

Tres sunt Ricardi and the Crowland Chronicle

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This short article introduces a previously unnoticed copy of the poem on the three kings Richard, of which the well-known text stands at the end of the second continuation of the Crowland chronicle.¹ While the poem is sufficiently familiar to scholars to have influenced the title of a recent book by a leading medieval historian, it has attracted very little actual discussion.² Given the acerbic tone of much recent argument on the authorship and date of the Crowland continuations, one hesitates to venture into this arena at all. However, while I will expand a little on the possible implications of my discovery for our understanding of the authorship of the second continuation, I will not engage substantially in the broader debates circulating about the chronicle. The new evidence does not warrant that. At most, it lends qualified support to those who, with Alison Hanham, believe the second continuation to be a work of compilation, containing material by more than one author. With Michael Hicks, my chief goal is to expand our knowledge of one of the most important and controversial historiographical texts from late medieval England.³

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¹ Whether or not it formally concludes the continuation is a matter of disagreement. Cf. for example J.G. Edwards, 'The 'second' continuation of the Crowland chronicle: was it written in ten days?' *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 39 (1966), pp. 117-29, at p. 119, and H.A. Kelly, 'The last chroniclers of Croyland', *The Ricardian*, vol. 7 (1985-87), pp. 142-77, at p. 148, with A. Hanham, 'Author! Author! Crowland revisited', *The Ricardian*, vol.11 (1997-99), pp. 226-38, at p. 235. Daniel Williams did not believe there was a third continuation, and saw the poem (which he described as 'rather silly') as part of a long continuation written around 1500: D. Williams, 'The Crowland chronicle, 616-1500', in *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. D. Williams, Woodbridge 1987, pp. 371-90, at p. 383.

² N. Saul, *The Three Richards*, London and New York 2005. On p. ix Professor Saul links the title to Michael Prestwich's *The Three Edwards*; the poem appears in translation on p. xi.

³ M. Hicks, 'The second anonymous continuation of the Crowland abbey chronicle 1459-86 revisited', *English Historical Review*, vol. 122 (2007), pp. 349-70, at p. 370. Professor Hicks states that 'no other copy of this poem is known' (p. 361), an assertion which he uses to support authorship by Richard Langport. I feel apologetic about

Eton College MS 213 is a copy of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, made around 1420. It is most widely recognised for the adventitious drawing of Eton College and Windsor Castle which occurs on folio xv.⁴ Scholars of the Carthusian order know it as one of the books donated to Witham Charterhouse in Somerset by John Blacman (died 1485). After a distinguished career at Merton College Oxford, Eton College (which he served as precentor), King's Hall at Cambridge (where he was provost), and the college of Westbury-on-Trym (where he was dean), Blacman became a Carthusian, first at London, and subsequently at Witham, which was located in the diocese of his birth.⁵ In the decade after his arrival there around 1463, he donated to the charterhouse at least sixty-eight volumes, the titles of which are preserved in three book-lists found on folios vi^v and 1^r-2^v of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 154.⁶ Roger Lovatt, who has demonstrated the importance of these lists for our understanding of fifteenth-century Carthusian spirituality, describes the donation of a *Polychronicon* to a charterhouse as 'inappropriate' due to its secular nature.⁷ However, there is evidence that the manuscript was of some interest to Blacman's confrères. It contains numerous annotations relating to the diocese of Bath and Wells, in which Witham charterhouse was situated, some by Blacman himself and others by an individual called by Neil Ker the 'principal annotator' of the manuscript.⁸ The latter also wrote a long note on Carthusian customs on f. 201^r. The local and in one case order-specific nature of these annotations suggests that they were added at the behest of, and perhaps by, a member of the convent. There are also additions in other hands which postdate the manuscript's donation, and are thus almost certain to have been done by Carthusians. The most significant of these is the poem *Tres sunt Ricardi*, which is written on an end-leaf (f. 270^v) in a secretary hand of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century (Fig. 1). (The same scribe added another, unrelated note on f. 254^r.) It suggests that the Carthusians of Witham had an

contradicting him on this point so soon after the appearance of his authoritative and interesting article.

