

## CHAPTER 1

# The Anglo-Norman Period

(1066-1340)

*The Anglo-Norman refers to the period from the Norman conquest to the middle of the 14th century. The Norman conquest inaugurated a distinctly new epoch where the clergy insisted on the use of Latin and the nobility on the use of French. Chronicles, religious and didactic writing, poetry and drama were the popular forms of writing.*

## Introduction to the Anglo-Norman Period

The term Anglo-Norman is generally used to describe the period of English history from the Norman conquest to the middle of the 14th century. It was called so because the non-Latin literature of that time was written in Anglo-Norman, the French dialect spoken by the Norman invaders. The Normans were pagan barbarian pirates from Denmark, Norway and Iceland, who began to make destructive plundering raids on European coastal settlements in the 8th century.

They were originally descendants of Vikings, who settled in the North-West France in the early 10th century. At the beginning of 10th century, the French King, Charles the Simple, made the Treaty of St Clair-sur-Epte with a Viking Chief Rollo. Charles gave him some land around the mouth of the Seine in what is now known as the **city of Rouen**, **North of France**. **King Charles** had hoped that by giving the Vikings their own land in France, they would stop attacking France. Within two generations, Rollo and his followers adopted the Franks' language, religion, laws, customs, political organisation and methods of warfare. They inter-married and mixed with the native French population.

They had become Franks in all, but name. They were now known as Normans, men of Normandy and their land became known as the **land of the Nordmanni** or **Northmen**. By the middle of the 11th century, Normandy became one of the most powerful states in Christendom. Though, the Normans had converted to Christianity, adopted the French language, and abandoned sea roving for Frankish cavalry warfare in the decades following their settlement in Normandy, they still retained many of the traits of their Viking ancestors. They displayed an extreme fearlessness and courage, craftiness and cunning, a love of fighting and spread terror wherever they went. In the early 11th century, a group of Norman Mercenaries led by **Robert Guiscard**, the 6th son of Tancred of Hauteville, helped various factions in Italy in order to gain territories for themselves. By 1060, there were three separate Norman holdings:



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### The Norman Conquest of England

One of the most important expansionary campaigns of the Normans in Europe occurred in 1066, when they invaded England. **William, Duke of Normandy**, launched his bloody England in 1066. In that year, Edward the Confessor, King of England, died without an heir, appointing by his will Harold Godwinson, son of England's most powerful nobleman, the Earl of Wessex, as his successor. Across the Channel, William of Normandy considered himself rightfully the next King of England, basing his claim on a promise by Edward the Confessor in the early 1050s and an oath of fealty sworn by Harold during an enforced visit to William's capital at Rouen following his capture by the Count of Ponthieu. It is believed that **William of Normandy** had held Harold captive until he had sworn on Holy Relics to enforce William's claim to the throne of England.

Although, he had promised to support **William**, Duke of Normandy's claim to the English throne, Harold allowed himself to be elected King as soon as Edward had died. The move was taken because it was feared that the Norwegian King, Magnus and his son, Harald Hardrada, would invade England to claim the English throne through their descent from Harthacnut. In January 1066, **King Harold II** was crowned King of England at St Paul's Cathedral. As news of the accession and coronation of Harold Godwinson spread, both William of Normandy and Harald Hardrada of Norway, Harold's rivals for the English throne, raised forces and planned to invade England.



*King Harold Godwinson marched 200 miles in 6 days and caught the Viking army off guard and killed **Hardrada** and most of his men. King Harold received the news of the Norman landing in York soon after his triumph over the Norse invaders. William, Duke of Normandy landed at **Pevensey** in the South of England and began a march towards Hastings, where a **wooden fort** was built. Harold Godwinson's weakened army was forced to march rapidly South.*

The **Battle of Hastings** began in the morning and went well for the English well into the afternoon, given their advantageous position on the hill. Then the French feigned a retreat, thus, luring the English out of their vantage point. They advanced and succeeded in getting the upper hand. Towards the end of the day the leader of the English, Harold fell, when a Norman arrow struck him in the eye. As a result, the English were routed and the French were victorious by nightfall. William in true medieval warfare fashion continued to pillage and plunder the South-East of England until London capitulated and decided to accept him

as King of England. He was crowned King of England on Christmas day 1066.

After Hastings, William advanced to London by a circular route that started *via* Kent, burning a ring of fire around the country's main city. The advance was resisted and met much armed resistance. The English had proclaimed the young Edgar Atheling, last scion of the old Wessex royal line, as the king. But William moved fast towards London to enforce his will before the remaining English nobility were able to re-group around Edgar and start an organised resistance to him.

With the coronation of William as King of England, the Anglo-Saxon phase of English history came to an end. William I proved an effective King of England and the 'Domesday Book,' a great census of the lands and people of England, was among his notable achievements. Upon the death of William I in 1087, his son, **William Rufus**, became **William II**, the second Norman King of England.

### Impact of the Norman Conquest

- Norman Conquest radically changed English culture, law, language and character.
- The Norman Conquest brought to power a French speaking ruling class. **French** became the language of law and old **English** became confined to the lower classes.
- The Norman Conquest fundamentally altered social, legal and political relations by introducing a new **feudal system**. Society became hierarchised. King became the supreme ruler and all land came into his possession.
- This new feudal system created a network of territorial relationships between members of a warrior aristocracy. The King granted a fief (land) to his tenants in chief or vassals, who granted sub-fiefs to their vassals. Each level in the feudal system had to pay for the land and protection that the higher classes offered. Fealty, thus, became central to this system of feudalism.
- It also led to changes in legal practice; Justice came under royal control, primogeniture became the norm, compensations to victims decreased and fines increased. For a short while, William's armies spread widespread devastation and had a negative effect on the economy of England.
- But the economy bounced back soon as Normans founded many towns and also introduced new groups of towns people.
- They introduced new building practices into England, which provided the kingdom with grandiose ecclesiastical and military monuments. They created important castles such as 'The Tower of London'.
- Normans seized wealth and lands from the English church.
- They introduced the idea of church courts in England.

## Influence of the Norman Conquest on English Language

The Norman conquest changed the whole course of English language. French became the language of social prestige and status. French words entered the English lexicon. More than 10000 French words found their way into English words associated with government, law, art, literature, food and many other aspects of life.

English gradually disappeared as a written language, which resulted in the removal of restraints on development of language. Grammar became simplified as people started finding the simplest way to communicate with people, who did not speak English as their first language.

The pronunciation of English changed to some extent under the influence of French, as did the spelling. *e.g.*, the old English spellings 'cw', 'sc' and 'c' became 'qu', 'sh' and 'ch'. The spellings of 'cwen' changed to 'queen', 'scip' to 'ship' and 'scolde' to 'should'. English grammar took on a few French structures, such as putting in adjectives after nouns in some expressions - attorney general, secretary general, surgeon

general. Since, Englishmen became desirous of learning the language of the ruling class, a large number of them learned French or Latin.

However, the Norman conquerors on the other hand, had to learn English and translate it into Latin, since there was the need to understand English law. As a result, this period saw an upsurge in the number of translations of English material into Latin.

