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Patriarchy, Honour, and Violence: Masculinities in Premodern Europe

Edited by

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Tensions in Hegemonic Masculinity

The Legend of John Baptist Grimaldi: Sexual Comportment and Masculine Styles in Early Tudor London

Shannon McSheffrey[1]

Summary: A small but wealthy and powerful group of Italian merchants lived in early sixteenth-century London, representing the international banking and mercantile firms of Genoa, Florence, Venice, Lucca, and other northern Italian city-states. Though favourites at the royal court, with direct access to the ears of the king himself, these Lombards (as the English termed them) were highly unpopular with their English mercantile rivals. London merchants' hostility drew obviously from the economic competition the Italians posed, but their animosity was cultural as well as commercial. One particular bone of contention was that Italian merchants did not play by English rules regarding sexual relationships: they were accused of seducing the wives and daughters of respectable men. The Italians may have pursued such seductions not simply for sexual gratification but also as a strategy to embarrass and shame their English counterparts. At the same time, it is also clear that there were quite different sexual ethics at work among the English and Italian mercantile elites that signified incompatible reactions to sexual situations.

In the decades around 1500, the Genoese merchant Giovanni Battista Grimaldi was a figure of great notoriety in London, so much so that several literary works of the period employed Grimaldi as the personification of vice. Among these was a 500-line ballad recounting his many faults that was copied into Robert Fabyan's *Great Chronicle of London*. This ballad portrays Grimaldi as the epitome of different forms of moral corruption: he cheated business

[1] Many thanks to Amanda McVitty, Martha Howell, and the anonymous reviewers for offering such useful comments on the draft; to Caroline Barron, Katherine French, DeLloyd Guth, Bart Lambert, Vanessa McCarthy, Matthew Payne, and Eric Reiter for references and suggestions; to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for financial support for this research.

associates, bribed juries, twisted legal processes, and committed all manner of horrific sexual offences, even deflowering his own daughter. Grimaldi's infamy, especially allegations of his sexual rapacity, dovetails both with cases against some of his Italian associates in English courts and with another set of narratives about Italian adulteries — Edward Hall's account of the Evil May Day anti-immigrant riot in 1517, which, in Hall's version, was sparked by Italian merchants seducing the wives of English merchants and openly boasting about it. There is no evidence that Grimaldi himself was targeted by the 1517 rioters, perhaps simply because he was out of town: he was likely in Calais by late April of that year.[2] Grimaldi's notoriety in the early years of Henry VIII's reign nonetheless contributed to the toxic stew of xenophobia that resulted in the Evil May Day riot.

The narratives about Grimaldi and other Italians swirling around London in the early sixteenth century clearly drew from English stereotypes about Italians but likely also had a basis in actual behaviour. Court records indicate that Italian merchants visiting London for short or long stays often transgressed English moral codes in ways that disturbed their English neighbours: living openly (and indeed boastingly) in adultery and seducing *juvenculas* (young girls) and even merchants' wives. Sexual comportment was a vital aspect of manliness, a potent tool for the demonstration of dominance, but the masculine styles of English and Italian merchants — *how* they used sexuality to demonstrate dominance — were different. Though for the English the prevailing public morality for urban patriarchs prized sobriety and sexual self-control, for the elite of Italian city-states sexual prowess was a much more prominent aspect of manly display. This is not to say that English merchants confined their sexual activities to the marriage bed, but rather that any extramarital sexual behaviour in which they engaged was to be discreet. The keeping of a mistress or sexual involvement with a domestic servant was to be distinguished, in the English merchants' code, from the open demonstrations of virile sexuality in which the Italians might engage; the latter might appear to the English as unseemly, dissolute, and disorderly, while English restraint might appear to the Italians as weak and ineffectual. This was thus to some extent a culture clash: the sexual mores of the Italian merchant class were substantially different from those of their English counterparts. Yet, this was not simply a misunderstanding of local customs by newcomers: the Italian merchants evidently sometimes pursued seduction of English women as a

[2] *L&P*, 2:965. On Evil May Day, see McSheffrey, "Disorder, Riot, and Governance," and references there.

deliberate strategy to embarrass and shame English rivals. Though all of the Italians' sexual delicts about which the English complained involved female partners, these were clearly performances of masculinity aimed at other men rather than at women.[3] The women involved, almost always unnamed, were objects with which the Italians displayed their mastery, but the display was meant for those women's husbands and fathers. Seductions and accusations of sexual misconduct were not minor distractions from a more central economic rivalry between Italian and English merchants in London in the 1510s, but thoroughly intertwined in these masculine contests.

Grimaldi as Literary Character

Though Giovanni Battista Grimaldi was at best a middling-level player in the rivalries between certain English and Italian merchants in the early sixteenth century, in the first decade of Henry VIII's rule he became the most prominent exemplar of Italian corruption and vice for English writers. Likely the earliest and certainly the most detailed literary portrayal of Grimaldi is the long ballad attributed to one "Tom a Dale," resident at the sign of the Blue Cat in Aylesbury, and copied into *The Great Chronicle of London*. *The Great Chronicle* is anonymous, but scholars generally now accept as certain that its author was the draper Robert Fabyan, an insider and partisan in London civic politics.[4] The ballad may be Fabyan's own composition or alternatively, as Fabyan himself states, a verse in common circulation in London. It is placed in the chronicle in the year 1509, as part of the reckoning that followed the death of Henry VII and the accession of the new king.

Fabyan entitled the ballad "The Legend of Baptyst," and at another point added a secondary title, "Legenda, sed non Aurea, hic Inscribitur

[3] See Levin-Richardson, *The Brothel of Pompeii*, 105; Howell, "Merchant Masculinity," 6; Moss, "Ready to Disport with You," 1–10; Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 108–114, 128; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 95–96.

[4] McLaren, "Fabyan, Robert (d.1513), Chronicler"; Payne, "Robert Fabyan's Civic Identity," 278–282; Boffey, "Robert Fabyan," 285. Boffey notes that Fabyan was much interested in including verse in his historical works, which he both borrowed or translated from other authors and apparently composed himself — and she suggests that the Grimaldi ballad could have been Fabyan's own work or, alternatively, in general circulation on the streets of London. Boffey, *Manuscript and Print*, 115–18; "The English Verse of Robert Fabyan," esp. 8, 23. See also May and Bryson, *Verse Libel*, 23–24, on where this poem fits into the genre.