⁴ Illustrated most recently in A.F. Sutton and L. Visser-Fuchs with R.A. Griffiths, *The Royal Funerals of the House of York at Windsor*, London 2005, p. 3.

⁵ A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols, Oxford 1957-67, vol. 1, pp. 194-95.

⁶ Edited by Ian Doyle in *Syon Abbey with the Libraries of the Carthusians*, ed. V. Gillespie and A.I. Doyle, *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues* vol. 9, London 2001, pp. 629-51.

⁷ R. Lovatt, 'The library of John Blacman and contemporary Carthusian spirituality', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 43 (1992), pp. 195-230, at p. 218.

⁸ *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, ed. N. Ker *et al.*, 5 vols, Oxford 1969-2002, vol. 2, p. 783.

Tres sunt Ricardi quorū fortuna fit impar
 Sine par in paucos. brevis hinc sit pagina testis
 Nam concors horū finis sine posteritate
 Temporis atq; utpote vite modū et violentū
 Interitū faciat. Sed minor gloria pū
 prole q' tunc sancte prae atq; reuerſum
 baliste tela in ferunt apud extera regna
 Alteri depositus regno. cui curare clausus
 mensibz extorret aliquot fame velle pae
 Eligat pangs q' fame pasbra videt
 Terens exhausto nunc amplo dūmāz
 Edmundi cūcto non contentū nisi fratris
 Opponet soboles propulſus angulatus
 Illarū pater amicos post deūq; brios. Inuasi regni felle rancoreſſe opaco.
 Ille tūmū vitarū iam pōdet atq; coronam
 Anno milleſo & quater atq; vicesimo
 Adūcto quito cū lux fixitūſ adeſſet
 Duplex vindex deūq; apri pūmōm
 De vindex albe rosa rubra refulget in oſbe.

Fig. 1. Eton College MS 213, folio 270^r. Reproduced by kind permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College

interest in secular, specifically royal, affairs. This is further suggested by other additions, most significantly a diagram contained within a shield showing the descent of Edward IV from Edward III (f. ii^r), and an illustrated royal genealogy from Ecgberht to Henry VI on folios ix^r-x^v which has been carefully updated by at least one later hand to include Edward IV (f. x^v) and Henry VII (f. x^r).⁹

In the edition of the poem which follows I have arranged the text in four discrete verses as indicated in Eton 213. Abbreviations are shown and original capitalization and orthography retained. Words written above the main text line are punctuated with slashes (\ /). These words are not afterthoughts (this is not a draft of work in progress), but seem rather to have been omitted in haste and integrated subsequently. Hasty copying may also account for the illegible, cancelled word in line seven. The accompanying illustration shows that the text is partially written over erasures. These cannot now be read, even with the aid of ultra-violet light. I do not think that they suggested alternative readings. Whatever they contained probably had nothing to do with the poem, although the erased text beneath the first six lines may itself have been in verse. It is more likely that they were earlier additions to the manuscript scraped off to provide the scribe with a clean field. The partially erased name written beneath the text is in a post-dissolution hand and also has no bearing on the poem.

[Eton College MS 213, folio 270^r.]

Tres sunt Ricardi\, reges anglorum, / quorum fortuna fit impar
 Siue par in paucis, brevis hec sit pagina testis
 Nam concors horum finis sine posteritate
 Corporis; atque rapax vite modus et violentus
 Interitus fuerat. Sed maior gloria primi
 Prelia quod terre sancte gerit atque reuersum
 balista¹⁰ tela ferunt, apud extera regna.

versus¹¹

Alter depositus regno, cum carcere clausus
 mensibus extiterat aliquot, fame velle perire
 Elegit potius quam fame probra videre.

versus

Tercius exhausto minis amplo diuiciarum
 Eduuardi cumulo, non contentus nisi fratris

⁹ Neil Ker, whose analysis of the manuscript (see above note) is the best available, mentions neither the diagram on f. ii^r nor the copy of *Tres sunt Ricardi*.