According to **A.W. Ward** and **A.R. Waller**, "The ambition of Englishmen to acquire the language of the ruling class and the influx of foreign monks into the religious houses that were the sources of literary instruction, soon brought about the cessation of all systematic training in the use of English. The upper and middle classes became bilingual and though English might still be the language, which they preferred to speak, they learned at school to read and write nothing, but French or French and Latin. When those, who had been educated under the new conditions tried to write English, the literary conventions of the past generation had no hold upon them; they could write no otherwise than as they spoke."

## *Literature of the Anglo-Norman Period*

*During the Anglo-Norman period, old English poetry totally disappeared. English began to be discarded in favour of French and Latin. Writings in the English vernacular began to be disregarded and French became established as the natural speech of the cultivated and the high-born.*

In contrast with the strength and somberness of Anglo-Saxon poetry, the Normans brought to England, bright, romantic tales of love and adventure. English literature inevitably felt the influence of the Norman French. In poetry, *e.g.*, the Anglo-Saxon versification gave way to regular meter and rhyme. In subject matter, too, the change was very great.

The French had developed the chivalric system to a point of brilliance and elaborateness unknown in England. Romance became a popular literary form, indicating the age to be a chivalric rather than heroic one. Breton lays were developed by writers like Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes into the form known as 'romance.' Romance was the most popular narrative genre for late medieval readers. These romances were mostly borrowed from Latin and French sources. They deal with the stories of **King Arthur**, 'The War of Troy' and

The Mythical Doings of Charlemagne and of Alexander the Great'.

Apart from romances, other principal genres were the chronicle, the saint's life and other moral literature. Historical writing was popular both in Normandy and in the rest of the Continent and although, after the Norman Conquest, Latin replaced English for use in documents and chronicles, examples of both are found in Anglo-Norman. Religious houses caused lives of native saints to be written and **The Fourth Lateran Council** of 1215 led to the compilation of moral and instructive works.

Thus, social and political differences between the two countries prevented Anglo-Norman literature from being a mere provincial imitation of French.

### Lanfranc (1005-1089)

Lanfranc was Archbishop of Canterbury in the 11th century. He received a liberal education according to the standard of the age, notwithstanding the death of his parents during his tender years. He studied law in **Pavia** and became a respected scholar, principally because of his studies in Roman law, which was a subject of growing interest in **Italy** at the time. Although destined to be a lawyer, he later left Pavia for the purpose of devoting himself to the pursuit of learning.



He made his way to France and attached himself to a school at **Avranches**, in Normandy, where he became noted as a teacher. After being attacked and almost killed by a highway robber, he went into seclusion at Saint Stephens Abbey at Bec, a newly established monastery. After 3 years of total seclusion, he returned to teaching, this time at the monastery. He taught there for 18 years, earning high respect throughout Europe as an instructor of theology. The school became one of the most famous in Europe under his leadership. The future **Pope Alexander II** was among his students.

#### Smart Facts

- The **Battle of Hastings** in 1066 established Norman domination and heralded the end of Anglo-Saxon phase of English history.
- The pronunciation of English changed to and grammar became simple with some extent incorporation of a few French structure.
- The first Anglo-Norman historiographer is Geoffrey Gaimar, who wrote his **Estorie des Angles** for Dame Constance.
- **Adam** is generally considered to be an Anglo-Norman mystery of the 12th century and was probably written in France at the beginning of the 13th century.
- The Norman Conquest effectively eliminated upper-class patronage of old English secular poetry and prose and gradually supplanted it with a new literary culture.
- **Anselm** was the author of a celebrated Latin treatise on the Atonement and offered a defence of the Christian faith.
- The word 'medieval' comes from the Latin 'medium' (middle) and 'alvum' (age).
- Four main languages circulated in England-old French or Anglo-Norman, Latin, old English and different branches of the Celtic language group.

Lanfranc also defended the doctrine of transubstantiation against the attacks of **Berengar of Tours**. He took up the task with the greatest zeal, although Berengar had been his personal friend; he was the protagonist of orthodoxy at the *Councils of Vercelli* (1050), *Tours* (1054) and *Rome* (1059). Lanfranc's Polemics is chiefly derived from the tract *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, which he wrote many years later (after 1079), when Berengar had been finally condemned.

Lanfranc also acted as counselor to William, Duke of Normandy. Under William's reign, he laid the foundation for what succeeding theorists would build into England's secular common law court system.

Lanfranc's efforts laid the foundation for important writings on English Law in the 12th and 13th centuries. He also assisted William in maintaining the fullest possible independence for the English Church.

### Anselm (1033-1109)

Anselm was an influential theologian and philosopher. He was born at **Aosta** in **Alpine** Italy and educated in Normandy. His parents held an honorable rank in society. In 1060, he entered the monastery of Bec in Normandy to study under Stephen Lanfranc, whom he succeeded in office, first as prior of Bec and later as Archbishop of **Canterbury**.

In 1063, after Lanfranc left Bec for Caen, Anselm was chosen to be Prior. Among the various tasks Anselm took on as Prior was that of instructing the monks, but he also had time left for carrying on rigorous spiritual exercises, which would play a great role in his philosophical and theological development.

He was appointed as the second Norman Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093 and secured the Westminster Agreement of 1107, guaranteeing the (partial) independence of the church from the civil state. Anselm's two most important works are the *Monologion* (1077) and *Proslogion* (1078).

#### Works

- Monologion
- Proslogion
- De Veritate (On Truth)
- De Liate Arbitrii (On Freedom of Choice)
- De Casu Diaboli (On the Fall of the Devil)

In **Monologion**, Anselm argues that “There is a certain nature or substance or essence, who through himself is good and great and through himself is what he is? Through, whom exists whatever truly is good or great or anything at all and who is the supreme good, the supreme great thing, the supreme being or subsistent, *i.e.*, supreme among all existing things”. The *Proslogion*, on the other hand is known for its **ontological argument** for the existence of God. In this work, Anselm proposed that God is understood as ‘a liquid quod maius non-cogitari potest’ (“That than, which nothing greater can be conceived”).

### A Song of Anselm

Jesus, as a mother you gather your people to you:  
 You are gentle with us as a mother with her children;  
 Often you weep over our sins and our pride:  
 tenderly you draw us from hatred and judgement.  
 You comfort us in sorrow and bind up our wounds:  
 in sickness you nurse us,  
 and with pure milk you feed us.  
 Jesus, by your dying we are born to new life:  
 by your anguish and labour we come forth in joy.  
 Despair turns to hope through your sweet goodness:  
 through your gentleness we find comfort in fear.  
 Your warmth gives life to the dead:  
 your touch makes sinners righteous.  
 Lord Jesus, in your mercy heal us:  
 in your love and tenderness remake us.  
 In your compassion bring grace and forgiveness:  
 for the beauty of heaven may your love prepare us.

## Chronicles in the Anglo-Norman Period

A tradition of writing chronicles became well established in the Anglo-Norman period. These chronicles recorded the history of kings and were written in Anglo-Norman. Chronicles were major source of historical knowledge for medieval people. They contained an extended account in prose or verse of historical events, sometimes including legendary material, presented in chronological order and without authorial interpretation or comment.