Johannis spurcissimi" [Here is inscribed the Legend, but not the Golden one, of John the most foul].[5] The ballad describes John Baptist as having arrived in England "at […] tendyr age" along with his father, Lewis Grimaldi. Lewis was a serious and honest man who was thoroughly trusted; his son, however, an "ungracious Imp," caused so much trouble that Lewis himself was arrested and imprisoned for his son's actions before returning to Genoa. John Baptist stayed in London; he was forced to live abroad, as the balladeer indicates in a repeated refrain, because the Genoese had "banyshid [him] owth of land."[6] In London, he made a career as a broker (middleman) between English producers of wool and cloth and international exporters, which allowed his maggoty corruption to fester openly. Although London civic officials tried many times to bring him to account — putting him in the pillory in the market for three days, even prosecuting him for the felony of horse theft — he was always able, the balladeer said, to escape due punishment by bribery and corruption.[7]

Grimaldi's villainy went beyond crooked business and legal practices: it invaded his whole body. The balladeer several times indicates that he was "moost deffourmyd" in his "body & lymmys," with a "gulfy [cracked and pitted] face," an outward sign of Grimaldi's inner putrefaction.[8] And the iniquity of this "worst of all men" extended to corporeal sin, as he ravished virgins, bought and sold women as a "common bawd," and was an "opyn avowtrer," indeed "rejoysyng [his] mysdede / Not beyng Repentaunt, by many a long yere." Among his many foul acts, he "long…kept, an othir mannys wyffe" and even sought to kill the husband. The cuckolded husband laboured hard to recover her, but to no avail; the balladeer chose not to reveal the husband's name to maintain his honest reputation while revealing John Baptist's shame. Worst of all, contrary to nature, he made his own daughter his concubine, deflowering her "of hyr vyrgynyte." As the balladeer says, John Baptist Grimaldi was indeed "the worst undyr sunne."[9] It is worth pausing here to note that though Grimaldi's alleged sexual sins were heinous and indeed unnatural ("contrary

[5] Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle*, 352, 357. The Golden Legend was a very well-known collection of saints' lives.

[6] Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle*, 352–354.

[7] Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle,* 360–361.

[8] Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle*, 357, 359. Thomas Penn has diagnosed this as the disfiguring skin ailment erysipelas, but as the only evidence for any dermatological condition is the vague reference in the ballad to his "gulfy face," this overreaches. Penn, *Winter King*, 267.

[9] Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle*, 358–359.

to all kyynd," as the balladeer puts it), they were exclusively heterosexual, on which more below.

We have no way of knowing whether this ballad was indeed sung on the streets as Fabyan describes: that is certainly plausible, though it survives only as copied into *The Great Chronicle*, which itself exists only in a single manuscript copy which remained unprinted until the 1930s. The ballad, however, was not the only literary work of the 1510s that used Grimaldi as an exemplar of depravity, suggesting that even if the ballad itself was not well known, Grimaldi's infamy was. The poet, John Skelton, made an allusion to Grimaldi when, in his morality play *Magnyfycence* (likely written around 1519), he described a dog who habitually snatched puddings from the table as "Grimbaldus gredy."[10] Skelton may have known Grimaldi personally as they possibly overlapped as residents of the Westminster Abbey sanctuary precinct.[11] Ian Lancashire has also argued that Grimaldi was the prototype of the personified vice "Imagination" (used in the sense of plotting and deception) in the anonymous morality play *Hick Scorner*, likely written in the early 1510s and first printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1515. The character in *Hick Scorner* exhibited a complex of vices: he was adulterous, licentious, and a bawd at the Stews in Southwark; he hung around Westminster Hall in order to look for bribery opportunities "to get money plenty"; he secretly made accusations of treason in order to hang true men. Lancashire argues that *Hick Scorner* was written for performance in the Southwark household of Charles Brandon, companion of the king and soon after made duke of Suffolk. The play makes a number of comic allusions to political issues, and Lancashire hypothesizes that the particular constellation of corruptions Imagination displays indicates that audiences would have recognized Grimaldi in the character.[12]

Although the animus of these writers towards Grimaldi is clear, one important thing to note is that his identity as Italian is not foregrounded in any of these literary works. Neither Fabyan in introducing the ballad nor the balladeer explicitly attributes Grimaldi's vice to his nationality, and indeed

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[10] Skelton, *Complete English Poems*, 151 (line 1156); Scattergood, "John Skelton," 19; Meale, "Skelton's English Works," 171.

[11] Skelton leased a tenement in the Westminster sanctuary by 1518 and perhaps before (Westminster Abbey Muniments, Westminster Abbey Register Book II, 1509–1536 [typescript calendar], fol. 56$^{r\text{-}v}$). If Skelton's residence there did not overlap with Grimaldi's (who, as below, had left by early 1517), then certainly stories of Grimaldi's stay would have come to Skelton's ears. Scattergood, "John Skelton," 13, 17–18.

[12] Lancashire, *Two Tudor Interludes*, 172–177, 193, 230–231.

the Great Chronicler is at pains to point out in the prologue to the ballad that Grimaldi's father, Lewis, had been an upstanding man with an excellent reputation in both Genoa and London and that John Baptist was a bad seed. In *Hick Scorner*, Italianness is absent altogether: there is no suggestion in the text that the character Imagination is Italian. This could mean that Lancashire's identification of Grimaldi as the prototype for Imagination is simply mistaken (although otherwise, the parallels are rather striking); or it could mean that the character was *played* as Italian (that is, with an Italian accent) so that audiences got the point; or it could mean that Grimaldi's Genoese identity was not actually central to his bad reputation. Indeed, perhaps in real life Grimaldi's Italianness was not always obvious. Grimaldi had likely been in England since childhood and thus possibly spoke English without an accent and he might indeed sometimes have passed as English. He was commonly called, according to Fabyan, John Grumbald, although "his propir name is John Baptyst de Grymaldis"[13] (in other words: you might have thought he was an ordinary Englishman but was actually Italian). Grimaldi may thus have had the kind of liminal positionality that those who migrate as children often have.

