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'*Of Seint Alex of Rome*'.
A Middle English Version of the Life of the Saint.

Il testo inedito medio inglese *Of Seint Alex of Rome*, incluso nel Ms. XIII B 29 (Napoli, Bibl. Naz.), ha ricevuto limitata attenzione accademica, probabilmente a causa dello scarso valore letterario che lo caratterizza, in contrasto con altre rielaborazioni volgari della vita del santo.

L'obiettivo del presente articolo è di fornire un'edizione critica del testo, così come tramandato dal codice napoletano, e procedere quindi all'analisi linguistica dello stesso, al fine di evidenziarne le caratteristiche dialettali, e proporre una localizzazione geografica. L'approccio editoriale e filologico permette di rilevare il valore del testo in quanto documento linguistico e consente di caratterizzarlo quale testimone di una situazione dialettale particolarmente composita e dinamica.

Nell'articolo viene quindi proposta una discussione delle valenze culturali della leggenda *Of Seint Alex of Rome*; il testo viene considerato anzitutto in quanto parte dell'unità codice, e contestualizzato alla luce della vicenda della sua diffusione nell'Europa medievale.

1. Introduction

The legend of St. Alex is one of the most widespread hagiographic narrations of the Middle Ages. Its original nucleus may be tracked between Syria and Greece in the 5th century A.D. (cf. Amiaud 1889 and Rösler 1933) but, by the late 10th century, the legend had already spread throughout Western Europe in the form with which we are familiar today. The Latin prose *Vita* edited by the Bollandists in the *Acta Sanctorum* (BHL 286) preserves the closest extant version to the 'panoccidental' (Odenkirchen 1978: 13) life of St. Alex which had begun to circulate in Europe, and which most probably also constitutes the basis of much of the Western tradition. The Latin version dates from the late 10th century; from this moment on, the legend of the Saint experienced enormous success and wide circulation; such a rapid development led to the

formation of an extremely rich tradition, the charting of which was undertaken by Margaret Rösler¹. By the late 11th century the life of Saint Alex had reached England, where evidence of its popularity, even in later centuries, is provided by the number of manuscripts – almost 20 – preserving the nine extant Middle English versions.

Without disregarding this varied insular tradition, the scope of the present article will be more limited. The main interest will focus on one specific branch of the Middle English tradition, represented by the unedited text *Of Seint Alex of Rome*, handed down by Ms. XIII B 29, housed in Naples National Library (the text will be henceforth referred to as N). The purpose of this article is mainly editorial and philological, as it aims to present the edition of the text as handed down by the Neapolitan Ms., proceeding then to its linguistic analysis in the attempt to localise the Middle English dialect used in N. This is a challenging task, due to the late date of the manuscript (1457)²; nonetheless, much of the interest in N lies precisely in its dynamic and composite language.

The text N has elicited little interest from a literary standpoint. A broader contextualisation of the text may nonetheless bring to light some interesting aspects that would otherwise go unnoticed: on the one hand, N exists as part of the larger entity represented by the codex in which it appears³; on the other, N stands as a realisation of hagiographic dramatization, and it therefore constitutes an exemplar of a very widespread medieval genre, as further discussed in paragraph 5.

2. *Textual Tradition*

The extant Middle English versions of the Legend of St. Alex have been organised into nine groups by Charlotte D'Evelyn (1970: 564-5), primarily on grounds of metre and content. In the following survey, the interest is centred on group A (D'Evelyn 1970: 564), to which N

¹ Cf. especially Rösler (1905: 23-34). Rösler's seminal work comprises the Western tradition of the life of St. Alex, focusing primarily on the Middle English period.

² The manuscript is dated by its scribe in the *colophon* on page 146.

³ The composition of codex XIII B 29 and the interrelation of the different texts included in it certainly deserve further investigation.

belongs and which includes the 'early 6-line stanza'⁴ versions of the legend with rhyme scheme aabccb. Besides N, group A also includes the two earliest Middle English versions of the legend: Ms. Vernon-Bodley 3938, dating from 1385 ca. (henceforth V) and Ms. Laud 108-Bodley 1486, dating from the beginning of the 15th century (henceforth L), both edited by Furnivall (1878: 19ff.). Ms. Durham University Cosin v.ii.14 (15th cent.) should also be included in A; the text has not yet been edited, apart from a brief passage published by Furnivall (1878: 99-100).⁵

V represents the oldest exemplar; V, L and N all descend from the same antecedent, yet a number of disjunctive errors, despite closely connecting N and L, exclude the hypothesis of a tradition with an archetype. Thus, V, L and N all descend through different grades of distance from the same Middle English original, which has not survived, each of them respectively through mediation of a *codex interpositum*. Despite the obvious connections with BHL 286 (the Latin *Vita*) it seems that the ultimate source of this branch of the Middle English tradition is to be identified with the *Legenda Aurea* version of the life of the saint (Rösler 1905: 79-82). The Middle English texts and the *Legenda Aurea* retain significant similarities, whereas BHL 286 can be excluded as the direct source of group A, mainly on the basis of a number of omissions.⁶ The *Legenda Aurea* version shows a tendency to the essentiality that is also reproduced in the Middle English texts, and is, in contrast with BHL 286, richer in details. Omissions account for a descentance of V, L, N from the *Legenda Aurea*, as it is very unlikely that hagiographic narrations would omit parts of the content, especially when these might serve as further demonstration of the saint's virtue.

⁴ The label has the intent of distinguishing group A from group B – referred to as the 'late 6-line stanza' (D'Evelyn 1970: 564) – on palaeographical grounds. Both groups present in fact the same metric structure, but vary considerably in contents.

⁵ Another edition of version A is the study by Schipper (1877: 67-94). Schipper's approach aims to restore a critical edition of the text, most closely approximating the original. With this aim in mind he argues V's eligibility as collation exemplar (1877: 12-16). Despite being dated, the work has the merit of dedicating specific attention to the sole Middle English tradition, as handed down in branch A.

⁶ For instance, Alex's habit of receiving the Communion daily appears in BHL 286, but not in V, L, N, nor in the *Legenda Aurea*. The reference to the temptation of the Devil is also left out in the ME texts and their antecedent, while it appears in BHL 286.

3. *The text*

The text *Of Seint Alex of Rome* appears on pages 80-86 of Ms. XIII B 29, the title caption is scribal, and it is inserted on the first page of the legend. The text is organised in two columns per page, the script is a combination of anglicana and secretary forms (see Appendix). The closing caption at the end of the text in Latin is in gothic script⁷.