In the medieval age, the term ‘chronicle’ included every kind of history. These histories or chronicles were known in the vernacular as Bruts, after Brutus, the eponymous founder of Britain. They traced the history and legend of the country from the time of the mythical Brutus, descendant of Aeneas and founder of Britain. In the beginning, Anglo-Norman historians restricted themselves to translating earlier historical works such as **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**. However, by the end of 12th century, patrons began demanding accounts of their own historical rule to be preserved for posterity. For instance, the biography of William the Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, written around 1226, was commissioned by one of his own sons.

## Anglo-Norman Latin Chroniclers and Historians

### Simeon of Durham (1090-1129)

Simeon of Durham was an English chronicler and historian. In his youth, he entered the Benedictine monastery at Jarrow, which was later moved to Durham in 1074 and he was professed in 1085 or 1086, subsequently attaining the office of precentor of the church. Simeon’s chief work is the *Historia Ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, written between 1104 and 1108. It is a history of the bishopric of Durham from its establishment in 635 at Lindisfarne (Holy Island) to 1096. His *Historia regum Anglorum et Dacorum* (‘History of the Kings’), consists of two overlapping English histories covering the years 731-957 and 848-1129.

This work was formerly attributed to Simeon. But it is now believed that, he was the author only of the second history: a chronicle for the years 848-1118 (based on the Life of King Alfred by Asser and the Chronicon of Florence of Worcester) and a narrative of the years 1119-1129 (part original, part based on Edmer’s history of the church in Canterbury).

### Florence of Worcester (1118)

Florence was an English chronicler and monk of Worcester. His *Chronicon ex Chronicis* (Chronicle of Chronicles) is the first attempt made in England to write a universal chronicle from the creation onwards. The *Chronicon* is a valuable source of information for late Anglo-Saxon and early post-Conquest history. The work itself is based on the universal history compiled by Marianus Scotus, an Irish monk, who died at Mainz about 1082.

The *Chronicon* was written in Latin in early 12th century. Florence seems to have derived much of his information from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, as it existed in his time and he also used Bede and Asser's Life of Alfred. It is believed that after Florence's death in 1118, the work was continued by John of Worcester. The 'Continuation' takes the form of a near-contemporaneous narrative and is valuable as a source of history for the period, which it covers.

### Eadmer (1060-1126)

Eadmer was a chronicler, historian and Precentor of Canterbury. He was the follower and intimate friend of Anselm, a Benedictine monk. He was in the monastery of Christ Church, Canterbury, when Anselm became Archbishop of Canterbury.

After St Anselm's death, Eadmer's chief occupation became writing. He had made notes of the saint's doings and discourses and of the affairs, in which he had been engaged and from these he compiled his chief works, *the Historia Novorum and the Vita S Anselmi*.

Eadmer's *Historia Novorum* is an account of the events of his time in Latin. His chronicle finishes AD 1122, about 2 years before his death. In his account of the defeat of Harold Godwinsson at **Senlac Hill**, Eadmer attributes the eventual victory of William the Bastard in spite of massive Norman casualties to the intervention of God.

Eadmer's *History of England* from 1066 to 1122 is written from the ecclesiastical point of view. Eadmer was also elected archbishop of **St Andrews**, but was never consecrated because the Scots refused to accept the spiritual authority of Canterbury.

### Ordericus Vitalis (1075-1142)

Historian Ordericus Vitalis was born at **Atcham**, near Shrewsbury, in 1075. He was born to an English mother and a French priest, who came over to England with the Normans and received a church at Shrewsbury. At the age of 10, Ordericus was sent over by his father to St Evroult in Southern Normandy and remained for the rest of his life a monk of that abbey. Despite spending the majority of his life in Normandy, Ordericus Vitalis always considered himself an Englishman and often added 'Angligena' to his name. Between 1123 and 1141, he wrote *Historia Ecclesiastica* (The Ecclesiastical History), which mainly dealt with the rule of William the Conqueror. His history was intended at first to be a chronicle of his abbey, but it developed into a general *Historia Ecclesiastica* in 13 books. Ordericus began by transcribing the *Gesta Normannorum ducum of William of Jumièges* with lengthy interpolations of his own, chiefly relating to the history of Norman families connected with Saint-Évroult. Not later than 1115, at the command of his abbot, he began a history of his own monastery and its patrons, which gradually expanded into a general history of the church and incorporated a chronological outline of events from the birth of Christ, originally intended as a separate work.

Books I and II of *Ordericus' Historia* are an abridged chronicle from the Christian era to 1143; books III-V describe the Norman Conquests of South Italy and England; book VI gives the history of his abbey. Books VII-XIII consist of his universal history from 751 to 1141, book IX being devoted to the I Crusade. The book is a valuable study of the Normans in England, France and Italy and the history of his own times.

### William of Malmesbury (1095-1143)

William of Malmesbury was born in **Wiltshire** in about 1095. His mother was English while his father Norman. At a young age, he was admitted to Malmesbury (Benedictine) Abbey, where he became a monk and later, librarian of the monastery. *Gesta regum Anglorum* is a compendium of English history in 5 books first published in 1125 and later revised. *Gesta pontificum* is a compilation of the lives and deeds of English bishops. Malmesbury's most important work *Historia novella*, is a sequel to the *Gesta Regum*. This history concerns the period between the death of Henry I (1135) and 1142, about the time of William's death. The *Historia Novella* is also an important work, which records the major political turmoil that was unfolding during William of Malmesbury's own lifetime the Civil War between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda.

#### Works

- *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (Deeds of the Kings of England), 449 to 1127
- *Gesta Pontificum* (Deeds of the Bishops), 1126
- *Historia Novella* (New History), 1128 to 1142

## Henry of Huntingdon (1088-1154)

English chronicler and archdeacon of Huntingdon, Henry of Huntingdon was probably born near Ramsey, Huntingdonshire. His father was a priest and Henry also followed a career in the church and was attached to the household of Robert Bloet, the Archbishop of Lincoln.

Henry's interest in history was due to a visit paid to the Abbey of Bec, which he made while accompanying Archbishop Theobald to Rome in 1139, for at Bec, he met the Norman historian, Robert de Torigny, who brought to his notice the *Historia Britonum* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Shortly after, he was himself requested by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, to undertake the composition of a history, using the writings of Venerable Bede as groundwork. This he did, carrying the work down to the death of Stephen in 1154.

Henry's *Historia Anglorum* (The History of the English People) covers one of the most exciting and bloody periods in English history, the Norman Conquest and its aftermath. He tells of the decline of the old English kingdom, the victory of the Normans at the **Battle of Hastings** and the establishment of Norman rule. His accounts of the kings, who reigned during his lifetime William II, Henry I and Stephen contain unique descriptions of people and events.

## Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100-1155)

Geoffrey of Monmouth was born sometime around 1100, perhaps in Monmouth in South-East Wales. His father was named **Arthur**. Geoffrey was appointed archdeacon of Llandsaff in 1140 and was consecrated bishop of St Asaph in 1152.



Geoffrey served for over 20 years as a Master at the College of **St George** in Oxford. It was during his time in Oxford - probably around 1136 that Geoffrey produced his great work *Historia Regum Britanniae* (The History of the Kings of Britain). Geoffrey's book gives a detailed account of the old Kings and history dating from the Roman era and climaxing with the reign of King Arthur.

