds should be emulated.²⁰ As in the main literary versions, practical application of the tales of Troy centred on the deeds of the ancient heroes, who were also relatives of the contemporary princes! They were to be remembered and imitated against the distant heathen Turk as well as against the nearby French. Literary products celebrating real-life heroes often took Hector as model: he was one of the classical trio among the Nine Worthies and it is well known how Georges Chastellain mourned Philip the Good as 'second Hector'. In 1471 it was wished for Richard of Gloucester himself that 'To the honoure of Ectour he myghte comens [attain]'.²¹

The most important figure in Guido's story as far as England is concerned was Aeneas' great-grandson Brut, and the most important event — though it takes only one sentence²² — the founding and naming of Britain. The whole structure merely served as support and background for this: the chronicle with its mass of circumstantial detail removed all possible doubt of its veracity and was the authority on which in the later middle ages the Trojan origins of the British people and especially of its kings was based. Before Guido and even before Benoît the story had been taken up by Geoffrey of Monmouth and it was he who cleverly created a link between the classical Worthy, Hector, and the Christian Worthy, Arthur. Arthur's Trojan descent made him the relative of many royal houses and boosted the claims of his successors not only to Wales and the throne of Scotland, but also to Brittany, Normandy and the whole of

France. It is not surprising that in Richard III's library Guido's 'History of the Destruction of Troy' contained Geoffrey's 'History of the Kings of Britain' as a 'supplement'.

Guido's Text

Paris meets Helen; Helen is described (book 7):

He saw with amazement how her thick blond hair glowed and shone; it was divided in the middle by a snow-white parting and everywhere golden threads were wound almost imperceptibly through it, covered it and held it strictly in place. Below it was the stretch of her smooth forehead like milk and snow, and her gleaming temples overhung by the mass of golden hair, a wonder to behold. No unattractive roughness marred the smooth surface of her brow. He also admired her twin eyebrows at the lower curve of her shining forehead: they were becomingly shaped, blond and high, and formed like two arcs; not hidden in a great cloud of dark hair, but drawn in correct balance they emphasised the circles of her shining eyes.

A battle scene (book 16):

Hector went into battle like a madman and killed whoever came to meet him. A young knight called Boetes attacked him boldly and courageously but Hector hit him on the head so heavily that he split him in two from his crown to his navel. He died instantly; Hector took his horse and had one of his servants lead it away. King Archilogus, a kinsman of Boetes, saw this, and with the intention of avenging the death of his relative he attacked Hector hardily. The latter rushed upon him — he was not hindered by Archilogus' armour but cut him in two with his sword. Archilogus immediately breathed his last in the midst of the battle. In his turn King Prothenor, bold and daring, went for Hector unexpectedly and attacked him with such force that he threw him from his horse, for he had not foreseen this sudden attack. Hector, however, was on his feet at once, mounted his horse again and rushed upon Prothenor and struck him so cruelly with all his strength that he divided his body into two halves.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Edition: N. E. Griffin (ed.), *Guido de Columnis. Historia Destructionis Troiae*. Cambridge, Mass., 1936. Translation: M. E. Meek, *Historia Destructionis Troiae. Guido delle Colonne*, Bloomington/London 1974, a very literal translation and therefore as 'unreadable' as Guido himself; useful for those who merely want to know the contents. For all aspects of the tradition of the legends of Troy and its early versions, translations etc. see W. Eisenhut, *Spätantike Troja-Erzählungen mit einem Ausblick auf die mittelalterliche Troja-Literatur*, *Mittelalterliches Jahrbuch*, vol. 18 (1983), pp.1-28; and e.g. the introduction to H. O. Sommer, ed., *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye . . . translated and printed by William Caxton . . .* London 1894; J. Burke Severs (ed.), *A Manual of Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, Connecticut 1967, Fasc. 11 Romances, pp.114-8, 274-7. See also M. R. Scherer, *The Legends of Troy in Art and Literature*, New York 1963.
2. See *The Ricardian*, vol. 8 (1988), pp.141-2.
3. Francois Villon's *Ballade de Dames du Temps Jadis* is probably the most famous example of the literature on this theme (see any edition of his poems); it contains the line . . . *où sont les neiges d'antan?* On the *ubi*