3.1. *Editorial practice*

Punctuation, capitalisation and word-division are editorial. Single words written separately in the original are hyphenated in the edition. Emendations are enclosed in square brackets in the edited text. Abbreviations are expanded in italics. The division into stanzas is editorial, page number and column-breaks, as they appear in the original, are given in brackets in the right margins of the text. Words presenting problematic reading or interpretation are transcribed in the edited text following the scribal variant, and footnotes in the textual apparatus give the corresponding forms in other manuscripts (V and L)⁸.

4. *Linguistic profile*

4.1. *Introductory remarks*

The earliest studies on the manuscript tend to localise its language to the “East Midland, probably toward the North” (Manly 1940: 377), or as “nordlichen jungeren Ms. N” (Schipper 1877: 64); in more recent years *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English (LALME)* proposed a

⁷ For further palaeographic descriptions of the manuscript cf. Seymour (1997: 149-50), Rice (1987: 241-2), and in greater detail Manly Rickert (1940: 376-80), who deserves credit for having detected the connection between the codex itself and Tommaso Campanella, as well as a suggestion for the name of the scribe, Henry More (1940: 378-9).

⁸ Developments in historical linguistics and dialectology argue for a diplomatic rather than a critical approach in text editing (cf. Laing / Lass 2007). The significance of such practice is fundamental, let alone the importance of preserving a text's value as historical document. The choice of the editorial practice in the present edition is motivated by the scope of the paper, which is limited to making the text *Of Seint Alex of Rome* accessible for fruition as a literary text.

Southern localisation, specifically the Dorset area (LP 9490), to which Seymour also adheres. However, the analysis of *LALME* is based on the sole text of *Patient Griselde*, a fragment of Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, which appears in the manuscript on pages 119-146.

A Northern provenance or strong influence on N should be excluded, on the basis of a number of linguistic features. To anticipate some elements: the results of OE /a:/, the dropping of *-l-* near *-ch* sounds, and the verbal forms, for instance. In addition, it is possible to trace other linguistic features that help limit the area: the *-th* form of the 3rd person singular of present tense verbs excludes the North and North Midlands; the forms of the verb *wol/wolle* and the 3rd person plural pronouns eliminate East Midlands and East Anglia, together with the Northern area.

However, the situation is not so clear-cut, and it is possible to detect some influences from those dialects which seem easiest to exclude. Together with its Southern features, the text often deploys linguistic elements stemming from the Midland dialects, especially South-Eastern and South-Western, and a few traces of a Northern influence may be noted as well. Moreover, some linguistic observations seem to highlight elements that contradict the assignment of the dialect to the South: e.g. the forms of the *be*-type of the verbs 'to be', which are not much attested in the Southern areas, or the form of the present participle.

Being a late exemplar, N mirrors a rather composite linguistic situation, in which dialectal forms of different areas, archaisms and innovations coexist.

4.2. Spelling

The scribe's hand employs a combination of *anglicana* and *secretary* scripts, which was a widespread practice in 15th-century productions. Throughout the text of the legend it is possible to trace an attempt at consistent usage; yet, in some instances – as will be seen in the case of verbs – oscillating spellings still prevail. The use of digraphs to indicate long vowels is rare, and it is mainly limited to the spellings for /u:/, for which both <ou> and <ow> can be found: *hous*, *doun/downe*, *lowde*, *nowe*. Some instances of the use of digraphs also occur in the rendering of /i:/, as in *hie/hye*.

In most cases long vowels are indicated by a weak final *-e*, as in *same*, *take*, *son*, *loke*, *meke*, *fete*, *grete*, *life*. Reduplication is found only in the spelling of the word ‘good’: *good*, *goodis*.

The use of the graphemes <i> and <y> to indicate /i/ or /i:/ is not regular, the two variants occurring regardless of context; even within a series on minims <i> is often found: *him*, *bring*, *drink*; and the same word often has both spellings: *bilby*, *icchelycche*.

The text shows a tendency towards the use of a set of two-letter spellings, where <þ> is replaced by <th> and <gh> is used instead of <3>. However, the pattern of the two-letter spelling is not yet established, and <þ> and <3> appear quite frequently. It may be noted, on the other hand, that the <ch> grapheme is used consistently followed by that of <sh>, for which only a couple of erratic spellings can be detected: *sulde*, *scho*. Yogh seems to be the most resistant grapheme, it is used both for the approximant /j/, as in *3ave*, *3ere*, *3erde*, and for the palatal fricative: *my3t*, *nou3t*, *ri3t*.

A number of verbs show a frequent oscillation in spelling, especially the forms of ‘hear’, ‘fall’, ‘go’ and ‘do’. In the past tense the spelling of ‘hear’ appears alternately as *hurd* (ll. 445, 475), and *herde* (l. 307, 361, 409). The spelling of ‘fall’ presents alternation of the radical vowel: it is <e> in ll. 449: *fel*, and 458: *felle*; <i> in *fillen*, l. 363, *fille*, l. 494, *fille*, l. 505. The past of ‘go’ alternates between *went*, l. 74, 78, 80, 97 and *wende* (l. 237); in line 170 the form of the past participle has the voiced dental: *y-wend*. However, the past form in *yede* is also frequent (ll. 267, 315, 416, 422, 580). ‘Do’ has the past forms *didde* in l. 17 and *dud* in l. 29.

4.3. Phonology

Due to the presence of the rhyme it is possible to infer some distinctive features on the status of spelling and pronunciation, and on the relationship between them. The rhyme scheme suggests the merely graphic value of final *-e*, which is most likely already pronounced as /ə/, where not mute. The tendency originates from the North, but by the 15th century it had already reached most Middle English dialects. The presence of final *-e* may also indicate the length of the preceding vowel as discontinuous representation for long vowels (Lass 1992: 38), and

has therefore no phonetic value of its own, as in the following examples of rhyme: *downe/diuocioun*, ll. 100-1; *Eufamyān/gone*, ll. 171-4; *churche/wirch*, ll. 196-7.

In the pair *downe/diuocioun*, the second term retains the digraph <ou> in the last syllable, rhyming with stressed <ow>. It can be supposed that this is an instance of sight rhyme, preserved by the scribe, since by the 15th century French borrowings already presented a shift of the primary stress to the word's first syllable (Mossé 1952: 14-15) or most often presented variation between native and Romance stressing (Lass 1992: 89; Burrow, Turville-Petre 1996: 13).

The last rhyme example mentioned, *churche/wirch*, ll. 196-7, raises problems connected to the words' root vowels. The spelling of the word *wirch* retains inconsistencies in the interpretation of the root vowel, which appears either as *-i-* rhyming with *-u-*, as in the example above, or as *-u-* rhyming with *-u-*, as in *church/wurch*, ll. 597-8. The word 'work' presents the same peculiarities: it appears as *work*, rhyming with *clerk* in ll. 112-3, while in ll. 46-7 the variant *werk* rhyming with *clerk* occurs. The differences in spelling may be an indication of the indefinite pronunciation of the stressed tonic vowel. The change involves not only the terms *work* and *wirch*, but also *church* and *clerk*: in fact, for the latter pair the written form does not change, despite their alternate rhyming with different stressed vowels. The stressed vowel's tone is thus undefined, and documents the gradual rise of the stressed /ə:/ sound. The OE /y(:)/ remains /y(:)/ in Middle English in the South West and West Midlands, but the delabialisation had already appeared elsewhere in the 13th century. The spelling *wurch*, which occurs only once in the text, might be an erratic spelling.