Written in the 12th century, *Historia Regum Britanniae* was one of the most popular Latin texts of the middle ages. The book begins with the settlement of Britain by Brutus the Trojan, great-grandson of Aeneas and the Trojan Corineus, the eponymous founder of Cornwall, who exterminate the giants inhabiting Britain. Though, Geoffrey's accounts can be seen to be wildly inaccurate, but his history is a valuable piece of medieval literature.

## William of Newburgh

(1136-1198)

English chronicler William of Newburgh was born at **Bridlington, Yorkshire**, around 1136. In his youth, William joined the Augustinian priory at Newburgh. His most well-known work is *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* (History of English Affairs), a history of England from 1066 to 1198. The book was written at the request of Ernald, abbot of Rievaulx. The book was written at the close of the 12th century and has been described as being "Both in substance and in form ... the finest historical work left to us by an Englishman of the 12th century".

## Benedict of Peterborough

(1135-1193)

Abbot of Peterborough, writer and royal councilor Benedict of Peterborough was educated at Oxford. He was appointed in 1174 chancellor to Richard, Archbishop of Canterbury and in 1175 became Prior of Christ Church, Canterbury. He is believed to have written a history of *Thomas Becket's Passion*, preserved in part in the work on Becket known as **Quadriologus** and also, a first-hand account of Becket's Miracles.

## Richard Fitzneale (1130-1198)

Bishop of London and Treasurer of Henry II and Richard I of England, Fitzneale belonged to a great administrative family, whose fortunes were closely linked with those of Henry I, Henry II and Richard I. Fitzneale was the son of **Nigel, bishop of Ely** (1133) and the great nephew of Roger, bishop of Salisbury, who had organised the exchequer under Henry I. It was his father, who bought him the Treasureship in 1158. Fitzneale became Dean of Lincoln in 1186 and Bishop of London in 1189.

Fitzneale is best remembered for his work, *De necessaries observanties Scaccarii dialogus*, commonly called the *Dialogus de Scaccario* (Dialogue of the Exchequer). It is an account in two books of the procedure followed by the exchequer in the author's time, a procedure, which was largely the creation of his own family. The dialogus furnishes a most faithful and detailed picture of English fiscal arrangements under Henry II.

## Roger of Hoveden (1174-1201)

English chronicler and historian of the reigns of Henry II and Richard I, Roger of Hoveden was born at Howden, a village in Yorkshire and probably attended a monastic school at Durham, Yorkshire. He was a king's clerk (*clericus regis*) in the time of Henry II and appears to have been attached to the court as early as 1173. In 1189, Roger served as an itinerant justice in the North, but he probably retired from public life after the death of Henry II.

Later in his life, he probably became the parish priest of his native village, Howden, devoting the rest of his life to the compilation of his chronicle. Roger's *Chronica* is divided in two parts: the first is based on Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. Its Continuation by Simeon and Henry of Huntingdon (732-1154) and the second treats the period from 1155 to 1201. His work is careful, precise and well organised and its broad approach makes it one of the more sophisticated annals of its time.

## Richard of Devizes (1150-1200)

Richard of Devizes was a Benedictine monk and chronicler. He was probably born in Devizes in Wiltshire. Richard is best known for his historical work *Chronicon de rebus gestis Ricardi primi* (Chronicle of the deeds of Richard I). It is an account of events in England and the Holy Land during the Third Crusade. This chronicle gives a vivid picture of London of Richard's time.

## Jocelin of Brakelond (D 1211)

Benedictine monk and chronicler, Jocelin of Brakelond was born in the middle of the 12th century in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. His name connects him with the quarter of the town called **Brakelond**. Jocelin joined the monastic community in 1173, was made chaplain to the abbot, Samson, in 1182 and thereafter served as guest-master.

Jocelin began writing his work, '*Chronicle of the Abbey of St Edmund's*,' an account of his life in Bury Abbey during the years 1198-1202 in the age of Richard the Lionheart. Jocelin's story covers the years from his days as a novice in 1173 to his appointment as a cellarer. It is a direct and personal account, containing not only closely observed portraits of his contemporaries and unusually vivid recollections of their deeds and conversations, but also some of Jocelin's most intimate thoughts, which give the work a special value.

## Giraldus Cambrensis (1146-1223)

Writer and historian Giraldus Cambrensis was born around 1146 at Manorbier Castle in **Pembrokeshire**. His father, William de Barry, was one of the most powerful of the Welsh nobility at the time. He was of mixed Norman and Welsh blood, his name being **Gerald de Barri**. He had a church education at Gloucester, followed by a period of study in Paris.

Giraldus was employed by the Archbishop of Canterbury on various ecclesiastical missions in **Wales**. He was appointed archdeacon of Brecon at the age of only 28 (and frustrated in his

desire to become Bishop of St David's), he then spent 2 years on a royal commission to Ireland, which gave him material for 2 books about the land and its people. His account of his findings was published as *Topographia Hibernica* (1188). This was followed by an account of Henry's conquest of Ireland, the *Expugnatio Hibernica*.

In 1188, a year after his return, he accompanied Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury, through Wales to preach the Third Crusade, a journey, which provided him with material for a much more affectionate book about the land of his birth and those he considered his countrymen. This journey led to the production of *Itinerarium Cambriae* in 1191. This was followed by *Descriptio Cambriae* in 1194.

### Works

- Topographia Hibernica (1188)
- Expugnatio Hibernica
- Itinerarium Cambriae (1191)
- Descriptio Cambriae (1194)

## Walter Map (1140-1210)

English churchman and writer Walter Map probably belonged to the **Welsh Marshes**. At the age of 14, Walter went to the University of Paris, where he studied until 1160 under Girard la Pucelle. In 1162, he was at the Court of England. He took holy orders and became a clerk in the household of Henry II. He was the King's representative at the 'Third Lateran Council' (1179), where he was appointed to dispute with the Waldensians.

Although Map wrote several books, only one, '*De Nugis curialium* (on the Trivialities of Courtiers), has survived. The book is extremely witty and contains some entertaining stories on life in Henry II's court.

## Matthew Paris (1200-1259)

Matthew Paris was an English monk and chronicler, born in about 1200. As a young man, he entered the monastery at St Albans. Matthew was interested in history, so he was given the job of helping Roger of Wendover, the chronicler of the abbey of St Albans.

In 1248, he was sent to Norway as the bearer of a message from Louis IX of France to Haakon VI; he made himself, so agreeable to the Norwegian sovereign that he was invited, a little later, to superintend the reformation of the Benedictine monastery of St Benet Holme at Trondhjem. Apart from these missions, his activities were devoted to the composition of history, a pursuit for which the monks of St Albans had long been famous.

Matthew edited the works of Abbot John de Cella and Roger of Wendover, which in their altered form constitute the first

part of his most important work, the *Chronica majora*. It extends from creation until 1259, the year of his death. Paris' work is one of the most valuable sources of knowledge of 13th century life remarkable for its detail, scope and accounts of events in Europe as well as England.

