

**VITA HAROLDI. THE ROMANCE  
OF THE LIFE OF HAROLD, KING  
OF ENGLAND. FROM THE  
UNIQUE MANUSCRIPT IN THE  
BRITISH MUSEUM**

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Vita Haroldi. The romance of the life of Harold, king of England. From the unique manuscript in the British museum by Walter de Gray Birch

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**WALTER DE GRAY BIRCH**

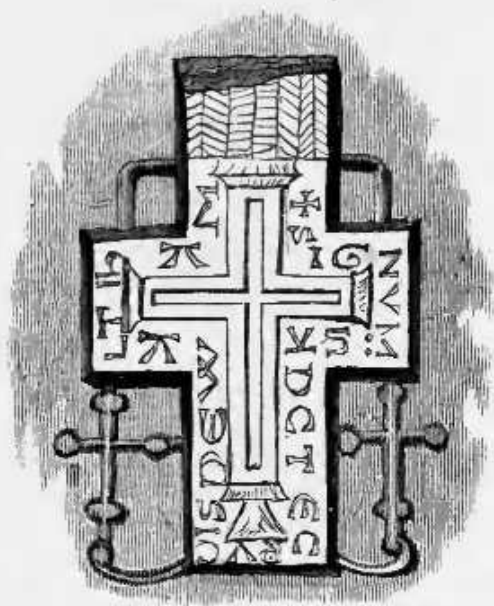
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VITA HAROLDI.





MOULD FOR A PILGRIM'S BADGE OF THE HOLY CROSS OF  
WALTHAM.

*The illustration kindly lent by the British Archaeological Association.*

# VITA HAROLDI.

THE ROMANCE OF THE LIFE

OF

HAROLD, KING OF ENGLAND.

*From the Unique Manuscript in the British Museum.*

EDITED,

WITH NOTES AND A TRANSLATION,

BY

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62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1885.



## INTRODUCTION,

**T**HE romantic life of King HAROLD—the last monarch before England fell under a series of dominations of foreign dynasties, which has lasted nearly nine hundred years—has, for a considerable time, formed an interesting theme with historians and men of literature. It is printed in the following pages from a careful collation with the unique manuscript in the Harley Library of the British Museum, No. 3776, with a translation for the first time.

For the convenience of reference, I shall divide the subject of this introduction into the following sections: (1) Description of the Manuscript; (2) History of the Manuscript; (3) Notices of the Historical Points, and of the Translation.

### I. DESCRIPTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT.

The manuscript is of quarto size, measuring  $10\frac{3}{8}$  inches by 8 inches, of somewhat thick and



rough vellum. The writing, in pale-coloured ink, is contained in thirty-one lines to a page, in a Gothic or black-letter book hand, occasionally difficult to interpret, because of the similar way of forming the *m*, *ni*, *ui*, *in*, etc. It is evidently written, or rather copied from the author's own writing, by a scribe ignorant of Latin—perhaps a novice of the great Abbey of Waltham—for several words are found divided erroneously, and others occur where they are improperly joined together. The ink, originally black, is now of a faded brown colour. The ornamental initial letters at the beginning of paragraphs are of red or blue colour; and the rubrics, or contents of chapters, are in red. The writing is of the latter end of the thirteenth century, or, at latest, of the beginning of the fourteenth century.

The volume, of which the "*Vita Haroldi*" forms the first article, contains several other treatises, written by the same scribe, which have been disturbed at some time from their original order of production, and other works have been introduced, although they have no connection with Waltham. The Waltham treatises are numbered by the scribe in numerical order, so that we can readily reconstruct the arrangement of the volume when it reposed upon the quiet shelves of the scriptorium of that great monastery. The subjoined table shows the contents of the work :

*Introduction.*

vii

Numeration of the Waltham Library.	Numeration of the Harley Library.		Folio
.1.	(1)	Vita Haroldi ...	1-24
.2.	(2)	Ista quæ secuntur ... deficiunt in Libro de Inventione Crucis nostre de Waltham, etc. ...	25-30
.5.		List of reliques brought by Harold to Waltham Ab- bey, etc. ( <i>Lat.</i> ) ...	31-35 <sup>b</sup>
.6.		Miracles performed by the wood of the Holy Cross at the altar of St. John the Evange- list, etc. ( <i>Lat.</i> ) ...	35 <sup>b</sup> -38
.A.		Verfes on Waltham Abbey; Names of the Abbots, etc.; Vifions, etc. ( <i>Lat.</i> and <i>French</i> ) ...	38-42
.8.		A tract on the In- vention of the Holy Cross of Waltham ...	43-62
	* (3)	A short chronicle of England from	

\* Numbers 3 to 7 have been added to the volume; they are not of the same size, and are of later date. There is no evidence connecting them with Waltham.

Numeration of the Waltham Library.	Numeration of the Harley Library.	Folio
	1066 to 1128	
	( <i>Lat.</i> ) ... ..	63-66
	* (4) Life of St. Brandan	
	( <i>Lat.</i> ) ... ..	67-75 <i>b</i>
	* (5) Henry of Saltrey's	
	"Purgatory of St.	
	Patrick" ( <i>Lat.</i> ) ...	75 <i>b</i> -82
	* (6) Life of Tungal,	
	Bishop of Cashel	
	( <i>Lat.</i> ) ... ..	82-89 <i>b</i>
	* (7) Three Visions of Hell,	
	etc. ( <i>Lat.</i> ) ...	89 <i>b</i> -92
.2.	(8) Meditation of St.	
	Bonaventura,	
	Minister - General	
	of the Minorite	
	Friars ( <i>Lat.</i> ) ...	94-114
.3.	Philosophical treat-	
	ises on sobriety;	
	old age, etc. ( <i>Lat.</i> )	114 <i>b</i> -116 <i>b</i>
	(9) Verses on "Quid est	
	Femina." This,	
	although made a	
	separate article, in	
	the Harley cata-	
	logue, is part of	
	the old numera-	
	tion 3. It ends	
	abruptly at the	
	bottom of the page	116 <i>b</i> -117