Old English /a:/ is regularly /ɔ:/ in the text, which would exclude a Northern dialect: *holy*, *go*, *one*. The only occurrence of the infinitive form presenting the old root vowel in /a/, *gang* (l. 44) may be connected to rhyme needs, as the first rhyming word of the couplet is *lang* (l. 43).

When <a> is followed by a nasal consonant the spelling is less consistent throughout the text, and it is rendered as <a>: *man*, *name*, or <o>: *thonkid*, *hond*. Sometimes the same term has both spellings: *land/lond* (ll. 152, 166), *lang/long* (ll. 43, 264). Despite the spelling, an obscuration in the pronunciation of /a/ can be hypothesised considering the rhyme in *man/lechon*, ll. 559-60. This example seems to further

testify a Southern influence on the language of the text, and in any case rules out a Northern provenance. The spelling <o> before *-nd* is from the West-Midland area, but it was also found in Southern dialects. Short /a/ became dominant later again starting from the East Midlands, where the situation was however still unstable, and a deeper penetration was documented around the 15th century. In two cases the spelling of /a/ followed by nasal sound is <aun>, but this is limited to the French borrowings *comaundement* (l. 224) and *seruauntis* (l. 313).

The text shows a predominance of the sounds *-i-/-y-* in final syllable before a consonant. This feature has been traced in 13th-century Middle English Northern dialects.

4.4. Morphology

On a morphological level the text shows more complications: as will be seen, numerous morphological features point to a rather unstable situation, due in part to the constraints of rhyme and metre.

The noun inflection retains the sole distinctions for the plural and possessive forms. The plural of nouns is generally marked by the *-s* morpheme, but two examples of the mutated plural can be found in the terms *fete* (l. 507) and *men* (e.g. ll. 10, 15). Some examples of zero-morpheme plurals are noteworthy: the example *partener* (l. 371) is doubtful, as it can be considered either as zero-morpheme plural and or as a singular noun. However, the stanza context seems to support the former hypothesis: all the personal pronouns related to *partener* are in the plural form (e.g. *bade ham* l. 368, *that ye mowe* l. 370); the noun *yere* (l. 502) after the numeral *seventene*, appears as zero-morpheme due to the loss of the Old English genitive plural morpheme.

As regards collective nouns, the text bears evidence of the unstable development they underwent during the Middle English period. A case in point is the term *folke*, which presents alternative constructions in both the plural and the singular: in *folke that wel was di3t* (l. 268) the verb is in the singular form; in *al the folke of Rome were* (l. 352) the verb is plural, possibly also because of its rhyming position with *hire*.

Furthermore, the possessive form is of particular interest in the text, as different strategies to build the genitive are employed. The regular *-ys/-is* morpheme is used: *mannys olde* (l. 50), *pore manis fere* (l. 184).

In one instance *-es* occurs: *for oure althres nede* (l. 192). A zero-morpheme genitive can be traced in the noun *church*: *churche yate* (l. 97), *churche yerde* (l. 531), and this may be linked to a Southern origin or influence on the text, a zero-morpheme genitive form for the feminine gender in Southern Middle English dialects is documented.

The periphrastic genitive also appears frequently – *the life of an holy man* (l. 2-3), *wardeyn of that churche* (l. 196) – and it is especially common in phrases with a partitive meaning, eg. *a parti of his good* (l. 76), or *som of hem* (l. 154).

The most frequent form is the 'genitive of definition', or 'possessive dative', especially in connection with the noun *God* – eg. *God-is sone* (l. 22), *God-is sake* (l. 107), *God-is grace* (l. 154) – but also with *lady* – *lady-is comaundement* (l. 224), *lady-is sake* (l. 228) – and in the phrases *Emperour-is bour* (l. 52), *Ihesus Crist-is wille* (l. 326), *Eufemyan-is hous* (l. 381). It is also used a few times with *man*: *pore man-is rewe* (l. 157), *pore man-is rout* (l. 261), *man-is honour* (l. 236). This form is found in Old English, where the postnominal possessive *his/is* is used in the cases of problematic genitive inflection (Blake 1992: 230). The form of the pronoun, often *is*, is then phonetically identical with the genitive morpheme *-is/-ys*, favouring the assimilation between the two constructions. This form of the genitive is to be found in the Middle English dialect in the South West area (Mustanoja 1960: 161). It is interesting to note that, apart from the few occurrences with the word *man*, or *fadir* (*fadir-is in*, l. 328) the 'genitive of definition' is preferred with proper names (*Eufemyan*), and terms defining the imperial dignity or sacred entities (*Lady*, which defines in fact the Virgin Mary, *God*, *Christ*).

As regards the dative, it is mainly periphrastic, with the prepositions *with*, *throwel/throw*, *on*, as well as *to* and *for* for the simple dative. Despite a few examples in which it is possible to distinguish different case forms, the text presents an accentuated assimilation between forms of the noun inflection.

The pronominal system requires close observation (see Table 1).

	Pronouns (subj.)	Pronouns (obj.)	Possessives
sg. 1	ycche, iche, ich, y, I	me	my, myn, myne
2	þ(o)u, thou, thow(e), ye	þe, the, thowe	thi, thyne
3	he, s(c)ho, it	him, hur, it, hit, 3it	his, is, hir, hur
pl. 1	we	us	our(e)
2	ye	you, yow(e)	your, yor
3	thei, þei	hem, ham	her(e), har(e), hur

Table 1. Pronouns

First of all, the forms of the 3rd person plural should be noted: at the time when the N ms. was composed the subject form of Scandinavian origin *thei/þei* had already spread to all the Middle English dialects, whereas *their* and *theim* reached London around the 15th century from the North. This element may confirm the exclusion of both the North and the South Midlands as dialectal sources of the N ms., since N forms for the possessives are *her(e)/har(e)/hur* and for the object pronouns *hem* and *ham*. The North is the area from which the innovation stems, and by the 15th century the Scandinavian form of the possessive had already reached the Midlands, although the forms *hem/ham* resisted longer in the language. The form of the feminine possessive may also point to the conservative character of the text, since the variant *hir*, dominant in N, had already been substituted by *her* in Middle English dialects in 1400. Moreover, there are instances of the nasal form of possessive adjectives: *thyne halle* (l. 283), *myn owne yn* (l. 465), *myne elde* (l. 473), *thyne thrallis* (l. 521), *myne hert* (l. 527), which is an archaic element, attested longer in Southern England than elsewhere.