Yet, it is also possible that the ballad's readers or listeners would not have needed to have Grimaldi's Italianness constantly spelled out, because it was already encoded in other ways — for instance in his name (there's a good deal of emphasis in the ballad on his name John Baptist, clearly not a common one in England), or in the particular forms of corruption he embodied, especially his profound sexual depravity. Though not all Italians were infected with such degeneracy — John Baptist's father Lewis had been a man of virtue — those were vices to which his kind was seen to be especially prone. Such stereotypes could be called upon when necessary to impugn his character.

Grimaldi as Historical Person

In the 1510s, then, Grimaldi had become a potent symbol in a certain segment of London popular culture for pervasive moral corruption, expressed in several forms. Was this a fair portrait of him? What we know about the man from contemporary records accords in some ways with the Grimaldi of the ballad, although it is also clear that the flesh and blood person was less obviously a complete villain. He was also, evidently, not at odds with

[13] Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle*, 352.

the English generally: throughout his career Grimaldi worked closely with English merchants and civil servants. Both he and his associates from Genoa and other Italian city-states evidently found advantage in locating themselves in London — they would not have been there otherwise — and, in turn, some sectors of the English economy and government also found advantage in their being there. As Grimaldi's career shows, however, in some corners of the London mercantile scene the Italians' presence was a threat, resulting in a lively conflict that played itself out in the manipulation of legal processes and in personal confrontations that took a number of forms, including sexual rivalries.

Grimaldi probably came to London, as Fabyan suggests, first in the 1460s as a child with his father, the Genoese merchant Ludovico Grimaldi. Although Italian merchant bankers' stints in England were almost always temporary, lasting a few years at most,[14] Giovanni Battista would go on to make his career entirely in England. It is not clear why he chose not to return to Genoa when his father did and indeed perhaps it was not his choice: the balladeer indicates that he was banished from the Italian city-state because of his many misdeeds.[15] That may explain his decision to make his living in London, although he continued to do business with other Genoese merchants until the end of his life, and so he was certainly not ostracized.[16] He had at least one son who lived in England with him (named Lewis after his grandfather)[17] and perhaps the daughter named as his incest victim in the ballad, for whom there is otherwise no evidence. The children imply that he was married; he seems to have lived fairly continuously in London, presumably with his wife, although nothing about her is known, including whether she was English or Italian. Either having a Genoese wife live with him in England or marrying an Englishwoman would have made Grimaldi atypical among his Italian merchant colleagues, very few of whom had wives in England.[18]

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[14] Guidi-Bruscoli and Lutkin, "Perception, Identity, and Culture," 89–96, 103.

[15] Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle*, 352–354.

[16] In particular, during a crisis in the mid-1510s he was supported by the major Genoese merchants then in London: TNA, C 1/339/36; C 1/368/31, STAC 2/16/346 to 350.

[17] He arranged a job for his son Lewis at the custom house in Southampton in 1509 just before Henry VII died; it was then stripped from Lewis by June 1509. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1494–1509*, 625; *L&P*, 1:52. Lewis was also cited as having represented his father in the legal conflict with William Huse in the mid-1510s. TNA, STAC 2/16/348.

[18] Bratchel, "Regulation and Group Consciousness," 593; Guidi-Bruscoli and Lutkin, "Perception, Identity, and Culture," 96. For exceptions, Ormrod, Lambert, and Mackman,

By the 1480s, as the ballad indicates, Grimaldi was working as a broker between English wool and cloth producers and Italian exporters and within a decade or so had branched into moneylending.[19] From the 1490s on, he had also begun to work in various capacities for the crown, enmeshing him in the London civic and mercantile political scene. The king himself was interested in curbing the independence to which certain sectors of the London mercantile elite aspired, and one potent weapon in this containment was a crackdown on London merchants who evaded customs duties. To accomplish this, a network of "promoters," or information-gatherers, was employed, among whom was Grimaldi himself.[20] The crown's interests in reining in London's merchants coincided with the interests of the Italian merchant community, who were happy to help curtail Londoners' freedom of action. Grimaldi evidently provided information that led to successful convictions on customs violations, including the 1496 takedown of the prominent mercer and later mayor William Capell.[21] In the first decade of the sixteenth century, Grimaldi and Capell continued to be implicated in some intense episodes of conflict both within the London civic elite and between London merchants and the crown in the waning years of Henry VII's life. Grimaldi clashed with some of the mayoral administrations (including, not surprisingly, Capell's in 1503–1504), although he also worked with others. In 1507 he faced what appears to have been a trumped-up charge of treason that was quickly erased by a royal pardon.[22]

This 1507 episode was connected, either directly or loosely, with the arrest, in 1508, of Gabriel Pennell (Gabriele Spinola), probably of the prominent

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Immigrant England, 144.

[19] TNA, C 1/64/1019; C 1/109/59; C 1/204/45; C 1/204/90; STAC 2/16/346.

[20] Harper, "London and the Crown," 231–238, 250; Cavill, "Enforcement"; Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 235–243.

[21] Harper, "London and the Crown," 231–232; Miller, "Capell, Sir William"; Cavill, "Enforcement."

[22] In 1488, Ralph Kynaston, a gentleman of London, contended that Grimaldi had committed treason (unspecified); Grimaldi was bailed and although he appeared a number of times the case was not apparently going anywhere, suggesting that there was not anything particularly serious to the allegations (TNA, KB 29/118, m. 29^{d}). In 1507, the twenty-year-old treason charge resurfaced — presumably as a weapon in the renewed battles of that decade — and Grimaldi was arrested for jumping bail and neglecting to appear in the London Hustings court. He was outlawed for this in September 1507 but by mid-October appeared in court with a royal pardon in hand to release him. TNA, KB 27/985, rex m. 25; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1494–1509*, 564.

