

New College MS 287 and its Text

New College's MS 287 is smaller in size and lesser in grandeur than some of the college's more impressive items, but despite its unassuming appearance this manuscript has equal claims to veneration as many other items in the collection. It is, in fact, a gift intended for a king, Henry VIII no less, from his court poet, Bernard André—who died exactly 500 years ago in 1522—and, considering how large Henry VIII looms in Britain's history, it is interesting for this reason alone.

Hitherto overlooked in comparison with some of its author's other works, namely his *Vita Henrici Septimi*, and annals for the years 1504–5 and 1507–8, MS 287 deserves more attention.¹ Although it is written for a specific date in a specific year (New Year's Day, 1515), this manuscript is different from the better-known annals. Whereas these annals give an account of the main events of the preceding year, MS 287 is primarily a discourse on whether peace should be preferred to war, arguing in favour of peace.

Scholarship in general does not appear to have a high opinion of André's writing, with Carlson stating that, by later standards, his accomplishments are 'meagre'.² It is particularly his historical writing that has drawn criticism (although this is perhaps in part due to the fact that historical writing forms the main body of what remains of André's work): Sutton describes Henry VII's attempt to make André a historian as a 'failure' since he 'never produced anything fit to print';³ Hobbins states that the *Vita Henrici Septimi* 'sustains . . . an exaggerated panegyric tone throughout', and that the work has 'many of the vices and few of the virtues of the new humanist historiography'.⁴ A reader, therefore, should be very cautious in their attempts to gain anything of historical value from a superficial reading of the text in MS 287, or even any of André's works, but, because MS 287 is not written to be read as history, it perhaps warrants more than a superficial reading.

There are also some inaccuracies in the scholarship concerning this manuscript, two of which are corrected by this essay. In one of the most recent mentions of MS 287 in critical writing, Sutton states that an annal presented to Henry VIII for New Year 1515 (features which match those of MS 287) can be found in the British Library's Cotton collection.⁵ Even supposing that André wrote two gifts for Henry VIII that New Year, and that they both survived, no such manuscript exists in the British Library. MS 287, André's gift to Henry VIII for 1515, is very much present here in college.

The second error is less fundamental. Carlson, in his listing of André's writings, gives a transcription of the beginning and ending of MS 287 in its description.⁶ This transcription contains some small inaccuracies; a corrected transcription is provided at the end of this essay.

¹ It is very possible that an important factor in the privileging of the 1504-5 and 1507-8 annals over any of André's other works is simply that James Gairdner printed them in his 1858 edition of the *Vita Henrici Septimi*. David Carlson's 1998 article, 'The Writings of Bernard André (c. 1450–c.1522)', *Renaissance Studies* 12 (2) (1998), 229–50, provides a list of André's surviving works.

² David R. Carlson, 'Reputation and Duplicity: The Texts and Contexts of Thomas More's Epigram on Bernard André', *English Literary History* 58 (2) (1991), 261–81, at p. 262.

³ Dana Sutton, 'Introduction' to 'Bernard André, *De Vita atque Gestis Henrici Septimi?*', *The Philological Museum* (2010): <www.philological.bham.ac.uk/Andreas/intro.html> (Accessed: 31 May 2022).

⁴ Daniel Hobbins, *The Life of Henry VII* (New York: Italica Press, 2011), p. xxviii; Daniel Hobbins, 'Arsenal MS 360 as a Witness to the Career and Writings of Bernard André', *Humanistica Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies* 50 (2001), 161–98, at p. 161.

⁵ Dana Sutton, 'Introduction' to 'Bernard André, *Annales regni Henrici Septimi* (1504/5 and 1507/08)', *The Philological Museum* (2019): <<https://philological.cal.bham.ac.uk/andreannals/intro.html>> (Accessed: 31 May 2022).

⁶ Carlson, 'Writings of Bernard André', 242.

A brief biography here serves to contextualise MS 287.⁷ Bernard André was born in Toulouse around 1450/52 and became an Augustinian friar in the mid-1460s.⁸ Although exact details of his training are unknown, he was well-educated in Roman literature (demonstrated by the Classical references in his work), and later styled as *utriusque iuris doctor* (a ‘doctor of both laws’, as in, canon and civil).⁹ He was also blind, a fact to which he refers in his own writings, apologising for not describing things more fully because he could not see them.¹⁰ Not much more than this is known about him during his time in France, except that it is possible that he came to the attention of the future Henry VII while Henry was in exile in France, perhaps due to his ability to ‘extemporize and recite Latin poetry.’¹¹ He was invited to England by Richard Fox, who helped Henry VII become king, and later himself became Bishop of Winchester. André refers to Fox as his Maecenas, styling himself after Virgil, whose patron was called Maecenas.¹²