¹⁰ The Witham text reads *balist*, with a mark of suspension following. This could be *balista* or, as in the Fulman text, *balista*. In the latter case it would be crossbow bolts.

¹¹ This and the subsequent abbreviation for *versus* are written in the margin.

Opprimeret soboles, proscribens auxiliaries.
 Illarum partes annos post denique binos
 Inuasi regni bello congressus eisdem,
 Ille trucem vitam iam perdidit atque coronam.
 Anno milleno C. quarter \quarter/ atque viceno
 Adiuncto quinto, cum lux sextilis \est augusti/ adesset
 Duplex undena, dentes apri stupuerunt
 Ac vindex albe rosa rubra refulget in orbe.

(Translation: There were three Richards, kings of England, whose fortunes were dissimilar, or alike in little; to which let this short account be witness. Assuredly they had in common an end without issue of their body, a life of greed and a violent downfall. But it was the greater glory of the first that he fought in the Holy Land and returning was struck down by a crossbow bolt in a foreign land. The second, deposed from his kingdom, after he had been shut up in prison for several months, chose to die from hunger of his own will rather than to bear the dishonour of ill fame. The third, after exhausting the ample mines of wealth that Edward had accumulated, was not content until he suppressed his brother's offspring, and outlawed their supporters; at last, two years after taking violent possession of the kingdom, he met these same supporters in battle and now has lost his savage life and his crown. In the year 1485, on the 22nd day of *sextilis* (that is, August), the teeth of the boar were blunted and the red rose, the avenger of the white, shines upon the world.)

While this text of the poem is substantially the same as that printed by Sir William Fulman, there are noteworthy differences.¹² These are conveniently demonstrated by comparing it with the text reproduced in Nicholas Pronay and John Cox's edition of the Crowland chronicle continuations, which is taken from Fulman's edition.¹³ First and most obviously, perhaps, it lacks the ascription to an author named Richard which seems to have occurred in the margin of Fulman's exemplar (*Versus Richardi de tribus regibus ejusdem nominis*). There is no indication of an epigraph here at all. The first two lines are different, adding the information that the Richards in question were kings of

¹² For Fulman's edition see 'Historiæ Croylandensis continuatio', in *Rerum Anglicarum Scriptorum Veterum Tom. I*, ed. W. Fulman, Oxford 1684, pp. 451-578, at pp. 575-76.

¹³ *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations: 1459-1486*, ed. N. Pronay, trans. J. Cox, London 1986, p. 184. This differs from Fulman's text only in its punctuation. Both editions use the classical diphthong æ, although, as Margaret Condon has pointed out, it is not used in BL MS Cotton Otho B xiii, the manuscript which almost certainly underlies Fulman's edition: M. Condon, 'The Crowland chronicle continuations 1459-1486', *History and Archaeology Review* (1988), pp. 5-11, at p. 7.

England, and noting in a rhetorical manner that their fortunes were 'unlike, or alike in little' rather than that they shared three basic characteristics in the context of differing fates. Some of the poetic irony is deducted from the circumstances of Richard II's demise with omission of the emphatic *certis*: here he 'chose' to starve to death, where the Fulman text says that he 'actually chose'. According to the Eton 213 version it is the 'ample mines' of Edward IV's wealth that were squandered by Richard III rather than the 'sufficiently ample store', and the *soboles* rather than the *proles* of the earlier king who were 'suppressed' by his successor. In the latter case the use of a different word for the princes does not seem important, although given the fact that this is probably the earliest surviving reference to their demise (whether physical or political), the variation is at least interesting. The scribe of the Eton 213 version has explained *sextilis* to his readers, perhaps suggesting local unfamiliarity with it. Finally, he states that the Tudor rose 'shines upon the world' rather than 'on our faces', as the Fulman text has it.

