

# One Knight, Several Names

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che già fu al soldo del  
comune di fiorenza e uno  
cavaliere el quale egli  
bene conobbe ma non  
salnome [...].<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

During the 14th century, Italy was the field of several campaigns where knights who came from all over Europe could show their value and bravery. But often the most popular knights were known by different names in the different towns of Italy. This research aims to examine some documents which witness the passage through Italy of one of the most famous mercenaries of his time, John Hawkwood.

He entered Piedmont in the second half of 14th century and became *Johannes Acutus*, the name which is still on his grave in Florence's Cathedral. But he was also known as *Giovanni Aguto* and *Johannes Augut*, etc. We will analyse the different interpretations within the frame of the Italian phonetics.

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One of the most famous mercenaries of his time,<sup>2</sup> John Hawkwood entered Piedmont at the beginning of the second half of the 14th century to pursue a career which led him to the main cities of northern Italy. He settled in Florence, where he died, and was buried in the Cathedral there. On his burial monument on the Cathedral wall, made a few years after his death by Paolo Uccello, we can still read his name: *Johannes Acutus*. But this was not the only name by which he had been known.

In our study we will try to examine the changes of his names through some representative documents connected with his distinguished military career.

During the 14th century many mercenaries came through Italy and were involved in the various war scenarios of that time. Almost all of them during their stay in Italy obtained a new name according to an understandable and acceptable Italian interpretation. Most of them were Germans like Werner von Urslingen, known as *Conte Guarnieri*, and Konrad von Landau, known in documents as *Conte Lando* (Balestracci 2003: 63) or *Comite Lando*.<sup>3</sup>

When Hawkwood first entered Piedmont between 1361-1363, as attested in an account of castellanies<sup>4</sup> of Lanzo, he was known as a destroyer, along with his group of

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<sup>1</sup> ASS, *Lettere al Concistoro*, n. 1778, 1375, c. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Si y vy monseigneur Jehan Agut un chevalier d'Angleterre qui regna en Ytalie bien .xxx. ans; cil servi les seigneurs et citoyens de Ytalie vaillaument et fu sages et bien cremuz par son sens et hardement* (Piccat 2008: 437). So wrote Thomas III, the last count of Saluzzo, at the end of the 14th century.

<sup>3</sup> ASS, *Biccherna*, 237, c. 98.

<sup>4</sup> These are the documents (in parchment rolls) where all the taxes of the Savoy county were noted and they are usually called *rolls*.

mercenaries, only mentioned as *angliis*.<sup>5</sup> In another document in Piedmont, a notarial minutory, we find an indication about [...] *anglici et societas anglicorum locum lancei in canapicio* [...].<sup>6</sup> The same note can be found in a third one in Pavone.<sup>7</sup> In a roll of Ivrea<sup>8</sup> they were not mentioned at all. In that roll we can only read that the castle was destroyed as were many others in the region.<sup>9</sup>

The absence of mentions does not mean that the situation was easy. The Count of Savoy received a letter from the King's son in which he reassured the Count that his soldiers were forbidden to destroy the country!<sup>10</sup>

We summarize these attestations of the State Archives of Turin as follows:

Year	Language	Fund/Series	Attestation
1362-1363	Latin	Rolls of Lanzo	<i>angliis</i>
1364	Latin	Protocolli Camerali	<i>anglici et societas anglicorum</i>
1363-1365	Latin	Rolls of Ivrea	(none)
1364-1366	Latin	Rolls of Pavone	<i>Anglicos/anglicorum</i>

The element of ethnical identification will follow Hawkwood for most of his life.

In the embassies related to the destruction carried out by his company, his name never appears but only the reference to their provenance: *Anglios*, *anglicos* or *societas anglicorum*, *compagna anglicorum*. It is worth noting that nowadays in everyday language we use the expression *English* as a synonym of *British* (De Mauro 1999-2003: III, s.v. *Inglese*). It is the easiest way to identify all English speakers, no matter if they are Scottish, Welsh, American or Australian. Moreover, with regard to *Angliis* and *Anglicis*, we observe that the first is the literary form (from Tacitus) and the second the usual medieval word (Pfister 1979-2010: II, 1217: s.v. *anglus*).