### Earliest History in French

- Geoffrey Gaimar's (fl 1140) *Estorie des Engles* (History of the English) is considered to be the earliest extant history in French language.
- It was written in England in the late 1130s.
- It is believed to be a translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.
- According to Ian Short, it was intended "To provide a vast panorama of the Celto-British, Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman dynasties in the British Isles from Trojan times until the death of William Rufus."

## Anglo-Norman Brut

*Bruts relate to the legendary history of Britain, which tells the story of Brutus, descendant of Aeneas. Espousing chivalric ideals and celebrating the deeds of knightly heroes, the Brut resembles aristocratic chronicles in content. The story of Brut was first made popular by Geoffrey Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae. Anglo-Norman poets Wace and Layamon used material from Monmouth's history and reworked it into French versions.*

### Wace's Roman de Brut (1155)

Wace was a Norman poet, who was born in Jersey in 1115 and brought up in mainland Normandy. Wace's *Roman de Brut* is an 1155 French verse rendering of Geoffrey of Monmouth's earlier Latin 'history' of Britain, from the time of Brutus, the eponymous founder, to the 7th century. Wace begins his chronicle with an account of the flight of Aeneas and moves quickly to the discovery of the island by Brutus and the division of the land into three kingdoms on his death.

He devotes much of his chronicle, nearly a third of the verses, to Arthur's reign, developing at length his foreign conquests and mentioning, for the first time, the Round Table. Wace uses Geoffrey's stories, such as those of King Lear and King Arthur, with a lively inventiveness and originality, drawing on oral sources and his own knowledge of parts of Britain.

The Roman de Brut became the basis for Layamon's Brut, an alliterative Middle English poem and Piers Langtoft's chronicle. According to Eugene Mason, Wace makes a few additions to Geoffrey's Arthurian history, but "His real contribution to the legend is the new spirit that he put into it. In the first place, his vehicle is the swift-moving French octo-syllabic couplet, which alone gives an entirely different tone to the narrative from that of Geoffrey's high-sounding Latin prose." Mason further adds that apart from matters of style, Wace made other changes to Geoffrey's narrative that are more important for Arthurian romance.

"He wrote the Brut under the patronage of Henry II and if we may trust Layamon's statement, he dedicated it to Queen Eleanor, who was the ardent propagator in England of the courtly ideals of Southern France. Accordingly Wace, perhaps partly because of his own milieu, partly because of his royal patroness, wove into Geoffrey's narrative more pronouncedly chivalric material."

## Layamon's Brut (1200)

Layamon was an English poet and a priest, who lived in Worcestershire. Layamon's *Brut* is a poetical paraphrase of the Brut of Wace. It begins with the fall of Troy and proceeds with the story of Brutus, a descendant of Aeneas, who journeys with other Trojans through the Mediterranean Sea until they finally reach the Isle of Avalon, inhabited by giants. The Arthurian passage is the major part of the poem, with some 8000 lines, it makes up to half of the Brut.

However, Layamon extends Wace's poem from 15300 to 32241 verses. Layamon freely adapted the Brut of Wace and added material from other sources. His Anglo-Saxon narrative meter foreshadows the Middle English metrical system. Layamon's additions to Wace are notable, such as his story "Regarding the fairy elves at Arthur's birth and his transportation by them after death in a boat to Avalon, the abode of Argante, their queen".

Layamon's work also shows a marked familiarity with current Welsh tradition. According to Eugene Mason, his "Work has a high value in the vexed question of the origin and growth of Arthurian romance; for it proves the existence of genuine Welsh tradition about Arthur".

## The Harley Brut

The anonymous *Harley Brut* consists of 3359 verses. Composed in alexandrine monorhymed laisses, it is extant in five fragments. The 5 portions of the text cover just over a quarter of Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, translating with some gaps from the death of King Lucius upto Arthur's campaign against (coincidentally) the emperor Lucius.

The authorship of this text has been attributed to Claraton, an English writer known to have translated Geoffrey into French verse, but there is no compelling evidence for this. According to Peter Damian-Grint, The Harley author "Shows slightly more interest in the figure of Arthur than in those of Ambrosius, Aurelius and Uther, to the extent of allowing himself a certain degree of amplification in descriptions of court life. He elaborates on Arthur's crown-wearing in Caerleon after his Northern campaign and provides, when Arthur arrives in France, a long description of his pavilion at Barfleur".

## Saints' Lives

- In the Anglo-Norman period, the genre of saints' lives or hagiography was a popular genre.
- Among the earliest lives in Anglo-Norman French is one of Saint Alexis, who abandoned his bride on their wedding night to embrace a life of exile and asceticism, which is widely considered the finest vernacular rendition of the popular Alexis legend. It is preserved in the 'St Albans Psalter,' a manuscript probably created for the 20th century recluse Christina of Markyate.
- Clemence of Barking, a nun writing in a Benedictine convent in Norman England reworked the Latin legend of the saint for a contemporary medieval audience in her 12th century old French version of the 'Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria.'
- The Vie de seint Clement is an anonymous early 13th century Anglo-Norman text, which combines into a single narrative version of three Latin sources: the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, Passio sanctorum apostolorum and Epistula Clementis ad Iacobum.
- Other noteworthy examples include *Denis Piramus'* late 20th century life of Edmund, a *king of East Anglia slain* by the Danes and the famous 13th century chronicler Matthew Paris's *lives of Alban, Edward the Confessor, Thomas Becket and Edmund of Abingdon*.
- Women also played a significant role in this Anglo-Norman hagiographic tradition. At least three Anglo-Norman lives of the 12th and 13th centuries were written by women: a life of Katherine of Alexandria by Clemence, a nun of Barking Abbey; a life of Edward the Confessor, also by a nun of Barking (possibly Clemence) and a life of Etheldreda by a woman identified only as 'Marie.' The importance of women as readers, patrons and authors may account for the rich representation of female holiness in Anglo-Norman saints' lives, encompassing virgin martyrs, penitents, nuns and holy laywomen, both legendary and historical.
- A group of five prose devotional works during this period dating from 1180 to 1200 has been identified as the Katherine Group. This group consisted of accounts of lives of Saints Katherine, Margaret and Juliana and two religious treatises, Hali Meidenhal and Sawles Warde.

## Religious and Didactic Writing in the Anglo-Norman Period

According to AR Waller and AW Ward, “The religious writings of the time may be divided into 4 sections, according to the aims, which they severally have in view. The purport of the first is to teach Biblical history; the second to exhort to holier living; the third is connected with the religious life of women; the last with the Virgin cult and mysticism.”

The earliest translation of a book of Bible was by Sanson de Nanteuil, who translated into verse the proverbs of Solomon, with commentary. Nanteuil devoted 11000 lines of verse to the Proverbs of Solomon for Lady Adelaide de Condé, wife of a Lincolnshire baron.

An anonymous author wrote ‘The Poema Morale,’ a sermon in the South-Eastern dialect around the year 1170. Concerned with the sins of the people, the sermon was very popular for a long time.

Composed in the form of a poem, it stands in the homiletic tradition of the period, but it reveals at the same time a sincere personal element in that the persona, a wise old man, wishes others to profit from his experience. The ‘*Ormulum* or *Orrmulum*’ was a popular outlay of the Holy Book, written by an English monk named Orm (or Ormin).