These differences show that variant texts of the poem were circulating in the wake of the battle of Bosworth. The geographical and constitutional distance between Carthusian Witham and Benedictine Crowland effectively disqualifies any possibility that the poem was transmitted directly from one to the other. In saying this it should be acknowledged that the annotations in Eton 213 reveal considerable knowledge of external, non-Carthusian texts. References to numerous chronicles, monumental epitaphs and other sources appear in the manuscript's margins, and in the royal genealogy mentioned above.¹⁴ However, these were all added before the second continuation of the Crowland chronicle was written. While Blacman's hand occurs frequently in the manuscript, he died in 1485, the earliest year in which the poem can have been composed. The poem must have been obtained and copied by another monk (or, much less probably, by a visitor to the charterhouse), who got it from a now unknown source. In any case, the textual discrepancies are adequate proof that the version of the poem in Eton 213 was not taken from the text edited by Fulman. It thus appears that *Tres sunt Ricardi* has no intrinsic connection to the second continuation. That it reached two such different, distant institutions suggests that it began life in a major centre, probably London; which is what one would expect if the poem existed independently of the Crowland chronicle.

With this conclusion in mind it is worth briefly considering the text of the poem transcribed by George Buck (died 1622) and published by his great

¹⁴ These include textual and/or pictorial references to Matthew Paris and other St Albans chroniclers, the Crouchback legend, and Robin Hood. I discuss them in forthcoming articles.

nephew.¹⁵ Hanham pointed out discrepancies between this and the text printed by Fulman, noting the possibility of different manuscript exemplars.¹⁶ Some of the variant readings were subsequently discussed by Henry Ansgar Kelly.¹⁷ Several scholars have asserted that Buck was working with the manuscript that seems to underlie Fulman's text, BL MS Cotton Otho B xiii.¹⁸ If this is so, then those differences present in Buck's version which affect the poem's sense must register a desire to temper the very negative impression of Richard III which is otherwise given. This conclusion is apparently supported by the fact that the most noteworthy difference between the Buck and Fulman versions is the omission of the reference to the king having 'suppressed' the princes, and also the use, discussed by Professor Kelly, of *mundanam* rather than *ille trucem* to describe Richard's life.¹⁹ Buck does not, however, cite the Crowland chronicle as his source, as he does in other places. Neither is he silent about the matter; he (or his great nephew) says it was transcribed 'from an old manuscript book'. While this proves nothing – he may simply have forgotten to record its precise source in his notes – it does raise a question which is also posed by the newly discovered version of the poem. Other discrepancies in the Buck and Fulman versions cannot be explained by a desire to ameliorate Richard's reputation. Besides those already mentioned, there are ten cases in which different words are used, too large a number to be attributed to haphazard transcription.²⁰ That the Buck version ends with *orbe* rather than *ore* is a point of correspondence with the Eton 213 text which suggests the influence of an exemplar other than Fulman's. In fact, given that the text has been shown by the discovery of the Witham version to exist independently of the Crowland chronicle, it seems to me that sufficient differences exist between the Buck, Fulman and Eton 213 versions of the poem to ascribe all three to distinct exemplars. If this is so,

¹⁵ G. Buck, *The History of King Richard III (1619)*, ed. A.N. Kincaid, Gloucester 1979, p. 218.

¹⁶ A. Hanham, *Richard III and His Early Historians 1483-1535*, Oxford 1975, pp. 101-02.

¹⁷ Kelly, 'Last chroniclers of Croyland', pp. 148-49, 167 n. 48.

¹⁸ *Crowland Chronicle Continuations*, p. 3; Hanham, *Richard III and His Early Historians*, p. 101; Hicks, 'Second anonymous continuation', p. 351. The relevant section of this manuscript was largely destroyed in 1731.

¹⁹ Kelly, 'Last chroniclers of Croyland', p. 167 n. 48.