It does not seem that the nickname *Acutus* was given to Hawkwood during his movements in Piedmont, even if the anthroponym *acutus* had already been attested as a surname in this territory since the 12th century in Chieri: *oddonus de la planca cui dicitur*

<sup>5</sup> AST, Sezioni Riunite, *Camera dei Conti, Piemonte, Articolo 41, Lanzo*, r. 28, 1361-1363. Cfr. also Caferro (2006: 46).

<sup>6</sup> AST, Sezione Corte, *Materie politiche per rapporto all'interno, Protocolli Camerali Serie Rossa, Protocolle du Nottaire Besson*, 1364, c. 43.

<sup>7</sup> AST, Sezioni Riunite, *Camera dei Conti, Piemonte, Articolo 56, Pavone*, r. unico, 1364-1366. The rolls mention *operibus dicti castris factis post recessum anglicorum*. Pavone is a town not far from Ivrea in Canavese, a region in Northern Piedmont.

<sup>8</sup> AST, Sezioni Riunite, *Camera dei Conti, Piemonte, Articolo 40, Ivrea*, §1, r. 19, 1363-1365.

<sup>9</sup> It is not easy to distinguish in this period who did the destroying. It was obvious, because the county administration spent a huge amount of money in rebuilding the castle. But it is not clear if the damage was caused by the Englishmen or internal *jacqueries*. In a few points there are mentions of *obsidionie castris per XLVIII dies* (AST, Sezioni Riunite, *Camera dei Conti, Piemonte, Articolo 40, Ivrea*, §2, rot. 2, 1362-1363).

<sup>10</sup> [...] *notre dit coufin vous mandons et commandons sur quantque vous pourrez meffaire emis nons que aus pais ne subgiz de notre dit cousin ne portez ne soefrez et avant come nullement pourrez estre portez ne fait aucun damage ne destruccion : Ainz per toutes les voies que vous pourrez empeschez et destorbez toute homine qui mal y voudra faire a votre loial pouoir. dautrepart mandons a vous et a chescun de vous que on cas que notre dit cousin ait affaire de vous ou besoigne de votre service [...]* (AST, Sezione Corte, *Materie politiche per rapporto all'estero, Corti straniere, Inghilterra*, 1365, m. 1, f. 4). (The text, as happened in ordinary medieval documents, is shortened. We wrote the integrations in italic).

*bechus acutus* (Rossebastiano 2010: 36).<sup>11</sup> This second name, a nickname, is related to the Italian adjective *acuto*, from the Latin word *acūtus*, from late Latin (13th century) *acūtāre* ‘aguzzare, sopravvivere’ (Cortellazzo and Zolli 1999: s.v. *acuto*). This adjective can become a nickname in a physical sense to indicate a person with a prominent nose or, in a psychological sense, can indicate a smart and cunning personality. In Old Italian it could also mean ‘sharp, cruel, painful’.<sup>12</sup> We do not know much about what Hawkwood looked like; but his life does not seem far from the second meaning.

Between 1375 and 1377 he was involved in several military actions, when his company destroyed territories in Tuscany and Romagna. He was also the focus of interest of the Italian diplomacy. His intentions were observed, his actions were watched and reports were written to the various institutions of the cities involved. At a certain moment the crowns of Aragon wanted Hawkwood to fight against Castille and Venice wanted him to fight against the Duke of Austria. These circumstances offer many documental samples of his names, but also a great variety of the ways he was called.

We decided to study the documents of two archives in particular, both in Tuscany, but with a different political role and a different destiny with regard to Hawkwood.<sup>13</sup>

Firstly, Florence where he spent much of his time and secondly, Siena, one of the towns most threatened by him and one which had sent many people to enquire about his movements. In fact, it is among these documents that we find the highest variety of attestations and a sort of presentation of the character of the company: *malignam presentem societatem anglicorum eius capitaneum esse dicitur dominus Johannis augut*.<sup>14</sup>

Another point of interest is the language used. It is also useful to distinguish public documents like the ones produced by a public authority and private ones (produced, for example, by spies and informers).