Genoese merchant family of that name and one of Grimaldi's servants. Three London artisans gave depositions to the court of London aldermen regarding Spinola's behaviour, which indicate some of the lineaments of the conflict. The Italian had declared, the witnesses said, that the mayor, aldermen, and sheriffs of London "hath non auctoritie to medell with any of them [the Italians], for he had a master that was a gret gentilman borne, which payed the king CC li. a yere for custome." Furthermore, Spinola said that the mayor and the aldermen were "but beggers to them" and that the Italians would be able to go straight to the king and his council if any attempt was made to bring them to account. He ended by bidding "the devillys torde in all their tethes [the devil's turd in all their teeth]," for only the king and his council would rule him, and no one else. The artisans also reported that another Italian, the Venetian Petir Tiplo (Pietro Tiepolo),[23] said that he would spend £100 to harm those who had "caused this trouble," and would "make them, their wiffis, and all their childern to wepe so that they hereafter shuld be fayne to come crepyng uppon their knese to entrete him." As a result of this testimony of his threatening words, Gabriele Spinola was taken into custody.[24] But he proved himself right in his boast that he could avail himself of his connections to disentangle himself from this situation: about two weeks later, John Baptist Grimaldi, together with the royal councillor, Sir Richard Empson, and Empson's associate, John Canby, were able to get Spinola released. According to later accusations, Empson and Canby tricked the mayor, Laurence Aylmer, into releasing Spinola; further episodes in the drama included the arrest and imprisonment (though ultimately, the acquittal) of Aylmer and several of his associates on allegations of corrupting justice.[25]

London politics were indeed becoming combustible in the waning days of Henry VII's reign. Grimaldi and other Italians worked with members of the king's council who sought to shape London civic politics; the London merchants, whose activities were curbed through corruption scandals unveiled by these Italian operatives, were clearly enraged by the boasts of Spinola and others that the mayor and aldermen were but beggars in comparison to them. They were even more enraged when the Italians were able to make good their claims of impunity due to their high connections. Indeed, matters turned even more against them when the leading figure among the English

[23] *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1494–1509*, 505.

[24] LMA, COL/CA/01/01/002, fol. 47^{v}.

[25] TNA, KB 9/453, mm. 456, 458.

opponents of crown policy, William Capell, was put in prison himself; he was still languishing there at the king's death in April 1509. The accession of the new king Henry VIII brought a significant shift in the London political landscape. Empson and his associate Edmund Dudley were arrested; Capell was released to resume his position as London alderman and then, in 1510, was elected as mayor for an unusual second term; Grimaldi was forced to go into sanctuary at Westminster Abbey.[26] The ballad is inserted into *The Great Chronicle* in the year 1509, and ends with Grimaldi holed up in the sanctuary.[27] Although Empson and Dudley were ultimately executed for treason (arguably in a show trial), Grimaldi himself was pardoned in February 1510 and emerged from his sanctuary.[28] In 1512 he paid a large fine of £1000 to the crown, which may have been a quitclaim for the various issues that emerged from the late years of Henry VII.[29]

By 1513, however, Grimaldi was once again in trouble, this time thanks to the London haberdasher,William Huse, who made it his business around that time to harass a number of Italian merchants.[30] Huse had Grimaldi arrested for theft regarding a decade-old business deal in which, Huse alleged, Grimaldi had cheated him of £400 (Grimaldi denied the allegations). Grimaldi escaped from prison and again went into sanctuary at Westminster, and from the sanctuary precinct, he and many of his associates exchanged lawsuits in various courts with Huse. Huse claimed that Grimaldi had escaped due punishment by engaging in widespread bribery and corruption; Grimaldi and a number of other Genoese merchants responded by arguing that Huse had fraudulently revived a settled Exchequer case by suing a writ of error in the King's Bench and then corrupting the jury. As was his right as a stranger, Grimaldi had asked for a "half-tongue" jury for this case — that is, one made up half of strangers, half of Englishmen — but Huse allegedly arranged that the stranger jurors be all Dutchmen rather than Italians; the

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[26] Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 235–243; Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle*, 337, 343–344.

[27] Thomas and Thornley, *Great Chronicle*, 337, 343–344.

[28] Grimaldi was specifically excluded from the general pardon issued in the early days of Henry VIII's reign, but this was reversed and an individual pardon was granted to him in February 1510. *L&P*, 1:8, 170.

[29] *L&P*, 1:681–682.

[30] TNA, STAC 2/16/346–350; C 1/350/42; C 1/339/36; C 1/368/31; KB 27/1019, plea mm. 21, 68.

Dutch jurors were then suborned to support his case.[31] Possibly Huse's case had some merit, but certainly there is plenty of evidence that Huse himself was a vexatious litigant with an axe to grind.[32] The crux of Huse's case against Grimaldi was that a document recording a settlement between him and Grimaldi had been forged by a filazer (clerk) at the court of King's Bench, Richard Hawkes.[33] Hawkes vehemently denied the allegation and its attack on his "unblemished reputation." It seems unlikely that the court at which Hawkes worked regarded Huse's claims very sympathetically.

Grimaldi ultimately emerged from this conflict and from sanctuary by early 1517. In March 1517, he was given letters of protection, along with his Genoese colleague, Domenico Lomellini, to serve in the retinue of the lieutenant of Calais.[34] He was presumably in Calais at the beginning of May and thus missed the Evil May Day riot. Little is known about Grimaldi thereafter; he evidently died sometime around 1520, because various other legal processes of the early 1520s in which he was involved recorded him as dead.[35] I have not located a will.[36]

Both sides in the conflict between Grimaldi and certain pockets of the London merchant class played dirty. Grimaldi certainly did work with Empson and Dudley and he did participate in providing evidence for customs violations. Fabyan in *The Great Chronicle* presents the prosecution of these offences against Capell and other London merchants as stemming from Grimaldi's malicious invention of charges, but Grimaldi's role could just as easily be depicted as whistle-blowing: all signs are that Capell and others were, in fact, engaged in widespread customs avoidance, and so Grimaldi did not need to invent anything. In working for crown agents, Grimaldi probably manipulated legal processes, just as he was also a victim of such manipulation himself. He possibly committed the sexual delicts, crimes, and

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[31] TNA, C 1/339/36.

[32] Apart from the records in the case with Grimaldi and the other Genoese merchants, see the recognizance Huse had to swear not to harass a London grocer. TNA, KB 27/1020, plea m. 73d.

[33] TNA, KB 27/1019, plea mm. 21, 68; Baker, *Men of Court*, 840.