It was a collection of homilies on the Gospels consisting of almost 19000 lines of Middle English verse. Though of little literary interest, the work is invaluable to philologists

studying Middle English phonology and tracing the development of English through the Norman conquests.

The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) made acquisition of theological knowledge necessary for the laymen and clergy. The Fourth Lateran Council was summoned on 19th April, 1213 to meet in November 1215. It was attended by numerous bishops and abbots of the church as well as priors

and even chapters of churches and of religious orders namely Cistercians,

Premonstratensians, Hospitallers and Templars and the kings and civil authorities throughout Europe. At

this council, it was decided that annual confessions should be made obligatory and bishops should be more attentive towards their teaching.

To fulfill these conditions, a large number of religious works that discussed the basic elements of Christianity were published.

St Edmund of Abingdon wrote *Speculum Ecclesiae* (‘Mirror of Holy Church’), widely read in England and elsewhere in the 13th and

14th centuries. The work provides a comprehensive plan for achieving spiritual perfection.

*Love Rune* by Thomas of Hales is one of the earliest successful religious poems of the period. The work was probably composed for a girl, who devoted himself to God. In this poem, a Maid of christ chooses her lover the Heavenly Bridegroom. The work elevates love of christ above earthly love.

**Le Jeu d'Adam** (The Play of Adam) is the earliest Anglo-Norman play in French. The play is a dramatic representation of Biblical stories, including the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, the story of Cain and Abel and the prophets Isaiah and Daniel. *Ancren Riwe* (Guide for Anchoresses) is an early 20th century manual for anchoresses. The work contains many interesting details of the life led by the solitary ladies for whom it was written. It is divided into 8 books, which lays down a set of rules and advice for religious observance.

## Anglo-Norman Poets

### Philippe de Thaun

(Year of birth and death unknown)

Philippe de Thaun was an Anglo-Norman poet, possibly from the area around **Caen** in **Normandy**, who was active in the early 13th century. He is considered to be the earliest Anglo-Norman poet of the period. From one of his works, we get the information that he was patronised by Adelaide of **Louvaine**, **Queen of Henry I**.

#### Works

- Livre des Creatures
- Bestiaire

He is known for two poems. 'The first is *Livre des Creatures*,' which is a treatise on astronomy. It was probably written around 1119. It is a treatise on 'creatures' in the sense of being about created things. The text is also called the 'Comput' from its focus on numbers; it deals with numbers in the calendar and in astronomy, as well as numbers of religious or mystical significance. His second work, which is more popular is the allegorical 'Bestiaire.' It is believed to have been written after 1121. Composed of some 1570 lines, the poem is written in the Anglo-Norman dialect. It is a book of natural history containing descriptions of various animals alongwith brief moralisations.

### Reginald of Canterbury (FL 1112)

Reginald of Canterbury was an Anglo-Norman poet and monk. He was born and educated at Fagia, South of France. He lent his poems to the famous scholar Hildebert, bishop of Le Mans, consecrated in 1097 and translated to the Sea Tours in 1126, who in return sent him a highly complimentary letter.

His principal poem, *The Legend of St Malchus* was perhaps written around 1112. It is in 6 books, containing about 3390 lines and is a life of St Malchus, a Syrian hermit. Reginald's other works include a poem about his native town, a group of poems extolling Canterbury and its saints and one or two on Anselm of St Saba.

### Hilarius (FL 1125)

Hilarius was an Englishman, who wrote in Latin. He was a disciple of the famous Pierre Abélard. A large portion of his poems are addressed to English persons. His oeuvre includes three scriptural dramas, two of which belong to Christmas and Easter cycles, while the third is about St Nicholas and a number of shorter poems. One of his poems was written in praise of the Virgin.

### Benoit de Sainte Maur (D 1173)

Benoit de Sainte-Maure was a 12th century French poet. He was patronised by Henry II. His '*Roman de Troie*' (The Romance of Troy), was a source for later works set during the Trojan War, such as Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. Consisting of around 30000 lines, this work is mainly a paraphrase of the history of the Phrygian Dares.

Another major work, by Benoit, is a long verse '*Chronique des ducs de Normandie*.' A large portion of it is a paraphrase of the Latin histories of Dudo St Quentin and Guillaume de Jumieges. Composed of around 44000 lines, it begins with the creation of the world and ends with the death of Henry I.

#### Jordan Fantosme (D 1185)

Jordan Fantosme was an Anglo-Norman poet and chronicler. He was probably an Italian (named Giordano Fantasma), who came to England in the train of Henry of Blois. He is believed to have been the spiritual chancellor of the diocese of Winchester.

He is known for the historical poem '*La Chronique de Jordan Fantosme*' (Chronicle of the War between the English and the Scots in 1173 and 1174). Written in Latin, the poem describes the barons' revolt against King Henry II and William the Lion's Scottish incursions into Northern England in 1173-1174. **Matthew Strickland** refers to this poem as of "Primary importance for the study of war, diplomacy and knighthood, in the Anglo-Norman world."

## *Anglo-Norman Poets*

### **The Owl and the Nightingale**

'*The Owl and the Nightingale*' is a popular medieval English poem written probably in the 13th century. It takes the form of a spirited dispute between two birds on the subject of the relative beauty and merit of their songs. It is composed of approximately 2000 lines of verse in rhymed, octosyllabic couplets, this allegorical and didactic poem is usually ascribed to Master Nicholas of Guildford, about whom little is known.

'*The Owl and the Nightingale*' is the earliest example in Middle English of a literary form known as debate poetry. The Nightingale opens the debate, chiding the Owl as a creature of the night, a bird that loves the dark and hence is evil. After the Owl's successful retort, she accuses the latter of singing only of woe.

The Owl initially responds by suggesting that the dispute be settled according to the traditional show of force, a solution that the delicate Nightingale quickly dismisses. Instead, the Nightingale continues her attack, claiming the obvious superiority of her voice, when matched against that of the defendant. The Owl, a bird fabled to possess extraordinary wisdom, realises that she must now protect herself verbally. This she does by asserting the virtues of her own song, which she claims can move human beings to repentance and atonement for their sins, in contrast to the Nightingale's voice, a mere source of superficial pleasure.

Since, the debate leads to no solution, it is finally proposed that the birds petition the astute Master Nicholas, who lives in nearby Portesham, to become their mediator. The poem thus, ends with the prospect of reconciliation. It combines the characteristics of burlesque comedy, parody, traditional beast fables and popular verse satire.

### **Cursor Mundi**

'*Cursor Mundi*' (Runner of the world) is an anonymous Middle English poem written in North of England around 13-14th century. containing 30000 lines, this poem relates the history of the world as recorded in the Old and New Testaments. It is written in form of eight-syllabled couplets.

The poem begins with a Prologue, in which the poet provides the rationale behind his undertaking. Men desire to read old romances of Alexander, Julius Caesar, Greece, Troy, Brut, Arthur, of Tristram, Sweet Ysoude and others. But better than tales of love is the story of the Virgin. He states that all men take delight in their '*paramours*'; but the best lady of all is the Virgin Mary. Whoever devotes himself to her, finds true and lasting love. Therefore, the poet will compose a work in her honour.