The verbal system shows a rather unstable situation (see Table 2).

As regards the present indicative, the ending of the third person singular in *-th* further suggests the influence of a Southern dialect, and the dental ending also appears twice in the plural: *now goth they furthe* (l. 151), *[ye] þat havyth travaile* (l. 356). Whereas the past of weak verbs is regular overall, in the past of strong verbs traces of the *-en* ending in the plural – *fillen* (l. 363), *criden al* (l. 558), *thei leiden* (l. 597) can be detected – although most forms have no ending.

Present sg.	1	-e
	2	-st/-t
	3	-th
Present pl.		-e/-
Past sg. (strong verbs)	1	-
	2	-ist
	3	-
Past pl. (strong verbs)		-
Subjunctive		-e/-
Imperative		-e/-th/-
Infinitive		-e/-
Present participle		-nd/-ing
Past participle		-en/(y)-id

Table 2. Verbs

Traces of the inflected infinitive can be found in the text: [*for to*] *bedden holy bede* (l. 354), *we have to kepyng* (l. 431). The present participle recurs mainly in *-and*, showing the influence of Northern usage; however, the text presents two occurrences of the *-yng* form: *hiryng is fadir also* (l. 444), *sowning he fell down to grounde* (l. 449). This is a typical innovation of the Southern dialects. However, the *-ing* form is not dominant within the text, and the other occurrences of the *-yng* participles retain an adjectival or noun usage: *of him was grete speking* (l. 230), *seking sore* (l. 455). It is not clear whether the presence of the two *-yng* present participles should be connected to the influence of the antecedent of the text, or whether it is a scribal introduction, suggesting the Southern origin of the scribe.

The past participle shows an even more problematic situation, as there is coexistence of archaic and mixed forms. The composite profile is certainly favoured by the metrical structure, which allows the use of archaic forms to make a rhyme. At the same time 15th-century Middle English was far from being a standardised language, which accounts,

for instance, for the numerous strategies deployed in tense formation. Weak verbs in N form the past participle in different ways: in a number of occurrences the use of the Middle English *y-* prefix (OE *ġe-*) is still registered: *y-thonkid* (l. 162), *y-honowrid* (l. 518), *y-dwellid* (l. 127); otherwise the form presents the dental suffix: *servyd* (l. 19), *weddid* (l. 55), *levyd* (l. 339). Frequently, the same verb is conjugated by following both uses: *was y-sent* (l. 223), *were out send* (l. 169).

Strong and irregular verbs have the nasal morpheme: *founden* (l. 562), *chosen* (l. 51), *leyn* (l. 451), but also forms where the prefix appears as well: *y-done* (l. 498), *y-gone* (l. 174). In some instances they appear with the sole prefix: *y-lore* (l. 544). Often, the same strong verb, like the weak ones, occurs in different forms: *hast y-sey* (l. 499), *was y-sene* (l. 65); *had do* (l. 73), *hast y-done* (l. 498), *was done* (l. 114). The verbal system does not show other peculiarities: the compound forms and the passive are regular, and so is the imperative, despite the occasional difficulty in interpreting a verbal form as either imperative or subjunctive.

The linguistic profile mirrored by the text is a rather problematic one. It has been pointed out that the date of the text in itself denotes a situation in which the most distinctive dialectal features are already blending or spreading, when not lost, and in which some of the innovations may be singled out. Complications arise from the metrical structure of N, since elements which may be defined as indicative, thus pointing at a certain dialectal influence, intertwine with metrical requirements. On the one hand, instability represents a problem when trying to assign the text to a specific geographic area; on the other, the very status of the language mirrored in N constitutes in itself an element of major linguistic interest. Although a Northern provenance may safely be excluded, as well as a North Midland one, some uncertainties still remain on whether to assign definitively the dialect to a Southern one, especially as south as the Dorset area as stated by *LALME*.

5. *Hagiographic narration and literary discourse*

The Middle English tradition of the legend of St. Alex has apparently attracted little interest among scholars. It is somewhat

suggestive that Furnivall's comprehensive, though dated, edition of four of the Middle English versions, is prefaced by a note in which the scholar apologises "For wasting so much space on a mere legend of a so-called [sic.] saint's life" (Furnivall 1878: 18). More than a century later, referring to Furnivall's apology, Upchurch aptly points out: "But the legend of Alexius [...] was more highly regarded during the Middle Ages than Furnivall's apology would lead us to believe" (2003: 1). The popularity of the legend in Medieval England is actually easy to infer, taking into account the strikingly rich number of manuscripts in which it has been preserved, against the background of England's ill-fated manuscript transmission.

Upchurch's insight has the merit of salvaging the versions of group B of the saint's life from literary oblivion, demonstrating the poet's underlying creativity and independence. To attempt a similar approach in the case of group A would most probably prove a desperate task: *Of Seint Alex of Rome* is essentially a slavish version of the legend, in which there is no trace of any intention to re-elaborate the matter. In other words, group A, and specifically N, does not seem to hide between its lines an individual poet actively and independently engaged in reworking the tradition, as is the case with group B.

However, a broader contextualisation of N can show that though the text may be said to lack literary merit, it undoubtedly gains ground not only as a linguistic, but also as a cultural document. In support of this statement it is important to consider N in its context, and evaluate both its cultural function as hagiographic discourse, and its material existence as part of Ms. XIII B 29.

Ms. XIII B 29 also contains medical recipes, a fragment of the *Clerk's Tale* and three Middle English romances: *Sir Bevys of Hampton*, *Libious Disconius* and *Sir Isumbras* (incomplete). The resulting impression might be that of a rather heterogeneous miscellany of texts; however, it is possible to demonstrate that the underlying plan is essentially homogeneous. The codex may in fact be treated as an exemplar of that particular kind of *compendium*, or anthology, which enjoyed considerable popularity in 15th-century England. Indeed, the palaeographic analysis of the manuscript highlights characteristics in the format, collation and overall organisation of the matter suggesting that the manuscript is analogous to the more famous Thornton or