[34] *L&P*, 2:965. He had also served in the same capacity with Lomellini in 1507: *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1494–1509*, 522.

[35] TNA, KB 29/148, m. 15; KB 29/148, m. 54d.

[36] If he was dead by the early 1520s, a record of intestacy for Giovanni Battista Grimaldi of St Dunstan in the West from 1542 cannot be his (LMA, DL/C/B/004/MS09171/011, fol. 76^{v}). Perhaps this is a son?

other misdeeds of which he was accused in the ballad, although we have no independent evidence of that (though some of his friends and associates were accused of similar outrages). It must also be noted, however, that his accusers were also deeply corrupt, possibly even more corrupt than he was. Though some historians have found the colourful portrait of Grimaldi in the ballad too compelling to doubt,[37] it is imperative to note that the Great Chronicler Robert Fabyan was himself a Capell loyalist and distinct partisan in these conflicts of the 1490s and 1500s.[38] The chronicler's recording of the ballad was not a reflection of popular opinion so much as a deliberate tactic to paint Grimaldi in the most unflattering light possible in order to exculpate Capell and his other friends and colleagues. The sexual allegations — which survive only in *The Great Chronicle* — are far from implausible to judge by the evidence about his Italian associates, but it is important to note that, true or not, they were wielded as weapons in a broader conflict.

Italians in London and Sexual Impropriety

I was initially drawn to the story of Giovanni Battista Grimaldi by the similarity between the allegations in the ballad and a narrative about Italian merchants' sexual behaviour woven through Edward Hall's important chronicle account of the Evil May Day anti-immigrant riot in 1517. Hall tells a story of ongoing hostility between Italians and the London merchant community which was rooted (or so Hall depicted it) in the disdain and contempt the Italians showed towards the host nation. The Italians boasted that they were "in suche fauour with the kyng and hys counsell, that they set naughte by the rulers of the citie." Among the Italians' most galling attitudes was their disrespect of Englishmen's sexual property.[39] Hall says, for instance, that the Florentine merchant Francesco de' Bardi seduced an English wife, who came to Bardi's chamber with her husband's plate. The husband demanded the return of his wife and belongings, but Bardi dismissively answered that "he shoulde neither haue plate nor wyfe." The husband then sued Bardi for the "withdrawal of his wife and property" (a formula reflecting the relevant legal

[37] See, for example, Penn, *Winter King*, 267; Lancashire, *Two Tudor Interludes*, 242–243.

[38] Fabyan was a close associate of Capell; even if Fabyan was not in fact the Great Chronicler, both Chronicle and ballad tell a clearly biased version of Capell's travails. Harper, "London and the Crown," 238.

[39] Hall, *Chronicle*, 586.

offence), but the Florentine intimidated the husband to such a degree that the Englishman was forced to drop his suit. Not content with that humiliation, Bardi then rubbed salt in the wound by having the Englishman arrested for non-payment of the expenses of his wife's room and board while she had been living in Bardi's house. The stories that Hall told sound familiar: his report of the Italians' boast of favour with the king and his council are very similar to Gabriele Spinola's words recorded in the civic inquiries in 1507–1508, and Bardi's seduction of the English wife resembles the story told of Grimaldi in the ballad.

Bardi was, however, no composite character but a major figure in London trade and finance in the 1510s. The Florentine Bardi merchant company was a leading bank both for London's merchants and for the English crown and aristocracy. They also furnished the king's household with luxury cloth and had been chief backers of John Cabot's Atlantic voyages in the 1490s. By the 1510s, Francesco himself was "consul of the Florentine nation" in London. In the 1490s, the Bardi had a huge house (eighteen rooms) on Lombard Street; by the 1510s, Francesco shared a "great tenement" with fellow Florentine Piero Corsi near the Austin Friars.[40] This second house may have been where Francesco kept his English girlfriend (and, as we will see, where Piero Corsi also welcomed female company). By the early 1520s, if not earlier, Bardi was also "master" of Lombard Place on Botolph Lane near the river, where Italian merchants maintained residences, conducted business, and perhaps ran a gambling house.[41] Along with colleagues from Venice, Lucca, Genoa, and other Italian city-states he had deep connections not only within London's mercantile economy but also with the corridors of power at the royal court.[42]

In Hall's narrative, Bardi's cuckoldry and mockery of the English merchant stung badly. The chronicler's next scene involving the Italians fell in April 1517, when some London merchants visiting the royal court at Greenwich encountered a group of Italian merchants — Bardi himself, Domingo (that is, Grimaldi's friend Domenico Lomellini), Antonio Cavallari, and others. (It would be fascinating if Grimaldi himself was also in the

[40] Ormrod, Lambert, and Mackman, *Immigrant England*, 157; Guidi-Bruscoli, "John Cabot and His Italian Financiers." The property near Austin Friars (in the parish of St Peter the Poor) belonged to the Grocers' Company and was leased for the very substantial rent of £9/year. London, Guildhall Library, Ms. 11571/3, fols. 6^{r}, 14^{v}.

[41] TNA, C 1/475/18; Brigden, "Thomas Wyatt among the Florentines," 1418.

[42] Brigden, "Thomas Wyatt among the Florentines," 1413, 1418.

group — he would soon leave the country with Lomellini, so it is far from implausible — but Hall does not name him.) The Italians were joking and laughing with a courtier, Sir Thomas Palmer,[43] about how Bardi had kept the Englishman's wife, boasting that if they could have the mayor's wife, they would keep her too. A London mercer heard them laughing and said, "wel, you whoreson Lombardes, you reioyse and laugh, by the masse we will one daye haue a daye at you, come when it will." With "these and many other oppressions done by [the Italians]," Hall recounted, "there encreased suche a malice in the English mennes hartes, that at the laste it brast oute."[44] This was the last straw in Hall's account of the genesis of the anti-immigrant riot on the eve of May Day: there had simply been too many trespasses on Englishmen's rights, and a conflagration was inevitable.