The poet purports to tell about the Old and the New Law, the Trinity, the fall of the Angels, of Adam, Abraham and the patriarchs, then of Christ's coming, of his birth and of the three kings etc, of his public life and of his Passion and Crucifixion and of the '*Harrowing of Hell*'. Hence, he will go on to '*The Resurrection and Ascension*', '*The Assumption of Our Lady*', '*The Finding of the Cross*' and then to Antichrist and to the Day of Doom.'

The chief sources of the poem have been identified by Dr Haenisch. For the Old Testament history, the author draws largely from the *Historia Scholastics* of Peter Comestor; for the history of the Virgin, he translates literally from Wace's '*Etablissement de la fete de la conception Notre Dame*', the parables of the king and four daughters, and of the castle of Love and Grace, are taken from **Sent Robert book** (1.9516), *i.e.*, from the **Chateau d Amour** of Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln; other sources are the apocryphal gospels of Matthew and Nicodemus, a Southern English poem on the Assumption of Our Lady, attributed by the writer of *Cursor Mundi* to Edmund Rich of Pontigny, the Vulgate, the '*Legenda, aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine' and the '*De vita et Morte Sanctorum*' of Isidore of Seville.

# Romances in Anglo-Norman Period

Romance denotes a type of literature that flourished from the 12th to the 14th centuries. Romance was a popular genre in the Anglo-Norman period. It replaced Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry to become one of the most thriving modes in the Anglo-Norman period. Medieval romances signified a style of heroic prose and verse narrative that was popular in the aristocratic circles. The romances usually involved stories about marvel-filled adventures, often of a knight errant portrayed as having heroic qualities, who goes on a quest.

Jean Bodel, author of the *Chanson des Saisnes* (Song of the Saxons) classified medieval romances into three main categories: The Matter of France, The Matter of Britain and The Matter of Rome.

## The Matter of France

Stories from the matter of France deal with the legendary adventures of Charlemagne, the 9th century Christian emperor of the West. French chansons de geste (Song of deeds) are a group of epic poems composed by trouvères and produced in Northern France. These are concerned with war and heroism. One of the most famous stories from the matter of France is the *Chanson de Roland*, which tells the story of Roland's courageous fight against hopeless odds, ending with the hero's death. Jane Anderson Jones divides the matter of France romances into two broad groups. The first group, concerning the story of Otuel, contains such romances as *Otuel*, *The Siege of Melayne* and *Roland and Vernagu*, while the second group, concerned with the story of Ferumbras, contains such romances as *The Sowdone of Babylone* and *Sir Ferumbras*.

### Matter Pertaining to France

- Otuel
- The Siege of Melayne
- Roland and Vernagu
- Sir Ferumbras
- The Sowdone of Babylone

## The Matter of Britain

The Matter of Britain romances are the most famous category of romance. Stories from the matter of Britain are mainly based on the life of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. They derive from French Arthurian legends. The characters of the Matter of Britain are heroic Knights, whose superiority is reflected not only in their physical strength and in the defence of values, but especially in the fidelity to their own individual destiny: Famous Arthurian romances include Robert Wace's *Geste des Bretons* (Deeds of the Britons) and Chretien de Troyes's, *The Knight of the Cart*.

### Matter Concerned with Britain

- Sir Degare
- Sir Orfeo
- The Earl of Toulouse
- Emare
- Geste des Bretons
- The Knight of the Cart

## The Matter of Rome

The matter of Rome deals with classical stories, the Mighty Exploits of Alexander, the Great, the Trojan War, the siege of Thebes, the Siege of Troy, the Adventures of Aeneas etc. It represents the ancient classical culture, as seen through medieval eyes and was primarily aimed at instruction. These romances were derived from conventions of courtly love, which began in the love lyrics of Provence. Examples of matter of Rome include Benoit de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*.

### Matter Related to Rome

- Roman de Troie
- Roman de Eneias
- Roman de Thebes
- Roman d'Alexander

## The Matter of England

A fourth matter, the Matter of England has been added by modern scholars to Bodel's classification to more accurately describe the medieval English romance. These romances are often much less courtly and less sophisticated than the other romances and they advance and support humble and simple virtues rather than the aristocratic virtues of chivalry and the courtly life. These include *King Horn*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Athelstan*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton*, *Richard*.

### Matter Containing Themes Related to England

- King Horn
- Havelok the Dane
- Athelstan
- Guy of Warwick

## Miscellaneous Romances

There are many romances, which fall outside the purview of the above mentioned categories. This category of miscellaneous romances is based on various themes and of varying quality.

### Miscellaneous Romances with Varied Themes

- Floris and Blancheflour
- Chevalere Assigne
- Sir Cleges
- Roberd of Cisyle
- King Edward and the Shepherd

## *Anglo-Norman Drama*

### **Le Jeu d'Adam** (The Play of Adam)

It is an Anglo-Norman play composed around 11th-12th century. This semiliturgical play is written in old French. Like the English Mystery Plays (or Cycle Plays), it is a dramatic representation of stories from the Bible (both old and new Testaments). The play is based on the Latin responses of the Septuagesima mass, which recount the Creation, Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve and the story of Cain and Abel. It dramatises the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and the story of their sons, Cain and Abel. The play has also been seen as a precursor to old French farce.

### **Seinte Resurrection**

(Resurrection of the Saviour)

It is a 12th century incomplete play written in the Anglo-Norman dialect. The play deals with the burial and Resurrection of Christ. The play's style is related to the historical realism of late medieval passion plays. Only 522 lines of the play remain with us as a fragment.

### **Le Jeu de Saint Nicholas**

(The Play of St Nicholas)

It is a miracle play by Jean Bodel. It was performed in 1201. It is an important transitional work, which combines elements of traditional miracle play with secular elements.

The play concerns a pagan Saracen King, who hears that Christians have invaded his land. The King then consults his idol, Tervagan about his future. In response, Tervagan both laughs and cries. The king then wages war with the Christians and massacres them. The lone survivor, Preudom is imprisoned. He prays before the statue of St Nicholas. The King questions Preudom about the powers of his idol. In reply, Preudom claims that the saint's powers can help in recovering one's lost possessions.

The King, then, wishes to test the power of the claim and keeps the statue in his treasure. Three Kings, however, steal the King's treasure. Enraged at Preudom, the King sentences him to death. Preudom, then prays to the saint, who, in turn, visits the thieves and persuades them to return the treasure.

On finding his lost treasure, the pagan King releases Preudom from captivity and himself converts to Christianity. The idol of Tervagan is smashed and the entire court gets converted to Christianity. *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas* is also of importance for its introduction of comic scenes based on contemporary life and is one of the first Latin school dramas to be translated into the vernacular.

### — Smart Facts —

- **Cursor Mundi** written in form of Eight syllabled couplets relates the history of the world as recorded in the Old and New Testaments.
- The **Brut** survives in more that 30 manuscripts and fragments and is a verse literary history written in Norman language.
- The English priest Layamon compiled and recast the Middle English poem **Brut**.
- The *Ormulum* is a 12th work of biblical exegesis and because of the unique phonetic orthography adopted by its author, the work preserves many details of English pronunciation.
- The hagiographic works of the Middle Age incorporate a valuable record of institutional and local history and evidence of popular cults, custom and traditions.
- **The Owl and the Nightingale** is a verse context written in rhymed octosyllabic couplets and precociously anticipates the style of Chaucer.