André was a presence in Henry VII’s reign right from the start, when he was invited to London to recite some verses in celebration of Henry’s victory at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. In 1486, he became poet laureate, receiving regular payments from the crown and ecclesiastical preferments.¹³ From 1496 until 1500 he was tutor to Henry VII’s eldest son, Prince Arthur, and it was at this point that he entered the court’s innermost circle, and began writing a commentary on Augustine’s *Civitas Dei*, which followed a complicated scheme of writing to coincide with the Prince’s life (to write one book a year, starting, intriguingly, with book eleven, supposedly because Arthur was in his eleventh year of life). André’s progress on this work petered out after the Prince’s premature death in 1502, and was eventually abandoned in 1510.¹⁴ It was just after André left the tutoring of Prince Arthur in 1500 that Henry VII commissioned André to write his biography, the *Vita Henrici Septimi*, making André his royal historiographer.¹⁵ Again, this was abandoned shortly after Arthur’s death.¹⁶

Henry VII died in 1509 and from this point, although André was still writing for the new king, Henry VIII, and receiving money from court, he began to fade from court life.¹⁷ His last known works were presented to the king in 1521 or 1522, and it is generally agreed that he died just after this, 500 years ago.

The collection of Henry VIII’s library, whither this manuscript was destined at least, was formed in several ways: most of it came from the Dissolution of the Monasteries following the Act of Supremacy in the first half of the 1530s, some was inherited from earlier monarchs or incorporated from the collections of at least three of Henry’s wives, some arrived as the result of sequestration following treason trials, and some, like MS 287, were gifts from those seeking patronage.¹⁸ This manuscript was a gift for Henry VIII for New Year’s Day 1515, the main gift-giving occasion in Henry’s court, at which he regularly received books.¹⁹ The date is perhaps significant for a text concerned with the advantages of peace (*bellum ne paci an econtra belle pax*

⁷ Fuller and better biographies of Bernard André can be found in Carlson’s entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, or in Hobbins’s introduction to his translation of *Vita Henrici Septimi*.

⁸ David R. Carlson, ‘André [Andreas], Bernard’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 89–90, at p. 89.

⁹ Carlson, ‘André [Andreas], Bernard’, 89.

¹⁰ James Gairdner (ed.), *Historia Regis Henrici Septimi a Bernardo Andrea tholosate conscripta* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), p. viii.

¹¹ Daniel Hobbins, ‘André, Bernard (c. 1450–c. 1522)’, in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollman and Willemien Otten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 521–3.

¹² Carlson, ‘André [Andreas], Bernard’, 89.

¹³ Hobbins, *Life of Henry VII*, p. xxvii, and Carlson, ‘André [Andreas], Bernard’, 89.

¹⁴ Hobbins, ‘Arsenal MS 360’, 171.

¹⁵ Hobbins, *Life of Henry VII*, p. xxvii.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. xxxix. Hobbins believes this is because the *Vita* needed Arthur alive to make sense structurally.

¹⁷ Hobbins, ‘André, Bernard (c. 1450–c. 1522)’, p. 521

¹⁸ James P. Carley (ed.), *The Libraries of Henry VIII* (London: The British Library, 2000), p. xxiii. André himself describes the text as an *auspiciatissimi novi anni munusculum* (f. 2r).

¹⁹ Carley, *Libraries of Henry VIII*, p. xlvi.

praeferatur, [whether peace should be preferred to war, or whether war should be preferred to peace], (f. 8r): August 1514 saw the signing of the Anglo-French Treaty which brought peace to France and England. One of the terms of this treaty was that Henry VIII's sister, Mary, would marry King Louis XII of France, so it was an agreement particularly relevant to the King's inner circle. This context should inform how the text is interpreted.

The manuscript itself is written in secretary hand, with three illuminated initials, two in the dedication, one (a Tudor rose) at the start of the main text. There are, for the most part, only eight lines on each page, with a considerable blank margin surrounding the text, another sign of its royal recipient, at a time when paper was expensive.



New College Library, Oxford, MS 287, f. 2v [detail]
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A few features of the text have been immediately notable in the process of transcribing it. The first, and the one which (apart from the language, and material differences between manuscript and modern printed book) may make the text feel most alien to a twenty-first-century reader is its level of panegyric. One example can be found in f.5r, where André lists the various skills in which some kings are lacking (*prudenciam* [wisdom], *eloquenciam* [eloquence], *audaciam* [daring], *disciplinam vel hasta vel gladio vel manu vel equestri certamine* [training in the spear or the sword or hand-to-hand fighting, or combat with cavalry]) but then states that all these things are contained in *uno mirabilia felicique concursu* [one wonderful and fortunate concurrence], in the existence of Henry VIII. This hyperbole is, in particular, perhaps harder to square with popular perception of Henry VIII as a tyrant, but it is important, as Hobbins says of the *Vita Henrici Septimi*, to ‘read against the grain of this relentless hyperbole and to extract from it some meaning beyond the obvious one, that André needed the support of a patron and was willing to say just about anything to gain it’.²⁰

²⁰ Hobbins, *Life of Henry VII*, p. xxviii.