Thus, it is clear that there was a broad perception among at least some Londoners — especially, presumably, those associated with Capell's party in the civic politics of the first two decades of the sixteenth century — that Italian merchants had no respect for the sexual territory of Englishmen and that this disrespect was a potent illustration of their general disdain for their hosts. How much credence should be given to this view? As noted above, the ballad is a smear job; although smears are not necessarily entirely void of veracity — the most successful ones build on a foundation of reliable detail — the ballad cannot be used on its own as evidence of Grimaldi's conduct or even of his reputation. Similarly, we must exercise skepticism about the stories that Hall told. Hall was in his teens, possibly a law student at the Inns in the western suburbs of London when the Evil May Day riot occurred; he was certainly not an eye witness to the encounters at court he describes, although while writing his Chronicle in the 1530s and 1540s, he apparently conducted oral interviews with insiders. This does not, however, make the stories he told entirely reliable. Like any good storyteller — and he *was* a good storyteller — Hall had an eye for telling anecdotes that encapsulated a point he wanted to advance. It is thus possible that either Hall himself or his informant borrowed stories that generally circulated about Italians' sexual depravity and used them as a narrative device to explain the particular resentments of the spring of 1517. Bardi may or may not have done the things of which he was accused; indeed, it is remotely possible that Hall embroidered the ballad's brief vignette about Grimaldi keeping a man's wife and attributed it to Bardi.

[43] Norris, "Palmer, Sir Thomas."

[44] Hall, *Chronicle*, 586–587.

Whether Grimaldi or Bardi specifically committed the sexual misdeeds attributed to them, however, there is other evidence in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that Italian merchants did not play by English rules regarding sexual relationships.[45] It was rare for Italian merchants to bring wives with them when they moved to London on what were usually temporary stays. This meant that some found sexual partners among the English.[46] Those partners could have been men as well as women, of course — for elite Italian men, same-sex relations were far from unusual[47] — but if so, Londoners paid no attention. Instead, the focus was on Italians' meddling with English wives and daughters. This focus of the conceptualization of sexual delicts as disruptions of the patriarchal governance of women is entirely consistent with how sexual misbehaviour was postulated and prosecuted in late medieval England: same-sex relations are evinced only extremely rarely in the many different forms of prosecution for sexual offences in England in this period. Instead, the focus was on abrogations of fathers' and husbands' control of their women.[48] So, too, with English accusations of sexual misdeeds against the Italians: they were located entirely in a heterosexual framework.

The accusations encompassed both casual sexual encounters and relationships of longer duration. As were other international merchants, the Italians were reputed to be frequent customers of London's sex workers (women were often targeted with the insult "Lombard whore").[49] On occasion, those "Lombards" were also brought to book by authorities, both civic and ecclesiastical, for fornication or adultery. In 1502, the Lucchese merchant Lorenzo Bonvisi was involved in a family drama with women of a mercer's family that seems to imply improper closeness to the mercer's wife and daughter; and in 1515 he was brought before the Commissary church court of London and accused of whoring with a *juvenculam*, a young girl. Following the Evil May Day riot, the draper Thomas Howell was made to post bond not to harass Bonvisi regarding the great "grugge" that he bore him: perhaps this was a

[45] Brigden, "Thomas Wyatt among the Florentines," 1417–1418.

[46] Guidi-Bruscoli and Lutkin, "Perception, Identity, and Culture," 96; Bratchel, "Regulation and Group Consciousness," 593.

[47] Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*; Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 202–203.

[48] See Ingram, *Carnal Knowledge*, 33–38; McSheffrey, *Marriage*, 149–150; Linkinen, *Same-Sex Sexuality*, 60–83.

[49] Some examples from the 1510s: LMA, Ms. COL/CA/01/01/002, fol. 139^{v}; Ms. DL/C/B/043/MS09064/011, fols. 59^{v}, 277^{r}; Ms. DL/C/B/041/MS09065J/001, fol. 63^{r}; Ms. DL/C/0206, fols. 242^{r}–244^{v}, 249^{v}. On international merchants and the sex trade, see Karras, *Common Women*, 76–78.

general commercial grievance but just as possibly could have been related to Bonvisi's sexual behaviour.[50] Another example is Piero Corsi, the Florentine merchant, who together with Francesco de' Bardi leased the "great tenement" near the Austin Friars;[51] he was summoned before the vicar general of the bishop of London in 1512 for "correction of his soul." Though not explicitly indicated in the record, Corsi's misdeeds likely came to the court's attention through complaints of fellow parishioners or the parish priest or both. Corsi was accused of having seduced young virgins, but he responded that the women with whom he had consorted were not virgins at all but already corrupt and public women. He admitted that he had held one Ellen Nicolls in the embrace of fornication for nine weeks in the summer of 1512, but that she was no virgin but had been previously corrupted; moreover, he believed that she was fully nineteen years old.[52] Normally such cases were heard in a lower-level church forum (the Commissary court), so Corsi's appearance in the highest diocesan court, the London Consistory, suggests either that his elevated status merited a more formal attempt to curb his behaviour or that previous attempts in lower-level courts had failed.

Corsi's responses to the accusations against him indicate that he did not feel his behaviour merited censure. Other Italians responded similarly. In 1513, the neighbours of a close associate of Grimaldi, the Genoese merchant Domenico Lomellini,[53] reported him to the lower-level London Commissary court. The neighbours alleged that he had fathered a child with a certain woman (unnamed) whom he had "long held in adulterous embraces" and that he had often boasted about it. When Lomellini appeared in court, he admitted the charges and said that, although he had a wife back in his own country, he had no intention of putting aside the woman he held in adultery. He was threatened with excommunication, although there is no record that it was actually proclaimed. It is quite likely he simply continued to live as he had before.[54]

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[50] LMA, Ms. COL/CA/01/01/001, fol. 108r; Ms. COL/CA/01/01/003, fol. 145r; Ms. DL/C/B/043/MS09064/011, fol. 274r.

[51] See above, note 40.

[52] LMA, Ms. DL/C/0206, fol. 175^{r}.

[53] Lomellini was granted letters of protection to serve in the retinue of the lieutenant of Calais along with Grimaldi in both 1507 and 1517, and was among those who acted as Grimaldi's sureties in his legal battle with William Huse in the mid-1510s. TNA, C 1/368/31; *L&P*, 2:965; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1494–1509*, 522.

[54] LMA, Ms. DL/C/B/043/MS09064/011, fol. 79^{v}.

