

Eric Sams

[On Shakespeare's Handwriting]

? Letter [Abstract of argument], 24 November 1981; previously unpublished © THE ESTATE OF ERIC SAMS

I

- 1) *Edmond Ironside* (in Egerton 1994) is undated and anonymous. But it has long been ascribed to the 1580s; and is among the Shakespeare apocrypha. My recent work (Annex A, pp. 1-7) on the internal literary evidence of Shakespeare's hand has been encouraged by leading authorities (e.g. Emrys Jones, Stanley Wells) and applauded by the word-study expert (Eliot Slater) to whom Dr. Wells referred me.
- 2) If the young Shakespeare wrote *Ironside* then prima facie that MS is a fair-copy autograph; the play-house text has clear authorial characteristics, and the prompt-additions are in a much later hand.
- 3) One possible reason why this field has been so neglected is that Egerton 1994 contains no recent note of relevant literature, notably E.B. Everitt, *The Young Shakespeare* (1954) and E.B. Everitt and R.L. Armstrong, *Six Early Plays Related to the Shakespeare Canon* (1965).

II

- 4) The Folger Library copy of William Lambarde's *Archaionomia* (1568) bears the signature Wm. Shakspeare.
- 5) Every scholar who has ever examined and reported upon that signature, from its discovery in 1938 to Samuel Schoenbaum in 1981, has pronounced it probably genuine. Annex B is a typical affidavit, affirmed in 1943 by the Folger Director.
- 6) The Lambarde volume also contains annotations and underlinings. These too have been passed over, perhaps for the reasons suggested in Annex A (pp.8-9). But Professor Kenneth Muir, another authority on early Shakespeare, is now interested; and so is the Folger Curator, who kindly sent me some xeroxes for scrutiny.

III

- 7) For the riveting fact as that *Ironside* and *Archaionomia* are closely linked already. Thus the British Library copy of the *latter* contains a manuscript genealogy of the historical Edmund Ironside; and Lambarde's main subject-matter is in fact the statutes of King Canute, who is the hero of the play *Edmond Ironside* (despite that title).
- 8) Further, one underlined passage in the Folger volume instantly recall Canute's main Act I speech in that play; and one annotation cites a book (*De Differentiis Animalium*, Edward Wotton, 1552) on a famously favourite subject of the young Shakespeare's.
- 9) But the most immediately striking point is the apparent identity of that annotation (Annex C, footnote) in a clear Italic hand, with the Italic component of *Edmond Ironside*.

IV

- 10) I have sought comments from, among others, the leading national expert David Ellen, Principal Scientific Officer of the Forensic Science Laboratory of the Metropolitan Police. Only he has so far replied. After a close comparison of the Folger xeroxes with the published facsimiles of *Ironside* he has concluded that the Italic samples share the same letter-forms, proportions and methods of construction. He aims to examine the original in Washington as soon as may be. He will also seek permission to inspect Egerton 1994.
- 11) It would of course also be most valuable to have the palaeographic and other assessments of the two libraries concerned. I now have a complete microfilm of the Folger volume readily available for comparison. I'm also in correspondence with Folger about published *Ironside* facsimiles; and shall be sending them copies of these notes.

- 12) Meanwhile I thought it might help with any contemplated comparison here if I drew up a dossier of background facts and information: section V below and Annex D.

V

- 13) The immediately obvious characteristic of the Latin annotation is its relation to the Italic fount from which the printed Latin of that Lambarde page and *passim* is drawn. Next comes its apparent identity with the Italic component (by now very familiar to me) of *Ironsides*.
- 14) The notion (by now equally familiar) that detailed comparison will prove a waste of time, either on *a priori* grounds or because any two Italic hands of the period would probably look the same, will I hope be at any rate challenged by a consideration of the highly detailed correspondences outlined in Annex D, e.g. items 9, 11, 12, 13, 27, 32, 40 and 41.
- 15) In general it may be thought that a close and clear correspondence of over thirty letter-forms etc distributed among over 1000 possible comparisons in *Ironsides* with only one or two small discrepancies is not without some evidential force (viz: small and capital a, b, c, two different styles of d, e, double f, two different styles of i, two different i-n joins, two different styles of l, m, n, two variants of o, p, r, two different forms of s, two different s-t joins, two different kinds of t, double t, three different forms of u, w, figure 1, figure 4, and an abbreviation sign).

VI

- 16) At any rate no one will deny that the resemblances are even closer and clearer than those which were (very kindly and gratifyingly) made the subject of a British Library exhibition earlier this year.
- 17) On that point perhaps I might just add that the only comparable characters common to both the "Southampton" letter in Lansdowne 71 and the Lambarde annotations, namely the figures 1, 5, 9 and 2 and an abbreviation sign - exhibit a correspondence fully as striking (v. Annex D 38, 41-44)

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