- sumi theme in general see for instance E. Gilson, *Les Idées et les Lettres*, Paris 1955, pp.9-38 and Philippa Tristram, *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature*, London 1967, pp.113-25.
4. Quoted in Wilma Keesman, *Troje in de Middeleeuwse literatuur*, *Literatuur*, vol. 4 (1987), pp.257-65. The quotation is from Abraham Kemp's life of the Lords of Arkel (Gorinchem 1656), a minor Dutch noble family who also traced back their family tree to an unnamed Trojan.
 5. William Caxton, *The Prologues and the Epilogues*, ed. W. J. B. Crotch, EETS, OS., 1928 (for 1927), p.8. Caxton is slightly misquoting St. Paul, in Rom. 15:4, who probably only meant the Bible.
 6. 'Homer' was only known in an abbreviated Latin version of 1070 lines, the *Ilias latina*, made in the first century A.D., see *Texts and Transmission*, ed. L. D. Reynolds, Oxford 1986, pp.191-4.
 7. Editions: Daretis Phrygii *De Excidio Troiae Historia*, ed. F. Meister, Leipzig 1873, and *Diety's Cretensis Ephemerides Belli Troiani Libri* . . . , ed. W. Eisenhut, Leipzig 1958, repr. 1973. Translation of both: R. M. Frazer Jr., *The Trojan War. The Chronicles of Diety's of Crete and Dares the Phrygian*, London/Bloomington 1966. The best discussion of both is in Eisenhut, *Spätantike Troja-Erzählungen* (see n.1), pp.11-28. Dares and Diety's were only two among many exponents of a vogue in Homer imitation; they are remarkable simply because their work survived, see N. E. Griffin, *Un-Homeric Elements in the Medieval Story of Troy*, *The Journal of English and German Philology*, vol. 7 (1903), pp.32-52.
 8. *Le Roman de Troie par Benoît de Sainte-Maure*, ed. L. Constans, 6 vols., Paris 1904-12.
 9. See R. K. Gordon, *The Story of Troilus*, Toronto 1978, which has the story (in translation) as it is found in Benoît, Boccaccio, Chaucer and Henryson; C. D. Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature*, *Guido delle Colonne's Historia Destructionis Troiae in Medieval England*, Woodbridge 1980, pp.133-50.
 10. Guido delle Colonne or de Columnis. The author calls himself '(Judge) Guido delle Colonne (of Messina)' in his prologue and at the end of the book, and says he completed it in 1287. It is not relevant to enter here into the controversy about his identity; for what is known of him see Meek (see n.1), pp.xxviii-xxx and references given there: Griffin (see n.1), pp.xv-xvi; Benson (see n.8), p.4. On Guido's use of Benoît, see Constans (see n.8), vol. 6, pp.318-34. There are, however, two supposed facts about delle Colonne which are of interest in the present context. The first is the tradition that he came to England in the retinue of Edward I (who visited Sicily on his return from the Holy Land) and stayed from 1273 to 1276. Attempts to trace this rumour back to its source have ended in John Bale's *Scriptorium illustrium maioris Britannie . . . Catalogus . . .* Basle 1557-9 (2 vols. in 1), vol. 2, p.136. Vossius, *De historicis latinis*, Leyden 1651, book 2 ch. 90, has the same information and says it comes from 'Boston of Bury', who was also extensively used by Bale. 'Boston of Bury' is the reputed author of the *Catalogus scriptorum ecclesiae* (c.1410). The only edition of this work, based on the only extant ms. (Th. Tanner, *Bibliotheca Briannico-Hibernica sive de Scriptoribus*, ed. D. Wilkins, London 1748), gives no more information about Guido than he himself gives in his own text (see above). Bale was not averse to adding some hypotheses of his own, but he may have had a source unnoticed by the present authors or not extant. Modern authors just repeat what Vossius said (see Meek, p.xxiv, n.40; the works mentioned there have all been checked but none of them contains any original information).

The second conjecture about Guido concerns his authorship of a 'great chronicle' and 'a history of England and its kings'; This has been mentioned in the preceding issue of this journal (*The Ricardian*, vol. 8 (1988), pp.137, 140 and 146, n.19). The first half of the theory must originate with Guido's own words in his prologue (our italics):

In hac . . . serie libelli totum invenietur inscriptum quod de tota historia universaliter et particulariter gestum fuit . . . (In the course of this little book all will be found written that happened generally and particularly in the whole of this history . . .).

He meant in the history of *Troy*, and Bale, who copied the sentence virtually verbatim, meant the same. Josias Simmler, in his third edition of Conrad Gesner's *Bibliotheca universalis* (1574), misunderstood the words, altered them slightly and created a '*chronicon magnum*' — the original *Bibliotheca* (1545) and Simmler's *Appendix* to it (1555) do not mention it. Between 1555 and 1574 Simmler, who hardly ever left his home town of Zürich but had correspondents in Switzerland, Germany and Paris, must have been informed of the contents of a ms. very similar to the one owned by Richard III, from which he concluded that its second part, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* was also Guido's work. On Geoffrey himself Simmler is vague: his only source appears to be Polydore Vergil.