Lomellini's shoulder-shrugging response to his neighbours' complaints about his extramarital sexual activity is all the more striking in light of a prior and much more serious accusation of a sexual transgression laid against him the decade before. In early 1505, Lomellini was sued for felony rape by the victim (in what was known technically as an "appeal of felony"). Joan Corne alleged that in December 1504 Lomellini had lain in wait for her by the London wall, attacked her, and raped her. He pleaded not guilty and was released on bail (with three Genoese merchants and two London mercers providing pledges); normally a court's willingness to bail the accused indicated a charge was not likely to succeed. Corne failed to appear on the assigned trial date, which resulted in the dismissal of her suit. For her default, she was then assessed a very large fine of 500 marks (about £333 — far more than an ordinary woman would earn in a lifetime). Once Corne's personal suit was dismissed, the charge of felony still had to go through the process of crown prosecution. Lomellini's not guilty plea would normally have led him to a trial by jury, but this was circumvented by Lomellini's presentation of a royal pardon for the charge.[55]

As always, it is impossible to say for certain what lay behind these legal processes. On the one hand, Lomellini may indeed have sexually assaulted Corne and escaped unpunished. Such a scenario would have seen the Italian merchant community pulling strings not only to make the suit disappear but also to arrange for the extremely large fine to discourage women from coming forward with such allegations in the future. Corne would have been very unlikely to have won her suit anyway: charges of felony rape, a capital offence, very rarely proceeded to a guilty verdict in premodern English courts (indeed, of course, they rarely do today). Her goal may rather have been to receive compensation for the wrong: it was not uncommon for allegations of rape to be resolved out of court with the victim receiving a cash settlement from the attacker. This case was not likely settled, however, as the extremely punitive fine assessed on Corne suggests her default was not the outcome of a negotiated deal (usually respected by the court) but rather that the court thought it was a malicious accusation — and, in turn, that word had come down from the crown to quash this suit.

Royal interest in the charge against Lomellini indicates the likelihood that the accusation of rape was connected with the conflict over customs

[55] TNA, KB 27/974, plea m. 63d; KB 29/135, m 31d; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1494–1509*, 417.

violations in London in which Grimaldi, Lomellini's colleague, was involved at this time. It was a common tactic in such disputes to harass opponents with vexatious felony accusations and other kinds of legal suits (as mentioned above, Grimaldi around this time faced malicious treason charges). Corne's accusation may thus have been a set-up related to this larger imbroglio, designed to inconvenience or possibly embarrass Lomellini. Such a suggestion is not to deny the reality of sexual violence or the complete insufficiency of the English legal system to handle such accusations. Indeed, the legal and social structures of late medieval England made it easier for a false accusation of rape to be brought forward maliciously by men seeking to score points in a different conflict than for a woman's valid claim to succeed. Even if Corne's allegations were genuine, it is unlikely they would have been brought so far forward in the absence of the larger conflict.

Therefore some Italians, at least, were indeed having sex with English women and in ways that did not always conform with English sensibilities; this may have included not only consensual relationships with English women but sexual assaults. Whether their English neighbours genuinely found the Italians' sexual activities disturbing, or simply useful as a weapon in their rivalries, is impossible to say with certainty. Perhaps the most useful observation is that sincere outrage more easily came to the surface when resentment for other reasons was present — and such resentment must have been stoked by the relative impunity with which the Italians acted. Though hauled before local civic and church courts for their sexual misdeeds, the Italian merchants' connections to the royal court and king's council were deployed to rob those local forums of authority.[56] It is probable that these accusations of sexual impropriety and violence were indeed employed as salvos in the broader rivalries between the Italian and English merchants, just as other kinds of accusations in civic and royal courts were; this does not mean that the accusations had no merit (Corsi and Lomellini, after all, admitted their sins in the church court), but it is also likely that they would not have been raised in the absence of other hostilities.

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[56] Another example in addition to those above: In the months following the Evil May Day riot, the Venetian ambassador's butler was arrested by London civic officials and thrown into prison along with an unnamed "whore" [*meretrix*] because the two were living "as harlotts […] to the grete displesur of god." The butler was released (but not his companion) when the Venetian ambassador intervened. LMA, Ms. COL/CA/01/01/003, fol. 163^{v}.

Nonetheless, these accusations also reflect different cultures of sex and masculinity among the Italian merchants and their English counterparts. When Italian merchants, wealthy and elite members of their own societies, came to London, they did so with certain expectations of how a man of status lived. Men married late in Italy and by no means was sex confined to the marital bed either before or after entering into the married state.[57] Concubinage among elite men was normal and openly acknowledged; adultery for men was at most a venial sin, though in the classic double standard it was intolerable in their own wives and daughters.[58] Moreover, sex was an important way of demonstrating manliness, through the man's own sexual acts and in his ability to control the sexuality of his women, both of which demonstrated his dominance. Joking and boasting about sexual exploits — Lomellini's alleged boasts about siring an illegitimate child with his concubine, Hall's story of the Italians visiting the royal court and laughing about keeping the mayor's wife, and the balladeer complaining about Grimaldi's unrepentant "rejoysyng [his] mysdede" — were common in conversations among elite Italian men. Bawdy humour was, Molly Bourne has argued, a crucial means in the Italian city states of fashioning an elite masculine identity.[59]

For men of the London merchant class, on the other hand, somewhat (if not entirely) different attitudes prevailed. For burghers, premarital sex in men was regarded as venial, just as it was among their Italian counterparts, but once married, a serious and sober man was expected to contain his sexual urges and restrict them to the marriage bed. What Martha Howell has described as the "merchant masculinity" of northern Europe emphasized self-mastery and control of appetites, while English burghers, by contrast, looked upon the lasciviousness of the aristocracy — so similar to the Italians' behaviour — as effeminizing, dissolute, and unmasculine.[60] These moral standards were undoubtedly situationally wielded: English merchants certainly committed adultery and kept concubines after marriage, but boasting and open bawdiness were unseemly. Even young unmarried merchants were circumspect rather than swaggering about their sex lives. Letters from the Celys,

[57] See, in general, the essays in Murray and Terpstra, *Sex, Gender and Sexuality*.