Auchinleck manuscripts⁹. These *compendia* became common due to a combination of factors: first of all, the increasing use of paper in scribal production made the circulation of texts more affordable for a wider readership; at the same time, societal changes saw the rise of new social classes, gentry and mercantile bourgeoisie, who enjoyed economic power and literacy. Jointly, the secularisation of culture, through universities and social transformations, took manuscript production outside monasteries, into the hands of professional scribes. *Compendia* were thus produced on demand, both with didactic and moral intents, as well as to respond to practical and entertainment needs. The presence of hagiographic narration in this kind of anthology is recurrent, as it clearly serves a dual purpose, functioning both as a moral *exemplum* with an educational and religious message, and as an entertaining narration. The hagiographic legend lends itself to precisely this kind of literary purpose: it offers moral and religious guidance, but at the same time it fulfils the need of the public for the marvellous and wonderful, religiously domesticated into the form of the Christian miracle. It is in this sense possible to look at N as a document, but from a literary perspective: *Of Seint Alex of Rome* retains the traditional characteristics of the hagiographic legend, and aptly complies with this kind of discourse. For instance, its narrative structure parallels the saint's deeds from his birth (st. 1-6), to his exemplary ascetic life (st. 7-58), to the miracles God dispenses through him after his death and the cult of the Saint (st. 59-103). The dominant stylistic feature is repetition, by means of *variatio* and *amplificatio*, which leads to the insistent reiteration of leitmotifs: Alex's virtue and holiness, his patience, the familiar grief and lament. The simple codified language and appeal to the pathetic – especially in the long *planctus* starting with st. 75 – aims to reach the widest possible audience, including less educated people.

The need for the narration to reach a wide and composite audience draws attention to the kind of cultural context against which the legend spreads. It is notable, in fact, that after the legend reached the West at the end of 10th century¹⁰, its success and propagation was so rapid that the cult of the saint was already attested in Italy in 986, when the church of St. Bonifacio was dedicated to St. Alex. It is likely therefore that the

⁹ For a detailed account of the *compendia* characteristics cf. Hudson (1984: 67-78).

narration had already started to circulate in Europe prior to the date considered, the end of 10th century – probably as part of the oral legacy – and that its later popularity in such numerous manuscripts intertwines with the long process of reformation experienced by the medieval religious world. From the 11th century onward the legend started to appear in written form in the vernacular languages and its fortune spread steadily, giving shape, for instance, to the bulk of the Middle English tradition, already numbering nine different versions of the life of St. Alex by the end of the 15th century. The pervasiveness of the legend in the Middle Ages perfectly fits within the cultural environment of religious and spiritual reformation, which affected Europe from the late 10th century. In other words, the joint action of the monastic experiences of Cluny and Cîteaux, the rise of mendicant orders, and not least, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 had the effect of bringing religious discourse to the common people, and making it accessible to the uneducated public for the first time. Thus, regardless of its contingent realisations, the narration *Of Seint Alex of Rome* can be seen as a vehicle for the ideals of spiritual reform, and concepts such as poverty, chastity, or separation of temporal and religious powers find in it direct expression and immediate representation. In this sense, the hagiographic discourse underlying the legend serves the purpose of conveying a deep and profound spiritual meaning in the form of direct narration; as aptly summarised by Upchurch, “Not long after it became available in the West at the end of the tenth century, the legend served as hagiographical dramatization of the ascetic ideals of the reform movement of the eleventh” (2003: 2).

6. Concluding remarks

It has been suggested that the primary interest in *Of Seint Alex of Rome* resides in its linguistic nature, which mirrors the coexistence of

¹⁰ The Archbishop of Damascus seems to have been responsible for the fortune of the legend in Europe. In 977 he was in exile in Rome, where he founded a monastic community in the church of S. Bonifacio sull’Aventino. The community was very active and, through mediation of its founder – who as a Syrian was already familiar with the life of St. Alex – is traditionally considered to be the mediator of the diffusion of the life of St. Alex in Rome, and thus in Western Europe. The hypothesis has some historical confirmation, although it may be criticised as too simplistic (cf. esp. Rösler 1905: 4-5).

archaisms and innovations, as well as influences of different dialectal areas: together with Southern features, the text often employs linguistic elements stemming from the Midland dialects; however, traces of a Northern influx can also be detected.

A broader contextualisation of the text, both from a codicological and cultural perspective, has made it worthwhile to reassess the text's literary value. First of all Ms. XIII B 29 – in which the legend appears – can be regarded as the expression of a rising phenomenon in 15th-century England: *compendia* production. The codex stands thus as a representation of Medieval English readerships' literary tastes, and testifies to the gradual secularisation of culture. As stated above, the recurrence of hagiographic legends in *compendia* – and specifically the presence of the text *Of Seint Alex of Rome* in ms. XIII B 29 – serves the dual purpose of functioning both as a moral *exemplum* with an educational and religious message, and as an entertaining narration. The literary strategies that can be detected (e.g. the use of the pathetic, the miraculous, and the codified narrative patterns) aim at presenting an appealing and effective narration, able to reach a wide audience. Finally, the circumstances of the legend's fortune intertwine with a more complex cultural context: the spiritual reform of the Medieval Church. Indeed, the rapidity and pervasiveness of the diffusion of the life of St. Alex can elicit a reflection on the interaction of factors underlying such a success. On the one hand it seems possible to detect the action of a religious strategy, which intentionally exploits the text in order to bring its message forth (the leitmotifs of poverty, chastity and humility might be considered); on the other, the effectiveness of such a strategy can also be explained on the basis of the prior diffusion and popularity of the text.

The stylistic merits of the legend of St. Alex as handed down by group A are very few; however, the cultural implications of the text and its transmission should not be underestimated. Thanks to a combination of complex factors the legend of St. Alex became one of the most widespread narrations in the Middle Ages, and, as discussed, the text *Of Seint Alex of Rome* represents an important document to access such a rich literary tradition.

APPENDIX: *Of Seint Alex of Rome*

- Sittith stille with-outen [s]trife, [p. 80a]
ycche wolde yow telle the life
of an holy man.
Alex was his right name,
to seruy God he thou3t no schame,
6 ther-of neuer he ne blan.
- His fadir was a grete lordlyng,
of Rome a kyng euenyng,
and hight sir Eufamyan;
pore men to clothe and fede,
in al Rome that riche stede
12 suche ne was ther nan.
- Eche day in his halle
were leide iij bordis, for to calle
pore men for to fede.
Therof he was fulle glade,
and didde as Ihesus Crist him bade,
18 ther-fore he happid to haue mede.
- When thei were seruyd by and by,
than at arst was he redy
to go to his mete,
than in drede of God-his sone,
with men of religione,
24 he wolde sitte and ete.
- His wife hight dame Agles,
to sey the sothe, with-oute les,
that moche was to preise,
but sho my3t do the same manere
as dud hir lord, as y seid ere,
30 was sho nought at ese.
- Childe bitwene hem had thei none,
þer-fore to God thei made her mone
- bothe day and nyght.
Ihesus Crist herd here bone,
and sent hem a ful good sone,
36 her hertis for to light.
- Whan he was bore þat blesful childe,
Alex, bothe meke and mylde,
and of maners hende,
sone ther aftir in gret hast,
thei auowid to leuy in chast
42 tille hare lyvis ende.
- Ther aftir was it lang,
Alex cowthe bothe speke and gang,
and was sette to lere.
Sone he was a ful good clerk, [p. 80b]
and moche he lovid God-is werk
48 to speke and to here.
- Whan that childe bi-gan to bolde
and for to come to mannys olde,
him was chosen a wife
out of the Emperour-is bour,
a maide good with gret honour,
54 to weddi with-out strife.
- Whan he was weddid þe first ny3t,
in God-is lawe as it was ri3t,
and was brou3t to hous,
mekely he gan hur teche
to drede God of synne leche,
60 that was maydon-is spous.
- He *prechid* hur *with* al is myght,
of synne sho sulde haue no plight,
but kepe wel hur maiden-hede,
and of Ihesus, that maide clene,

in wham was neuer wem y-sene,
66 sho schulde haue hur mede.