There are also the characteristic Classical references one would expect to find in the humanist Tudor court circle. André uses *Nestoreum* [Nestor-like] to describe the *decursum corporis* [the course of a body], (f. 13v), and, more surprisingly, invokes classical deities, in *Hercule* [Hercules], (f. 3v) and *medius fidius* [I call heaven to witness], (f. 8r).²¹ This sits in happy incongruity with mentions of Jesus (f. 9v), Jerusalem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, angels and apostles (ff. 12r–v), and even a paraphrase of a Biblical passage (John 14:27): *pacem meam do vobis pacem relinquo vobis non quomodo mundus dat ego do vobis* [my peace I give to you, peace I leave to you, I do not give to you as the world gives], (f. 11r), a sign of the Christian humanism at Henry's court. Finally, André twice mentions Augustine, once in connection with *Civitas Dei* (f. 10r and f. 11v). This is notable because of André's commentary on Augustine's *Civitas Dei*—here it is possible to imagine the personal connection between author and text.

TRANSCRIPTION

Providing this transcription is mainly motivated by a desire to make the text more accessible, while preserving the sense of the physical manuscript as much as is possible in this context. For this reason, I have expanded abbreviations, marking any additional letters with italics. I have retained the manuscript's original spelling, keeping *excellencia* for *excellencia*, for example, but, regardless of how the two letters appear in the manuscript, I have used 'u' as a vowel, and 'v' as a consonant. I have preserved the punctuation (virgule and medial point), and the symbol // to mark a word continuing over the line or page. New pages are indicated here by a new paragraph.

(f. 2r)

Pro anno millesimo quingentesimo decimoquinto inuictissimi Angliae regnis Henrici octavi felicissimae regnacionis Anno Septimo Bernardi Andree auspiciatissimi noui anni munusculum/

(f. 2v)

Cum praeclarissimas ingenii tui corporis/ et foren ne dotes mecum animo considero regum triumphator eximiae quid primum in hoc nonnulli tam exordio proloquar diversis agor · si eum sagacissimi ingenii

(f. 3r)

tui celestia dona dicere primum ordiar quid aliud michi dicendum sit/ quam tam pace · quam bello illud sacro sanctum ingenii tui acumen illam in rebus omnibus · veri perpicatissimam/ acrimo//niam comtemplabor/ si corporis sacratissimi tui laudes pertractem

(f. 3v)

quos tuae regiae magnanimitas vel huius vel superioris aetatis principes aequirerem/ hercule invenero/ nam quid ego de fortunae muneribus amplissimis de potencia de thesauris nunc comemorem, cum tua hac in re sublimitas

(f. 4r)

nemini cedat · verum ut ad rem · tandem · veniam · quam inte solo super omnes proprianos principes si tam totus paene orbis dicere non dubitat · Te videlicet bellis tam positis clausis quae tam luminibus tranquillissimae pacis amatorem ·

²¹ Nestor was a character of Greek mythology, most famously as the elderly king, 'the archetypal wise old man' (*OCD* s.v. 'Nestor' 1.) in Homer's *Iliad*. *Medius fidius* (*OLD* s.v. 'Fidius') has connotations of the Roman god Jupiter, for whom the phrases *Dius Fidius* was perhaps a title.

(f. 4v)

in hoc tumultuario oracionis cursu *praecipuum* regum · *omnium* constituere est animus · /
&que ut de ipsa beata succinte paucis attingam · in primis occurrit *pacatissimae* rex · quod
legimus quosdam principes bello *prae//stantes* eosdem tamen in pacis

(f. 5r)

artibus defecisse/ Aliis quibusdem *prudenciam* aliis *eloquenciam*/ aliis *audaciam* · aliis
militarem disciplinam/ vel hasta vel *gladio*/ vel manu vel *equestri certamine* defuisse tibi
autem uno *mirabilia felicitate* concursu cuncta *quae* ·

(f. 5v)

laudari morentur · ita coherent ita quadrant ita conueniunt/ ut ipsa inter sese de *excellencia*
certare videantur idem · in bello *fortissimus* · idem in pace *benignissimus* · idem terra *marique*
dextimus · *felicissimis promptissimusque*