[58] Byars, "Long and Varied Relationship," 669–670; Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility*, 117–134; Eisenach, *Husbands, Wives, and Concubines*, 134–148; Storey, "Courtesan Culture," 247–248.

[59] Bourne, "Mail Humour," 199–200; Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love*, 108–114, 128.

[60] Howell, "Merchant Masculinity"; Neal, *Masculine Self*, 69–72; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 70, 74–75, 85, 94; Fitzgerald, *Drama of Masculinity*, 1–2, 10, 42, 88–90.

a late fifteenth-century London family of Calais staple merchants, indicate that before marriage the young men of the family kept concubines in Calais but, as Rachel Moss has noted, even among intimate correspondents such sexual relationships were referred to euphemistically rather than explicitly, as characteristic of Italian correspondence.[61] This, of course, does not mean that all English men adhered to this standard, but rather that it was the dominant public morality. The stark double standard on adultery in the Italian city states was also considerably attenuated in London: both men and women were punished for adultery in church and civic courts, and (as indeed the ballad version of Grimaldi illustrates) a man's adultery often functioned as a potent symbol of a larger complex of disorder and disreputability rather than as a demonstration of virile mastery.[62] If, for the Italian merchants, their keeping of English women as concubines was only to be expected, in the public morality of the early sixteenth-century London civic elite such behaviour was inappropriate. Perhaps most importantly, it was certainly not to be boasted about.

Moreover, although Lomellini, Corsi, and their colleagues might have considered it normal behaviour to take a concubine during their time in London, the Italians sometimes seem to have deliberately stepped beyond their usual practice to demean their English rivals. In Italy, the concubines of elite men were women of inferior social station.[63] If John Baptist Grimaldi and Francesco de' Bardi took the wives of their fellow merchants as sexual partners — and indeed threatened to seduce the wife of the mayor himself — this was an insult that resonated on multiple levels: not only was the English merchants' manliness besmirched in their inability to control their women but they were also humiliatingly denigrated as the social inferiors of their Italian counterparts. This implication of social inferiority may have struck a nerve with the London merchants: the Italians were well connected and with their cultured sophistication integrated easily into courtly circles, whereas the London merchants were somewhat out of step with the aristocratic cultural environment of Henry VIII's court. Indeed, the Italians were fashionable — young educated aristocrats like Thomas Wyatt kept their company, evidently attracted not only by their air of culture but also by their dissolution.[64] By the early 1520s, Grimaldi's old companion Domenico Lomellini

[61] Moss, "An Orchard," 229, 233–237; cf. references in note 58.

[62] McSheffrey, *Marriage*, 177–189.

[63] Eisenach, *Husbands, Wives, and Concubines*, 144–145.

[64] Brigden, "Thomas Wyatt among the Florentines," 1417–1419.

was running a gaming house frequented by courtiers; even the king himself gambled (and lost prodigiously) at "Domingo's" house. Like Grimaldi, Domingo made his way into a Skelton poem.[65] Thus, when the Italians came to Greenwich and laughed with courtiers about Franceso de Bardi's seduction of the London merchant's wife, it signalled that the London merchant was a figure of ridicule on many levels. There was no better way for the Italians to humiliate their mercantile rivals than to cuckold them and to hold them up in mockery in the streets of London and at the royal court.

The seduced wife herself was the instrument of humiliation but her identity or person did not matter except insofar as she was the wife of a man who needed to be shamed. If these were consensual relationships, the women themselves must have made choices to abandon their husbands to live with the Italian merchants; but in the stories told about them, the women serve only as placeholders. Though the story might have been told to centre or even simply to mention the women's betrayal of their husbands, that was not the point: this was about the men. The wives' troublesome agency lurks in the background, unacknowledged.

It is likely that both Italian merchants' sexual behaviour and English rhetoric condemning it were partly driven by their larger rivalries: in other words, that those battles over the control of women were not only about sex. But that does not mean that sex was irrelevant or secondary. Grievances regarding foreign merchants' economic intrusions were by no means more important than resentment of their sexual conquests of English wives; each fed off the other. The point of seducing a woman was to make a cuckold of her husband, revealing a humiliating lack of manliness that spilled over into his inability to compete economically and socially. The English reaction also largely disregarded the female partners with whom the Italians misbehaved, focusing instead on the insult the seductions constituted for the menfolk. If no doubt humiliated, as they were meant to be by these trespasses on their sexual property, the English merchants so targeted could also feel contempt for the seducers. In their own civic morality, the Italians' profligacy revealed a different kind of unmanliness, a lack of self-mastery and respect for others'

[65] Brigden, *Thomas Wyatt*, 207–208; Nicolas, *Privy Purse Expenses*, 17, 32, 33, 37, 190, 204, 205, 267, 270; Skelton, *Complete English Poems*, 270–271. "Domyngo Lomelyn / That was wonte to win / Muche money of the Kyng / At the cardes and haserdynge." Skelton also referred to an unsuccessful medical treatment Lomellini had received from Catherine of Aragon's physician for some kind of pustules on his nose — possibly, as with the emphasis on Grimaldi's skin condition, a comment on Lomellini's bodily corruption.

governance, an absence of honesty in both sexual and commercial arenas. There was tension between masculinity as control or as a demonstration of potency; interpretations of particular behaviours as manifestations of virile mastery or as exhibitions of effeminate lasciviousness were subjective and contingent. All in all, the Italian merchants' sex scandals of the 1510s and the different masculine styles they revealed were no titillating sideshow but an essential constitutive part of their rivalries with their English counterparts.

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Abbreviations

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LMA London Metropolitan Archives
TNA Kew, The National Archives

Manuscript Sources

Kew. The National Archives
C 1, Early Chancery Proceedings
KB 9, Court of King's Bench, Indictment Files
KB 27, Court of King's Bench, *Coram Rege* Rolls
KB 29, Court of King's Bench, Controlment Rolls
STAC 2, Court of Star Chamber, Proceedings, Henry VIII

London. Guildhall Library
Ms. 11571/3, Grocers' Wardens' accounts, 1511–1521

London. London Metropolitan Archives
COL/CA/01/01, Repertory Books of the Court of Aldermen, City of London

DL/C/0206, Deposition Book of the Consistory Court of the Diocese of London, 1511–1516
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