During this period in Piedmont, we can find that the documents are almost always in Latin, although sometimes in French when they were produced by Savoy authorities. Notaries wrote only in Latin. In Siena, it is possible to find documents in Latin but also in Italian (the dialect of Tuscany during 14th century) used by private individuals.

In the tables below it is possible to see the attestations. They are ordered chronologically, specifying the language, the archival fund and the various mentions in the same document. The name was often repeated simply as *Messer/Domino Giovanni*. In this case, we mention the attestation just once. As is normal in medieval documents, there are many abbreviations. We have written our expansions in italics.

<sup>11</sup> And it was a Roman name before (Forcellini 1864-1926: s.v. *Acutus*).

<sup>12</sup> ‘maligno, crudele; aspro, doloroso, pungente, violento, penetrante (sentimenti, affetti)’ (Pfister 1979-2010: I, 586, s.v. *acutus*).

<sup>13</sup> It was worth beginning with the State Archives of Turin because Piedmont was the first place he arrived.

<sup>14</sup> ASS, *Capitoli* 71, 1367.

## State Archives Florence

Year	Language	Fund/Series	Attestation 1	Attestation 2	Attestation 3	Attestation 4
1375	Latin	Capitoli Registri n. 1 (c. 160r and v)	Domini Johannis anguod	milite domino Johanne haukevvide capitano compagne anglicorum	Dominus Johannes Augud Anglicus miles	Ipsi domino Johannj et eius uxorj et familie
1375	Latin	Balie n. 13 (c.34)	domino Johannj Aughud capitano	dominj Johannis		
1375	Latin	Signori Missive I cancellaria reg. 15 (c.2 r et v)	Anglicorum ferale comport[...]	domino Johannj haughud		
1375	Latin	Signori Missive I cancellaria reg. 15 (c. 3v)	domino Johannj hauchud	dominus Johannes		
1375	Latin	Signori Missive I cancellaria reg. 15 (c. 7r)	domino Johannj hauchud			
1375	Latin	Signori Missive I cancellaria reg. 15 (c. 9v)	domino Johanne hauchud			
1375	Latin	Signori Missive I cancellaria reg. 15 (c. 66r)	domino Johanne haucud			
1375	Latin	Signori Missive I cancellaria reg. 15 (c. 69r)	Magnifico et egregio militi domino Johannj hauchvod capitaneo societatis anglicorum			
Copy Da una cronaca manosc ritta	Italian	Carte Bardi 3a Serie	Funerale di Gio: Acuto Capitano di Guerra de Fiorentini	Gio: Acuto Capitano di Guerra de Fiorentini		

## State Archives Siena

Year	Language	Fund/Series	Attestation 1	Attestation 2	Attestation 3
1364	Latin	Consiglio Generale 171 (72 r)	Balia <i>contra compagnam Anechinj et Anglicorum</i>		
1364	Latin	Consiglio Generale 171 (93 r)	Balia <i>pro compagna Anglicorum</i>	congeries <i>Anglicorum</i>	<i>anglicorum perversa armatorum setta</i>
1365	Latin	Consiglio Generale 173 (42 r)	compagnie <i>Anglicorum</i>		
1366	Latin	Consiglio Generale 174 (42 r)	[several different groups] et <i>anglicorum</i>		
1366 Florence	Latin	Capitoli n.70	<i>societas dominj Johannis haucut</i>		
1367	Latin	Capitoli n.71	<i>dominus Johannis augut</i>		
1367	Latin	Consiglio Generale 176 (c. 18b)	<i>anglicorum compagna</i>		
s.d. [1369]	Latin	Particolari famiglie forestieri (m.1) Letter from a private person	<i>viris et militibus dominis Johanni Agud</i> [this letter was addressed to Hawkwood]		
1369	Latin	Concistoro 1778 (c. 14)	<i>dominus Johannes auchud</i>		
1369	Italian	Concistoro 1778 (c. 14)	<i>missere giovanj aguto</i>	<i>missere giovanj Aguto con la sua brigata</i>	
1373	Italian	Concistoro 1783 (c. 21) Letter from a private person	<i>messere giovanj aguti</i>	<i>a missere giovanj aguto</i>	<i>missere giovanj agutj</i>
1375	Latin	Concistoro 77 (c.5r. and v.)	<i>Compagna Angliorum</i>	<i>societate Angliorum</i>	<i>Compagna Angliorum domini Johannis agud</i>
s.d. Crema [1375]	Latin	Particolari famiglie forestieri (m.1) Letter from a private person	<i>domino Johannj de Agud</i>		
s.d. Perugia	Latin	Particolari famiglie forestieri (m.1) Letter from a private person	<i>magnifico et et potenti militi domino Johanni Achuto</i> [this letter was addressed to Hawkwood]		