(f. 6r)

habere · vis breviter, dicam *dificili indicatu* est · an in bello *severior* sit an pace *clemencior* ·
nam de ceteris aut *animi* aut *regni corporis* aut denique *fortunae copiosissimis muneribus* ·
michi tacere potuis omnino est *pro* pauca referre · /hoc unum post multa dicam ·

(f. 6v)

ut de *sapientissimo* genitore tuo his in *Novi anni auspiciis* pro *singulari ac peculiari suae*
inclitae maiestatis excellencia dicere solebam · quodque in hoc *cristiam natalis tempore*
sanctissima vigilia vespertino in officio recitatur rex · *pacifucus* ·

(f. 7r)

magnificatus est · cuius *vultum desiderat* *universa terra*/ et iterum *magnificatusque* est · rex
pacificus super omnes reges universae · terrae/ et quia deus *pacis amor* est/ et *pacis pacificus*
rex amat/ · non inmerito hac in

(f. 7v)

tempestate *pacis amatorem* · super omnes *omnium gencium reges* te solum *praedicarim*
divulgarim buccinariusque apud omnes · hoc in loco *vetustissima* illa *movenda* michi esset ·
gestio alioqui *dificilis* et *quam plerique* tam nostri *quam primores* exqui//

(f. 8r)

sistere *philosophi ac principes* bellum ne *paci* an *econtra belle* · *pax praefertur* possem multa
quidem hac in parte *mitissime princeps veterum praeepta* referre quorum isti *pacem* illi *paci*
bellum *praefertur* · sed *medius fidius*

(f. 8v)

michi *paene* de hac *resingula advertanti* · illud *pietissimi salvatoris nostri Ihesu cristi*
praestabile verbum occurrit suam post *admirabilem resurrectionem* · ad suos dictum
discipulos *pax vobis*/ · Sic ipse potes *benignissime princeps* post tot de *gallis et sertis*

(f. 9r)

in urbem hanc tuam *florentissimam* *relatos speciosissimos triumphos* tuis *strenuissimis*
commilitonibus cristi exemplo dicere seu *mavis imperare* · *pax vobis* · Nam quid per deum
immortalem felicius humano generi aut *comodinis aut delicta*//

(f. 9v)

bilius omnibus cristianus exaudiri potest · *quam* pax vobis/ enim vero post reportatam ex hoste superbo talem tantamque victoriam · quid amplius nobis dicendum reliquid · ille pacificusque rex noster Ihesus · *quam* pax vobis/ de hac saluberrima toti mundo ·

(f. 10r)

medicina/ et si multa ses ultro · offerunt resencenda · illud tamen unum in primis me comemorare ad huius oraciuncule extremum calcem non pigebit horacianum hoc paces habuere boni ventique secundi / et noster divus Augustinus liber tercio de civitate

(f. 10v)

dei semper in poteste habere victoriasque semper fore per humanorum animorum motus accidunt per quam difficile est pace igitur/ in primis omnes omnium gencium cristi colarum principes consulere debent ut pace frui certa ·

(f. 11r)

laeticiaque illis liceat quod si caecus eveniat · timendum est illud salvatoris nostri/ pacem meam do vobis pacem relinquo vobis non quomodo mundus dat ego do vobis cum pax infida incertaque plerumque est *quam* qui sectantur aut disimulant caneant

(f. 11v)

locum illum · ubi nulla pax · nulla viget victoria/ Amemus igitur dulcissima munera pacis · ut post huic vitae cursum praecipitem/ superna pacis gaudia pervenire possimus/ ubi decente sino patre viro · Augustino super matheum

(f. 12r)

vicesimo quinto/ lumen indeficiens ubi gaudium sempiternum ubi vita perhennis et immortalis et laetitia sempiterna/ cum Angelis et apostolis · ubi lux lucis et fons luminis · ubi civitas sanctorum Ierusalem caelestis ubi conventus · mar//

(f. 12v)

tirum et patriarcharum cum Abraham Isaac et Iacob et sanctorum omnium · ubi dolor nullius nec tristitia post gaudium · ubi nox efugiet senectus non aparebit · ubi caritas in explebilis ubi pax individua · ubi assistant

(f. 13r)

angeli et universae potestates ubi manna id est cibus caelestis et vita angelica/ et ut infinita inbrevis comprehendam · ubi omnis dolor et omne malum non videbitur et omne bonum non deesse unquam poterit ad quam pacificam · aeternamque

(f. 13v)

vitam post huius vitae longenum Nestoremque decursum corporis et animae incolumitate semper intigerrima permanente tua sacro sancta maiestas pervenire valeat nunc et inaeuum triumphatura

Amen ·/

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