

**A STUDY OF THE ROMANCE OF
THE SEVEN SAGES: WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE MIDDLE
ENGLISH VERSIONS; A
DISSERTATION**

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A Study of the Romance of the Seven Sages: With Special Reference to the Middle English Versions; A Dissertation by Killis Campbell

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KILLIS CAMPBELL

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A STUDY OF THE ROMANCE OF THE SEVEN SAGES
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MIDDLE
ENGLISH VERSIONS

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES
OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY FOR THE
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BY

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A STUDY OF THE ROMANCE OF THE SEVEN
SAGES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE MIDDLE ENGLISH VERSIONS.

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION.

The main object of this study has been to investigate thoroughly the relations of the Middle English versions of the *Seven Sages of Rome*.

As preliminary to this investigation, a review of the history of the romance in the several stages through which it has passed before reaching English has been made. This survey, a recapitulation of the results which modern scholarship has attained in the study of the romance, has been made impartially, and with a view to set forth the most approved views that have been held rather than to advance any new theories of my own. Where these views are conflicting, as is particularly the case with respect to the eastern versions, I have endeavored to sift truth from error, though here naturally some difficulty has been encountered. It is only on the question of transmission of the romance that a view differing from that of the best authorities has been taken.

The chapter on the French and the Italian versions has been based in large part on the work of Gaston Paris, whose *Deux*

Rédactions has superseded all previous contributions, representing as it does the most recent and the best results that have been attained in this branch of the study of the romance. Additions which have been made consist largely in information as to a number of manuscripts which were unknown to Paris, or which have since been found.

The second and major part of the study has been devoted to the *Seven Sages* in English. Here I have been preceded by Petras and Buchner, the one dealing mainly with the Middle English group, the other especially with the relations of the Wynkyn de Worde and Rolland versions. The dissertations of these two scholars are the only real contributions which have been made to the study of the English versions. It is therefore not surprising that many of the current theories with regard to these versions are shown on closer examination to be erroneous. The most far-reaching of these misconceptions is, I believe, that which regards the Wright version as independent of all other English versions. My investigations lead me to the conviction that at least seven of the eight Middle English manuscripts are related to each other through a common Middle English original.

I regret that I have been forced to forego consideration of one of the Middle English versions,—the Asloan. I was denied access to this manuscript by its owner, Lord Talbot de Malahide, and learned of the existence of a transcript of it in the University Library at Edinburgh when it was too late to avail myself of it. Prof. Varnhagen believes it to have had an immediate basis on some Old French manuscript; there are reasonable grounds for doubting this belief, however, and I am unwilling to subscribe to it until a further comparison with the remaining Middle English versions has been made.

This study leaves undone the most interesting, if not the most valuable part of the work I had planned,—a comparative study of the stories themselves; for not even the stories of the *Bidpai* collection have enjoyed a wider vogue than those of the *Seven Sages*. The task of tracing these in their travels

and of collecting their analogues will be attempted in a future publication, when it is hoped that an edition of one or more of the unpublished Middle English manuscripts may also be attempted.

I. THE EARLIER HISTORY OF THE ROMANCE.

I (a). *The Romance in the Orient.*

It is universally held to-day that the great collection of popular stories known in the West as the *Seven Sages of Rome*, in the East as the *Book of Sindibād*, is of Indian origin. This was well established by Deslongchamps already in 1838, in his *Essai sur les Fables Indiennes*,¹ and has never since been seriously brought in question. The Indian original, however, has not yet been discovered, nor is it probable that it ever will be; and it even admits of very considerable doubt whether the romance ever existed in India in a form very near to that in which it is first found.

All attempts, too, to show a kinship between the romance and some surviving Sanskrit story have proved in large part futile. Benfey first pointed out the analogy between the introduction to the *Pantchatantra* and the framework of the *Sindibād*,² but he very justly concluded that the *Pantchatantra* was indebted to the *Sindibād* rather than the *Sindibād* to the *Pantchatantra*. In a later publication,³ he called attention to the similarity between the *Sindibād* and the legend of Kunāla and Asoka, and Cassel has boldly assumed this legend to be the ultimate basis of the romance.⁴

The story of Kunāla is widely known in Sanskrit literature. Asoka, a famous Indian king, had, after the death of his first wife, married one of the latter's attendants. The

¹ Published at Paris, 1838, in conjunction with Leroux de Lincy's edition of the *Sept Sages de Rome*.

² *Pantchatantra*, Leipzig, 1859, i, § 8; also *Mélanges Asiat.*, III, p. 188 f.

³ *Orient and Occident*, III, p. 177 f.

⁴ *Mischle Sindbad*, Berlin, 1888, pp. 10 f., 62.