Than toke he his golde ryng
and yave it that maiden yong,
and seid to hur thus:

“Take this ryng, and kepe it me,
til that God-is wille be.

72 God be bitwene vs”.

Whan he had do as y yowe say,
he toke his leve and went is way
fro that maiden fre.

A parti of his good he *with* him toke,
and alle that othir he for-soke,

78 and went to the se.

Shippis he founde redyly,
to one he went *prively*
ouer for to fare.

He seide he was a chepman,
and praide he must *with* hem gan,
84 and har ship were 3are.

Furthe he went with good wille,
a feire cite he come vn-tille,
the name y shalle yow telle,
Edissa hight that cite,

90 God-is seruaunt for to be,
ther-in wolde he dwelle.

The goodis that he with him brou3t, [p. 81a]
of hem he wolde right nou3t,
but 3ave hit to pore men.

His robe he yaued ther he say nede,
and clopid him-silue in pore wede,

96 for no man schulde him kenne.

He went to a churche yate,
ther pore men sate in the gate
almys for to take;

a-mong hem he sate a-downe,
and axid with diuocioun

102 sum good for God-is sake.

Alex, of alle that he myght gete,
nedely but that he wolde ete,
eny holde to his bi-houe,

to pore men he wolde it take,
and othir he yave for God-is sake,

108 that is in heuen aboue*.

That churche was of Our Lady,
ther-in was a celly
an image of hur sone,

y-makid of a wondir work,
ne myght ther lewid neithir clerk

114 my3t y-wete how it was done.

Ther-fore was ther gret sikyng
of on and othir, olde and yong,
of alle that contre,

for the pore that ther were
alle the betir my3t thei fare,

120 throwe hare cherite.

Alex, of alle that he myght gete,
nedely but that he wolde ete
he ne helde to his bi-houe,

to pore men he wolde it take,
that othir he yaued for God-is sake,

126 that sittith in heuyn a-boue.

Nowe hath Alex y-dwellid there,
his fadir at home seghith sore

* Scribal repetition. Lines are repeated on ll. 121-126. In mss. L and V, they correspond to ll. 121-126 in N.

- and seieth alas, alas;
his mothir wepith boþe nyȝt and day,
and seieth alas, and wel-a-way
132 that euer sho y-bore was;
- his wif wepiþe and makipe hir mone,
that sho shalle leue a-lone,
as turtil on the tre;
eue more with-outhe make, [p. 81b]
ioy and blis sho wol for sake,
138 til sho hur spowse y-se.
- Nowe his fadir with drery chere,
he biddith his men to come hym nere,
as thei wolle haue har mede.
He praieth ham þat thei be boune
to wynde to seche his dere sone
144 in eueri ilke a stede:
- “That ye ne dwelle for no-thing
or ye haue hurd sum tithing
whare that he be.
Goth furthe nowe, and God you spede,
ther-fore y shal, so God me rede,
150 yeve you golde and fe”.
- Nowe goth thei furthe Alex sekand,
echone in-to dyuers land,
yef thei myȝt him wyne.
Som of hem, throw God-is grace,
come in-to that ilke place
156 ther Alex was jnne.
- He sate in pore man-is rewe,
ther-fore cowthe thei him not knowe,
thei yaue him cherite,
and he hit toke with mylde mode,
- and seid: “Ihesus Crist þat deied on rode,
162 lord y-thonkid the!
- Lord y-heried be thowe ay,
that y haue beden that ilke day
that y may, for thi sake,
of hem that in my owne lond
seruid me to fote and hond,
168 her almys for to take”.
- Nowe this men that were out send,
a-yen homeward thei bith y-wend
to sir Eufamyān;
þei swore to him, al bi heuen kyng,
of Alex hurd thei no tithing,
174 as wide as thei had y-gone:
- “In eche lond þat we haue bene,
we found no man þat couthe hym sene,
that to him cowthe vs wis”.
Now he seid alas þat he was borne,
“Bothe haue nowe for-lorne
180 my ioy and al my blis!”.
- In þis tale wol we not dwelle,
but of Alax wolle we telle, [p. 82a]
that riche is pore man.
Alex was pore manis fere
fully seuentene yere,
186 fro that he bi-ganne,
- sittand in a churche yerde
amonge poremen, an herde
in a symple wede.
An ymage in that churche stode
of his modir that deied on rode,
192 for oure althres nede.

* 128. V: sikeþ; L: seyetz

At the seuentene yeris ende
ther spake and seid wordis hende,
that ymage of tre,
to the wardeyn of that churche
and seid: "Wardeyn, yef þu wolt wirsch
198 eny-thing for me,

fecche þou yn my son-is man,
for seuentene yere it is a gan,
that he hath be ther out.
I warny the witturly,
to dwelle her in he is worthy,
204 dar ye haue no dout.

He hath seruid heuen bri3t,
the holy gost in him is li3t,
and yeue him myght and grace,
that his praier, with mylde stevyn,
is swete and good, an hie in hevyn,
210 bi-fore my sonnys face".

Than answerid the wardeyne
and seid: "Lady iche wol fayne
and y wist whilke".
"Go out tite as thow my3t go,
thou fyndist ther-on and no mo,
216 bring him yn that ilke".

Pe wardeyn went him out ful yare,
he found hym redy sittand there,
he brou3t him yn ful sone,
and seid: "Per yof it be thi wille,
thowe art wel come vs vn-tille,
222 here in schalt thow wone.

I was out aftir the y-sent,
throw our lady-is comaundement,

the in for to take. [p. 82b]
Moche honour schalt thow haue,
and al thing that thow wolt craue,
228 for that lady-is sake".

Whan the worde bi-gan to spryng,
that of him was grete speking
for his holynys;
for then thou3t he for to wende,
tille a-nothir lond for to lende,
234 ther men knewe hym le.