²⁰ Buck l. 1 = *erat*, Fulman l. 1 = *fit*; Buck l. 8 = *quum*, Fulman l. 8 = *cum*; Buck l. 13 = *Henrici*, Fulman l. 14 = *Illarum*, Buck l. 14 = *Suscepti*, Fulman l. 15 = *Innas*; Buck l. 14 = *confectus*, Fulman l. 15 = *congressus*; Buck l. 15 = *tum*, Fulman l. 16 = *jam*; Buck l. 16 = *octavagena*, Fulman l. 17 = *quarter atque viceno*; Buck l. 17 = *et*, Fulman l. 18 omits *et*; Buck l. 19 = *refloret*, Fulman l. 20 = *refulget*; Buck l. 19 = *orbe*, Fulman l. 20 = *ore*. There are also two divergences in the word ordering; cf. Buck ll. 7, 18 with Fulman ll. 7, 19.

then *Tres sunt Ricardi* may have enjoyed at least a limited popularity at the beginning of the Tudor period.

As suggested above, the discovery of a new text of the poem unrelated to Crowland Abbey does not necessarily revolutionize our thinking about the problems of the chronicle's authorship and date. However, it does show that the *quidam metrista* of the second continuation should be understood not as cryptic self-reference (we would not normally interpret such an anonymous citation in this way), but rather as a genuine expression of ignorance about the poet's identity. This ignorance is natural if, as we now must surely agree, the poem came to Crowland from elsewhere, just as it came to Witham. It also casts doubt on the genuineness, or at least the interpretation, of the note included by Fulman which seems to attribute the poem to an individual named Richard. We are led to ask how the continuator, or a pre-dissolution annotator of his work, could have known this, and consequently to question whether the note was accurate, and even, perhaps, if it appeared at all in the medieval manuscript underlying Fulman's text. If it did, then John Cox's translation of this note as 'poem about three kings with the same name: Richard', however counterintuitive it seems, is perhaps closer to the mark than 'Verses of Richard on the three kings of the same name'.²¹

More broadly, the emergence of the Witham text validates Alison Hanham's argument that *Tres sunt Ricardi* is one of a number of 'disparate items' which have been tacked on to the end of the second continuation either by the 'monastic redactor' to whom she ascribes compilation of the continuation or by somebody else.²² If we take *quidam metrista* to indicate a lack of awareness of the poet's name, as we seem bound to do, then the subsequent poem beginning *Qui legis haec hominum* may also be interpreted in this light, for it is attributed by the chronicler (or redactor) in the same way.²³ The newly discovered text also provides some support for Hanham's larger argument that the second continuation was compiled at Crowland by a monk with an extraneous political memoir at his disposal.²⁴ This thesis has been rejected,

²¹ Cf. H.A. Kelly, 'The Croyland chronicle tragedies', *The Ricardian*, vol. 7 (1985-87), pp. 498-515, at pp. 507, 514 n. 63.

²² Hanham, 'Author! Author!', pp. 233-34.

²³ *Crowland Chronicle Continuations*, p. 190. Dr Hanham believes that this poem is part of the original secular history employed by her Crowland redactor in compilation of the continuation: Hanham, 'Author! Author!', p. 235. Cf. Hicks, 'Second anonymous continuation', p. 362.

²⁴ A. Hanham, 'Richard III, Lord Hastings and the historians', *English Historical Review*, 87 (1972), pp. 233-48, at pp. 234-35; eadem, *Richard III and His Early Historians*, pp. 79-83; eadem, 'Richard Lavender, continuator?', *The Ricardian*, vol. 7 (1985-87), pp. 516-19, at p. 518. Hicks, 'Second anonymous continuation', pp. 350-51, considers it more sensible to assume that the author of the second continuation interpolated existing