1375	Italian	Concistoro 1778 (c. 32)	messere giovannj agut	Messer giovannj	
1375 Florence	Italian	Concistoro 1786 (c. 82)	messer giovannj agut	messer giovannj	
1375 Florence	Italian	Concistoro 1786 (c. 83)	messer giovannj agut	messer giovannj	
1375 Frosinone	Italian	Concistoro 1787 (c. 49)	misser Giovanj aghuj		
1375 Florence	Italian	Concistoro 1787 (c. 64)	misser giovannj agud	misser giovannj	misser giovannj
1377 Florence	Italian	Concistoro 1792 (c. 20)	giovanni aghuto	misser giovanj achuto	
1377 Florence	Latin	Concistoro 1792 (c. 80 <sup>1</sup> )	Anglicos	domino Johannj hauhevvod	
1377	Italian	Concistoro 1792 (c. 80 <sup>2</sup> )	Giovani agudj	misser Giovanj	misser Giovanj
1377 Florence	Italian	Concistoro 1792 (c. 90)	misser giovannj		
1377 Florence	Latin	Concistoro 1792 (c. 94 <sup>1</sup> )	dominus Johannes haukevvod	dominus Johannes	
1377 Florence	Latin	Concistoro 1792 (c. 94 <sup>2</sup> )	domino Johannj haukevvod		
1381	Latin	Capitoli n. 86	dominus Johannes augud		
1388 Florence	Latin	Particolari famiglie forestieri (m.1) Letter from a private person	magnifico militi domino Johanni haucud capitano [this letter was addressed to Hawkwood]		
1388 Florence	Latin	Particolari famiglie forestieri (m.1) Letter from a private person	magnifico militi domino Johanni haucud capitano [this letter was addressed to Hawkwood]		

First of all, a general observation can be made: in the beginning, he was seen just as an Englishman and his company was identified by their language, non only a foreign language, but the English language, and the people were the Anglios/Anglicos (as in Piedmont).

We can now analyse the main attestations of Hawkwood's name. In Florence we can find the closest samples to his English name. The first *h-*, a Latin element that was soon lost in the Italian language, is preserved. This is usual in medieval Italian documents and it is considered a Latinism, as it probably was, but in this case it happens to show regard (maybe an involuntary regard) for English phonetics. The same happens for the 'double *v*', the name that the letter *w* still has in the Italian alphabet.

We suggest that official documents wanted to honour the powerful mercenary even with respect to his foreign name.

The right name appears also in letters stored in the Siena Archives, but just in the ones originally from Florence. This suggests that the correct name was quite accepted in Florence.

We see the widest variety in Siena, where enough was known to leave the generic indication of *compagnia anglicorum*.

We can summarize and analyse the attestations as follows:

1. The first sample in Siena (1366), *Haucut* can be considered quite a faithful interpretation for Hawkwood. It preserves the first *h-* lost in Italian and the phonetics that we can perceive through the graphics can be considered rather close to the original, even if it is probably a Latinism by a public notary. *Au-* is apparently the way they pronounced the group *-aw-*. Then, the /k/ in the intervocalic position is rather permanent<sup>15</sup> and in the literary language it is possible to find both alternatives (voiced or voiceless).<sup>16</sup> The transformation of the final *d>t* from voiceless to voiced was quite common in northern Italian dialects.
2. After that period we can see samples which fit the Italian phonetical point of view. In fact, *au-* does not become *o-* as in the ordinary transformations from Latin into Italian (*aurum>oro*). As happens in *augustum>agosto*,<sup>17</sup> we have the simplification of the protonic *au>a* because of the influence of the further *-u-* (as in *Agud*). The transformation of the velar occlusive in the intervocalic position from voiceless to voiced (*k>g*)<sup>18</sup>, which is possible also in Tuscany, is typical of northern Italian dialects.
3. In 1369 in Siena the first Italian version *aguto* with final vocalic sound *-o* and in 1373 the final in *-i* appear. The vocalic sound at the end of a word is perceived by an Italian mother tongue speaker as a natural sound, and the *-i* is a traditional ending for anthroponyms in Tuscany and some other areas. We must also remember that during the middle ages in Tuscany (Siena and Lucca) the adjective *aguto* was usually used instead of *acuto*.<sup>19</sup>
4. The form *aghuj* hides the fall of the intervocalic voiced consonant. We do not know where the writer came from although it may be of Northern influence. We can also see the form *Giovanj* instead of *Giovanni* with one intervocalic consonant, typical of Northern Italy, instead of the reinforced sound. The same