Ther wolde he ne lengir be,
man-is honour for to fle,
fro that stede he wende,
a-none to laodritan
furthe the ri3t wey he name,
240 as Ihesus Crist him kende.

To a-nothir lond, he thou3t,
God-is wille to haue y-wrou3t,
ther no man had him knowe.
As swithe as he was in the se,
for to wynde ther he wolde be,
246 the wynde bi-gan to blowe,

the wynde bigan hur ship to dryve,
til that thei gon to a-ryve,
as it was God-is wille,
in Rome, ther he was fed and borne,
ther his wonyng was bi-forne,
252 ther alle him thou3t ille.

Whan he say none othir wone,
he bi-thou3t him sone a-none
where him thou3t best to be.
To him-silue he seid and thou3t:

* 238. V: Laodiciane; L: laodician

258 "Sith that Ihesus me hath brou3t
in-to this Cite,

I can no betir rede of alle,
but go to my fadir-is halle
in poreman-is rout.
I may sitte at the rewe,
ther is none that schal me knowe,
264 so long y haue be out".

On a day sir Eufemyan,
fro the paleys he was gan,
and homeward he yede
with moche folke, that wel was di3t
bothe knave, swayn and kny3t,
270 that good were in dede. [p. 83a]

Alex thou3t him to mete,
and ranne furthe fast in the strete,
vn-tille that he him mette.
Whan he say that he was nye,
with a vois bothe lowde and hye,
276 sir Eufemyan he grette,

and seid with al mylde steuyn:
"Sir, for God-is love of heuyn,
haue merci on me.
Ich am a pilgryme pore and nakid,
that gret default hath y-makid,
282 sir, as ye may se.

Resteyuy me into thyne halle,
ther-in pore men bene alle,
and graunti me sum of thi mete,
and y schal pray ny3t and day
for thi sonne, that is a way,
288 that Ihesus Crist him the gete,

and graunty the for this woundes v,
that thou maist 3it se him on lyve,
that was thi hart blys.

And the sir, with-uten strif,
ioy and blis in sowle and lyf,
294 Crist the til him wys".

Than sir Eufemyan per with-stode,
and grauntid with a myld mode
the poremannys bene.
He grauntid for to clopi and fede,
and his men schulde him lede
300 to his hous as sone.

He grauntid him, as y yow telle,
an hous alone, ther-in to dwelle
with-uten eny fere.
And a man schulde him gete
and bring him bope drink and mete,
306 whan the mystir were.

Nowe Alex hath, pat ye haue herde,
is dwelling in is fadir 3erde
as a pore man.
In fastyng praier and wakyng
he serwyd Ihesus heuen kyng
312 in alle that he can.

Seruauantis pat were prowte and yong,
thei drewe him to heything,
as he yede vp and down, [p. 83b]
and oft-sithis broth of fischis
and water that thei wasch in dischis,
318 thei cast it vpon his croun;

and alle the schame pat bei hym wrou3t,
he thonkid Ihesus pat him bou3t,
and yaue ham my3t ther-to.

* 283. V: receiue; L: reseceyue

He was tholemode in al thing,
ther owt my3t no man him bryng,
324 for nou3t that thei couthe do,

ther dwellid Alex stille,
as it was Ihesus Crist-is wille,
seuentene yere,
in his owne fadir-is in,
kend him none of al his kyn,
330 neithir furre ne nere.

At the seuentene yeris ende,
he wist he schuld hens wynde,
throw grace of the Holy Gost,
to Ihesus Crist God-is sone,
in blis with him ay to wone
336 in life that euer schal last.

He gate him ink and parchemyn,
and al his life he wrote ther-in
that he had leuyd here,
and radde it sith eueridele,
and thonkid God so my3t he wele
342 with welle blithe chere.

Whan he had do as y yow say,
vppon the holy sonday
that come aftir next,
with moche ioy and moche li3t,
his sowle þat was so feire and bri3t,
348 went out of his brest.

Whan his sowle was went to heuyn,
ther come a vois *with* mylde steuyn
in-to an holy stede,
ther al the folke of Rome were
God-is seruyce for to hire,
354 and bedden holy bede,

and seid þis wordis with-outen faile:

“Comyth to me þat hauyth travaile,
or chargy for my sake.

Comyth to me, y schal yow telle
with ioy and blys at *your* wille,
360 þat neuer more schal slake”.

Whan þat folke had þat worde herde,
thei weren echone a-ferde, [p. 84a]
and fillen down to grounde,
and as thei lay and hyd her face,
ther come out throw God-is grace,
366 in a litil stounde,

anothir steuyn mylde and meke,
and bade ham a-rise vp and seke
a God is manne of Rome:
“That ye mowe, throwe is prayer
and þrowe is godenys, be *partener*
372 at the day of dome”.

Thei rose vp al *with* mylde chere,
and sou3t bothe fer and nere,
bi wey and bi strete*,
but for no-thing that thei wrou3t
with that relik that thei sou3t,
378 my3t ther now here mete.

Til the vois, with wo[r]dis meke,
come a-yen, and bade ham seke
in sir Eufemyan-is hous,
for ther schulde thei sone fynde,
that schulde hele dome and blynde
384 a relik precious.

Then went thei furthe a-none,
and askid sir Eufemyane
yef he knewe suche a man;
he answerid redily
and seid: “Lordlingis sicurly
390 of suche ne wote y nan”.

Than went furthe the Emperour,
Archidiacanus of honour,
and Innocent the Pope
a-non to sir Eufamyens in,
til þei come þer wolde þei not blyn,
396 with hem come gret rout.

Than come furthe a knave a-non
and axid: "Sir Eufemyan,
go we sir, y rede,
and loke nowe at your pilgreme
that ye haue kept so long tyme,
402 wher he be quyk or dede.

Yef he be dede, þat was so meke,
he is þat man that thei seke,
I wote wel, with-ouen drede,
he was a man of holy lyfe;
of him come neuer stynt ne stryfe, [p. 84b]
408 ne wikkid worde ne dede".

Whan Eufemyan that herde,
he went to loke howe Alex ferde
to his house ful right.
He founde him dede, whan he come þer,
his face ther it lay on bere
414 as sonne it schy-ned bright,

tho in his hond he helde a scripture,
Eufamyan yede ther-to as tite
to loke whate was ther-in,
but for no kynde ien,
out of the honde that was in,
420 my3t he it nou3t wyn.

Whan he my3t no betir spede,

to the Emperour he yede,
and tolde him that tithand.
Thei come furthe bothe good pas,
til thei come ther it was
426 the dede corpus liggand.

Whan thei come in-to that hous,
the Emperour seid thous,
and on this manere:
"Thei we for synne be vnworthi,
we haue to keypyng nou3t for-thi
432 of this londis here,

and this man, that we Pope calle,
hath the keypyng of vs alle,
and of alle holy churche;
ther-fore de[li]uery vs that scripture,
þat we þer þrowe may se and wate
438 howe we schul with the wirche".