often tacitly, by most scholars writing on Richard III, although a few, such as Livia Visser-Fuchs and Daniel Williams, have endorsed it.²⁵ The notion of a unique author is usually preferred: Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, who thought the continuation written by Piers Curteys, was an influential early voice here, and subsequent scholars have contended for or endorsed single authorship by John Russell, Richard Lavender, Henry Sharp, and, recently, John Gunthorpe and Richard Langport.²⁶ All of these arguments embrace the poem *Tres sunt Ricardi*, with Kelly, Pronay and Hicks singling it out as an example of the work of their preferred authorial candidates.²⁷ That the poem has here been effectively proven to derive from a source foreign to Crowland abbey must now be explained by anyone claiming single authorship. One way of achieving this would be simply to call it an interpolation, but to do so would introduce yet another convolution to an already tortuous argument. Another would be to claim that in fact the poem did begin life at Crowland, and somehow found its way, in a different form, to a rural Somerset charterhouse. In rejecting this unlikely notion one could only appeal to economy of hypothesis.

obituaries of abbots at Crowland than that a monastic chronicler adapted an extraneous source. Indeed, the latter assumption seems more cogent to me, not least (but not only) because it circumvents a number of the most vexing imponderables concerning the circumstances under which the chronicle was composed.

²⁵ L. Visser-Fuchs, 'A commentary on the continuation', *The Ricardian*, vol. 7 (1985-87), pp. 520-22, at p. 522; Williams, 'Crowland chronicle', pp. 377, 390. Antonia Gransden also thought the secular material in the continuation extraneous: A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England II: 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century*, London 1982, pp. 268-69. Recently, Anne Crawford has stated that *Tres sunt Ricardi* in particular is not the work of the Crowland continuator: A. Crawford, *The Yorkists: A History of the Dynasty*, London and New York 2007, p. 169. Disconcertingly, however, she says that the poem was written in English.

²⁶ C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century*, London 1913, pp. 180-82. For Gunthorpe as author see D. Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville: Mother of the Princes in the Tower*, Stroud 2002, pp. 176-81; for Langport, see Hicks, 'Second anonymous continuation', pp. 362-70. That Witham is situated within the diocese of Bath and Wells, of which Gunthorpe was dean and Langport a native, can hardly be said to support authorship of the poem and the continuation by either man. Even were someone to claim this, the differences between the two versions of the text would still need to be explained.

²⁷ Kelly, 'Last chroniclers of Croyland', pp. 155-9 (by implication); idem, 'Croyland chronicle tragedies', p. 507; *Crowland Chronicle Continuations*, p. 76; Hicks, 'Second anonymous continuation', pp. 362-3, 370. Moreover, Professor Hicks (p. 366) attributes to Margaret Condon the suggestion that the author (or compiler) of the second continuation wrote the single word *Ricardus* in Cotton Otho B xiii at f. 60^v, further implying self-reference. However, this conjecture is not to be found anywhere in Condon's article (Condon, 'Crowland chronicle continuations').

Finally, it is worth noting that this conclusion undermines Dr Hanham's interesting conjecture that the *Historia de Ricardo rege carmine scripta* seen by John Leland at Crowland was a metrical history of Richard III. The existence of a work with this title at the abbey gave her the idea that *Tres sunt Ricardi*, rather than belonging to an original, extraneous text of the second continuation (her 'Ur-text'), was a local monastic product based on a now-lost source for Ricardian history.²⁸ Since she wrote, alternative subjects have been recommended for this text: James Carley suggested either a metrical version of the French *L'Estoire de la guerre sainte* or a versified redaction of Ricardus de Templo's *Itinerarium Ricardi primi*, while Richard Sharpe has pointed to the existence of a French-language poem on the downfall of Richard II.²⁹ While it remains theoretically possible that Crowland Abbey owned a metrical life of Richard III, *Tres sunt Ricardi* no longer supports the idea.

²⁸ Hanham, *Richard III and His Early Historians*, pp. 81-82. ↗

²⁹ *English Benedictine Libraries: The Shorter Catalogues*, ed. R. Sharpe, J.P. Carley, R.M. Thomson, and A.G. Watson, *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues*, vol. 4, London 1996, p. 126.