<sup>15</sup> The debate about the matter of intervocalic /k/ in Italian was quite sharp among the linguists; we follow the opinion of Rohlfs who affirms that the voiceless sounds are the natural and popular Tuscan sounds, but they change under the influence of northern Italian and Gallic-romance dialects: *Si è andata sempre più affermando la convinzione che in Toscana i suoni sordi rappresentino il risultato indigeno e popolare, mentre g, d, v, ś tradiscono influssi provenienti dall'Italia settentrionale e dai parlari gallo-romanzi: [...]* (Rohlfs 1966-1969: §213).

<sup>16</sup> *In taluni casi la lingua letteraria presenta entrambe le forme, per esempio soffocare e soffogare, faticare e fatigare, acuto e aguto [...]* (Rohlfs 1966-1969: §194).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Rohlfs (1966-1969: §134).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Rohlfs (1966-1969: §197). In the south, the /k/ between two vowels does not change (*Ibidem*: §198).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Battisti-Alessio (1950-1957: I, s.v. *acuto*).

phenomenon in *Giovani agudj* (1377) where the voiced sound *-d-* instead of the voiced *-t-* is together with the first name in the form *Giovani* with the simple *-n-*.

5. In 1377 we find again a sample which can be considered conservative: *haukevvod*.

In conclusion, what seems a trivial matter in today's knowledge about *Hawkwood* > *Acuto*,<sup>20</sup> actually reveals an unexpected richness on closer observation.

In fact, we can observe a huge variety of samples of the anthroponym connected to his person.

In the documents it is not obvious that *Acuto* represents the semantic interpretation of the name. A phonetical interpretation of the anthroponym is possible, which, when eventually reinforced by the meaning of a certain local usage, helps the memory. We can also see the influence of the northern dialects in the transformation and interpretation of the anthroponym.

The first attestations in Florence, *anguod* and *haukevvide* (quite approximate), represent a graphic interpretation to reproduce the original sound, especially in the difficult element *-uod/-vvod*. In general, Latin texts are rather conservative. The Italian version ignores the semantics: nobody seems to care what *Hawkwood* means.

So, the Italian modified forms can represent a way to remember a word which cannot be understood, and the best way to remember an expression is to have something which has a meaning in the language it comes to.

Finally, we do not consider *Acuto* as a way to reproduce its heraldic symbol or a surname for a smart person, but a complex phonetic way from something unknown to something familiar, from an unknown and scary Englishman to a known and respected knight.

It is probably thanks to Paolo Uccello and his fresco, that Italian people nowadays mention *Giovanni Acuto* as an old friend.

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<sup>20</sup> We can find the two names, *Hawkwood* and *Acuto* one after the other, also in schoolbooks nowadays (cfr. Paulucci-Signorini-Marisaldi 2012: 344).

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## Archival Funds

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### State Archives of Siena (ASS)

- ASS, *Consiglio Generale*, 171, 173, 174, 176
- ASS, *Concistoro*, 77, 1778, 1783, 1786, 1787, 1792
- ASS, *Biccherna*, 237
- ASS, *Capitoli 70, 71, 86*
- ASS, *Particolari famiglie forestieri*, m.1

### State Archives of Turin (AST)

- AST, Sezione Corte, *Materie politiche per rapporto all'estero, Corti straniere, Inghilterra*, 1365, m. 1, f. 4.
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