Whan thei had seide hare wille,
the Pope leide his hond ther tille,
Alex than lete it go.
The Pope as tit lete rede it there
bi-fore alle that ther were,
444 hiryng his fadir also.

Whan his fadir had hurd þat y-rad,
he was for-wondrid and for-ferd,
for sorowe he was nye dede;
as a man had a dede wounde,
sownyng he fel down to goronde,
450 heuy as eny lede.

Whan he had longe leyn,
tille his state come a-yeyne, [p. 85a]

* Scribal inversion. In the ms. l. 375 is written on line 378 and viceversa. The mistake is edited in the original version with margin note: 'a' appears on the left margin of l. 375, 'b' on that of l. 378.

and made rewly chere.
He ros his brest, he drowe his here,
with deolful cry and seking sore,
456 that pite was to here.

Moche deole it was to telle
howe he on the body felle,
of wepyng blan he nou3t.
He seid: "Alas, my dere son!
How mi3tist thou so long won
462 with ous that knewe the nou3t?"

Alas, nowe hast thou dwellid here
al this seuyntene 3ere,
in myn owne in,
and thou hast borne þe so lowe,
and woldist neuer ben a-knowe,
468 that thou were of my kyn.

Out alas and wel-away,
that ich euer a-bote this day
this sorowe for to se.
Ich wend of the haue solas
in myne elde. Alas, alas!
474 For deole dede wol y be!"

Whan his modir hurd of this,
sho stert furthe in hast y-wis,
as a lyonesse.
With hur-silue sho ferde to wonder,
sho rose hur clothis al in-sonder
480 in gret wodenesse.

Sho drowe hur here as scho were wode,
and seid: "For him that deide on rode,
men yeue me way,
that y may to my son go.
Was neuer modir halfe so wo
486 as me is this day.

Yeue me Rome, and lete me se
that bodi þat was borne of me,
and fed was of my brest.
Lete me come that corps vn-tille,
for ye wote it is good skille
492 that y be it next".

Whan scho my3t nyghe it nere,
sho fille þer-on *with* drery chere,
and seide: "Alas my sone!
Whi hast þu thus *with* vs y-fare
suffird vs for the sorowy and care? [p. 85b]
498 Whi hast thowe thus y-done?"

Thou hast y-sey thi fadir and me
wepe and make grete sorowe for the,
bothe erly and late,
and thowe hast seuentene yere
vnknowe *with* vs dwellid here,
504 in pore beggars state".

Oft-sithis scho fille a doun,
a-pon the body al in soun,
and kissid hondis and fete,
and the face that was so swete,
sho it kist, and made hit wete,
510 with teris that scho lete.

Sho seid: "Alas þat me is wo!
Thou were my son with-ouren mo,
wepith alle folke with me!
Y haue the fedde many a day,
alas sone, and wel-away,
516 that y knewe nou3t the!

Thou my3t haue be a gret lordling,
and y-honowrid as a kyng,
and it had be thi wille.

* 449. cf. l. 363

Nowe hast thou had dispit and wrong,
of thi thyne thrallis euer a-mong,
522 and borne it fulle stille.

Alas! Who schalle yeue to me
welle of teris to wepe for the,
bothe day and ny3t?

Alas alas, what me is wo!
Y wolde myne hert wolde breke a-to,
528 that y sey nou3t this si3t”.

Than come furthe a drery þing,
y-clad in clothis of mornyng,
that was Alex wife.
Sho was al pite th[a]t to se,
and seid: “Alas, ful wo is me,
534 that euer y had life.

Nowe al my ioy is a-wey gon,
here had y hope now haue y non,
to se him on lyue.
Now am y wedow, alas þat stound
sorow hath yeue my hert a wound
540 that me to dethe schal dryue.

Alas, whate is me to rede,
my myrroure is broke and is dede [p. 86a]
that my likyng was in.
Hope of ioy nowe haue y-lore,
and sorowe is newid me bi-fore,
546 that neuer more schal blyn”.

Al folke that stode bi-side,
that say hur sorowe so vnride,
thei wept fulle tendirliche.
Ther was none that my3t hur holde,
man nothir woman, yong ne olde,
552 and that was ferliche.

The Pope come furthe and þe Emperors
to lete him bring out of þe hous,
and leide him on a bere,
and bere him out *with* gret solempnite,
vn-to mydward of the cite,
558 and criden al that my3t here,

and seide: “Comyth se þat holy man
that ye haue sou3t echon.
Here he is in this place,
founden he is and he is here,
that holy body in a bere.
564 throwe help of God-is grace.
al that holy body in a bere
throwe help of God-is grace*

Al that wist of that cry,
thei ranne thedir hastily,
and drowe it nou3t a lite.
570 And al the sike that ther were,
that my3t touche that body there,
thei were hole as tite.

The blynde of him had hare si3t,
the wode hare witte had ful ri3t,
the holte hare lemys lele;
576 was þer none that thedir my3t wyn
whate sikenys that thei were in,
that thei ne had hare hele.

Whan the Emperour say þat wondir,
thei toke the bere and yede þer vndir
with the Pope helpand;
582 for he wolde be made holy
throwe bering of that body,
he toke the bere on honde.

He lete sowe in that Cite

* ll. 565-6 scribe's repetition

golde and siluer grete plente,
and that was for this skille
588 for the folke schulde with-drawe, [p. 86b]
but that a-vailid not an hawe,
thei toke none entent ther tille.

Thei proceden euer nere and nere,
for to come to the bere,
ther the corpus lay in;
594 ther proceden to þat *with* gret fors,
that vnnethe *with* that holy cors,
to the churche myȝt thei wyn.

Whan thei come to the churche,
a tombe of golde thei lete wurch
with precyous stones.
600 In seyn daies was it diȝt,
ful rechely and alle a riȝt,
thei leiden ther-in is bonns.

Whan þat holy corps was leide,
in þat tombe, þat wel was greithid

with ful moche honour,
606 to al that were in þat place,
ther come out throwe God-is grace
a ful swete odour.

So swete felid thei neuer none,
as wide as thei had gone,
of no spicerye.
612 Than worschippis thei al *with* o steuyn
Jhesus God-is sonne of heuyn,
and his modir Marye.

Nowe Ihesus Crist, throwe þe *preiere*
of him that y haue of tolde here,
ȝif thi wille be,
618 graunte vs al good endyng,
and in heuyn a wonnyng.
Amen amen pur cherite.

Explicit vita sti Alex
Hic pennam fixi penitet me si male scripci

* 602. V, L: bones

* 612. V: worschipeden; L: worchipeden

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