Sir Bevis of Hampton is arguably one of the most important secular non-Arthurian romances in Middle English, but it is only comparatively recently that it has begun to attract the scholarly attention it merits. Originating in England, the story was immensely popular during the late medieval and early modern periods, both in the British Isles and continental Europe. The Middle English Bevis was translated around 1300 from an Anglo-Norman original; versions of the story, written and oral, were told in many languages, down to living memory, when a dramatization of the tale was still being performed by Sicilian puppeteers. References to the romance appear in Shakespeare, Spenser, Bunyan, Drayton, and Steele.

This parallel-text edition complements earlier editions of Bevis, such as that by Jago Kelling, EETS, O.S. 349 (1886-88). A full introduction and annotation place the romance in its literary and cultural contexts from the fourteenth century to the present, and describe the variety and complexity of the poem’s textual tradition.

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Jacket Illustration: Misericord in Gloucester Cathedral showing Bevis’s first encounter with Ascopart, by permission of Gloucester Cathedral (photographic edition).

The Early English Text Society was founded in 1864 by Frederich James Furnivall, with the help of Richard Morris, Walter Skeat and others. The Society’s device is a representation of the Alfred Jewel, which was found near Athelney in Somerset in 1835 and is now preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.