It can be concluded that the rumour of Guido's English visit may have some substance, but his authorship of the English chronicle has not. Guido's only reference to England is the founding of Britain by Brut.

11. The *Historia Troiae* was printed in Holland c.1473. The last printed edition of the Latin text before the modern one by Griffin (see n.1) in 1936, was the Strassburg one of 1494. Translations were published frequently all over Western Europe.
12. The '*Geste Hystoriale*' of the Destruction of Troy, ed. G. A. Panton, D. Donaldson, EETS. OS. 39, 56, London 1869, 1874.
13. The *Laud Troy Book*, ed. J. E. Wülfing, EETS. OS. 121, 122, London 1902-3.
14. John Lydgate, *Lydgate's Troy Book*, ed. H. Bergen, EETS. ES. 97, 103, 106, 126, London 1906-35.
15. See *Charles le Téméraire* (catalogue of an exhibition at the Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, Brussels 1977), ed. P. Cockshaw et al., item 3, pp.79-80; A. Bayot, *La Légende de Troy à la cour de Bourgogne*, Bruges 1908. The Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, was interested in the stories because they included Jason (and the Golden Fleece), the 'patron' of his chivalric order. Why Jason was chosen and in what way the quest for the Fleece was comparable to Philip's own chivalric ideals remains a subject for discussion. It may have been the general knightly concept of a quest: to Philip it may have meant a crusade. His son Charles seems to have regarded his life-long struggle with Louis XI as his quest and France as the land of Colchis where the treasure is kept (see Livia Visser-Fuchs, *Sanguinis haustor* — drinker of blood, a Burgundian view of England, 1471, *The Ricardian*, vol. 7 (1986), pp.213-9).
16. Caxton's edition (see n.1) is mentioned in every article or book on him as it was the first book printed — at Bruges? — in the English language.
17. The '*Geste Hystoriale*', the *Laud Troy Book* and Lydgate's *Troy Book* will be considered here since they have been exhaustively and conveniently studied by Benson (see n.8). Most of what follows is indebted to him. The conclusions are our own.
18. Jean de Wavrin, *Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretagne* . . . , ed.: W. Hardy, Rolls Series, 5 vols., 1864-91, vol. 5, pp.38-9.
19. Wavrin (see preceding note), *ibid.*, p.360, and R. Vaughan, *Philip the Good*, London 1970, p.366 and reference given there. The Turks took advantage of the fact that the Latin for Trojans is *Teucri*.
20. In *The Boke of Noblesse*, ed. J. G. Nichols, Roxburghe Club 1860, repr. 1972, pp.2 and 20. John Capgrave's *Abbreuiacion of Chronicles*, ed. P. J. Lucas, EETS. OS. 285, 1983, puts the destruction of Troy in the year 4034 from the Creation of Adam — Christ was born in 5199 according to the same reckoning.
21. For Philip: *Oeuvres de Georges Chastellain*, ed. C. Kervyn de Lettenhove, 8 vols., Académie Royale de Belgique, Brussels 1863-6, vol. 7, pp.207-8. For Richard: *Political Poems and Songs* . . . from the *Accession of Edward I to that of Richard III*, ed. Th. Wright, Rolls Series, 2 vols., 1859-61, vol. 2, p.280, in 'On the Recovery of the Throne by Edward IV'.
22. At the beginning of book 2: Griffin (see n.1), p.11.

Addition to note 28 of the article on the present ms. (*The Ricardian*, vol. 8 (1988), p.147): the poem *Pergama flere volo* . . . which is often added in its entirety, or in part, to texts containing stories of the destruction of Troy, was exhaustively edited in *Carmina Burana*, ed. A. Hilka, O. Schumann, B. Bischoff, Heidelberg 1930 70, part 2, pp.139-60 and part 3, pp.204-5. It appears that other mss. and a printed edition of Guido (Strassburg 1494) contain precisely the two couplets inscribed in the Leningrad ms., but attempts to follow this up have not produced any new evidence concerning it. — Caxton in his edition (see n.1 above) also included seven random couplets of the same poem, after his epilogue to book three. The poem also occurs, for example, in a miscellany owned by Thomas Beckington, Bishop of Bath and Wells (died 1465), see A. Wilmart, *Le florilège mixte de Thomas Beckington*, *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 1 (1941), pp.41-84.