## ***Major Anglo-Norman Romances***

### **Otuel**

*Otuel* was composed around 1330 in East Midlands. The main theme of this romance is the battles fought between Christians and Saracens. It is a Saracen knight, who arrives at Charlemagne's court in Paris with a message from the powerful Saracen Emperor Garcy. The Emperor demands that Charlemagne surrender France and abandon Christianity.

The French however refuse, as a result of which Otuel and Roland agree to fight a duel. Both of them fight fiercely. Roland realises his opponent could be a valuable ally and offers him to adopt Christianity and marry Charlemagne's daughter Belisant. Suddenly, a miracle happens and a white dove appears on Otuel's helmet. Interpreting it as a good omen, Otuel accepts the offer.

He joins Charlemagne's army and they travel to Lombardy to attack Garcy. Garcy laments Otuel's treachery and tries to capture him. However, with God's help, the French knights' achieve victory and many Saracens overcome and flee. At the end, Garcy is captured and later surrenders before Charlemagne.

### **The Sege of Melayne**

It is considered part of the Otuel group of Charlemagne romances. It was written in 12-line rhyming stanzas. Central figure of this romance is Bishop Turpin.

According to Alan Lupack, "Turpin is pictured as an unswerving defender of the faith. He demands high standards and correct action from those around him and even more from himself. Nor is he afraid to use the spiritual or political power of his religious position." The main story concerns how Lombardy was conquered by the Saracens.

### **Sir Fermubras**

It was written in the 13th-14th century, it is a verse romance. The story describes the capture of Rome by the Saracen hosts and its relief by Charlemagne. A Combat takes place between Olivier and Ferumbras, son of the sultan of Babylon.

The Saracen is overcome in the end and accepts Christianity. His sister Floripas, who is in love with the French Sir Guy assists the Christians and both brother and sister are subsequently rewarded with territory in Spain.

### **The Sowdone of Babylon**

*The Sowdone of Babylon* is a middle English romance. It deals with the exploits of Charlemagne and his band of retainers known as the Twelve Peers. The Sowdone or the Sultan captures Rome before the arrival of Charlemagne's army.

Sowdone's son, Fermubras is forced to submit to baptism. But Roland, Oliver and other knights are captured. Sowdone's daughter, Floripas aids the captured knights out of her affection for Guy of Burgundy and helps them in escaping. She allows them to hold out against the Sultan until assistance from Charlemagne arrives. As a result of Floripas' treachery and Fermubras' conversion, Sowdone is finally defeated and executed.

### **Sir Degare**

*Sir Degare* is a 14th century verse romance. It carries features of a Briton Lay. According to some scholars, the poem is supposed to be based upon a lost Breton lay, *Lai d'Esgaré*.

The story concerns Degare, who becomes a proficient knight after being abandoned at birth. Degare goes in search of his parents and unwittingly marries his mother. Degare fights with his father until he reveals the truth about himself. At the end, Degare's parents marry and he marries the daughter of widowed King of Litel Bretaygn.

#### **Sir Orfeo**

Sir Orfeo is a 13th century romance composed by an unknown Celtic author. It is a reworking of the classical myth of the great musician Orpheus and his wife Eurydice.

The romance narrates the tale of King Orfeo, a harp player without equal. His wife, Heurodis, is abducted by the fairy King, but Orfeo, through his harp playing, manages to bring her back to the land of mortals.

The poem was probably translated from a French romance of the kind called a Breton lay. " Few features of the story suggest that the source story had been Anglicised. e.g., Orpheus becomes Orfeo, an English king although he's a harpist. The Gods Pluto and Juno become humanised to serve as parents. Traciens becomes Winchester and Orfeo favours the election of a successor by Parliament". The poem contains authentic fairy lore, including the strong traditional association of fairies with the dead.

## Geste Des Bretons

It is written by Wace, *Geste des Bretons* is an adaptation of Geoffrey Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Wace called this work *Geste des Bretons* ('Deeds of the Britons'), but scribes, who copied it renamed it as the *Roman de Brut*. It is composed of 14866 lines, the poem is written in octosyllabic couplets in vernacular French.

The poem was completed in 1155 and dedicated to Eleanor of Aquitaine. This work contains the first mention of Arthur's Round Table. According to **Eugene Mason**, Wace makes "Few additions to Geoffrey's Arthurian history, but his real contribution to the legend is the new spirit that he put into it".

## The Earl of Toulouse

*The Earl of Toulouse* is a Middle English romance composed in the 14th century. The poem is written in the dialect of the North-East Midlands in tail-rhyme stanzas. It is a Breton lay. The story concerns Diocletian, the Emperor of Germany, who unjustly takes lands from Sir Barnard, the Earl of Toulouse. His wife, Beulybon, begs him to return them, but Diocletian refuses. A battle wages between the two and finally the Earl emerges victorious.

The Earl takes help of a knight, Sir Tryalbas. Together, they travel to Diocletian's city, where the Earl disguises himself as a hermit".

Tryalbas informs Beulybon that he has the Earl and offers to kill him. She replies that he must not break his promise and tells him to bring the Earl to her chapel the next morning. Here Beulybon, richly clothed, allows the Earl, who is still dressed as a hermit, to gaze on her. As she leaves, he asks her for alms and she gives him a ring as a token.

Meanwhile, Emperor Diocletian goes away and entrusts his wife to two knights. The knights try unsuccessfully to woo her. Fearing that she will tell the Emperor, they hide a naked youth in her chamber, pretend to discover and then eventually kill him. Beulybon is accused of adultery.

Diocletian returns home, where he is met by the traitors demanding that she be burned. Hearing of Beulybon's situation, the Earl comes disguised as a hermit to defend her. Satisfied of her innocence, he defeats the two traitors, makes them admit their guilt, and has them burned. The Emperor accepts the Earl's friendship. After his death, the Earl is elected emperor and married to Beulybon.

## Emare

Emare is a 14th century romance composed in North-East Midlands. The story preserves a version of what is known as the 'Constance-saga,' a narrative, which was quite popular in late medieval literature. It is written in 12-line tail-rhyme stanzas. The story concerns Emaré, daughter of the Emperor Artyus.

When Emari grows into a beautiful young woman, Artyus falls in love with his own daughter and obtains a papal dispensation to marry his own daughter. Emare refuses his proposal. As a result of this, Artyus sets her a drift in a boat with no provisions. But later repents and sends a search for her.

Emare arrives in the land of Galys, weak and frail. When the King of Galys sees her in her robe, he resolves to marry her, despite his mother's conviction that the beautiful woman is a devil. They eventually marry. When the King is away, Emare bears him a son, Segramour. However, in the King's absence, the Queen Mother arranges that Emaré and her child be set a drift in a boat.

When the King of Galys returns, he realises the Queen Mother's treason and sends her into exile. At Rome, the King is finally united with his wife and son. Emare re-inscribes the tradition of domestic romance with its focus on the family and on the heroine's personal relationships.

### The Knight of the Cart

- Chretien de Troyes's *Lancelot, The Knight of the Cart* narrates the story of the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Arthur's Queen Guinevere. Chretien claims to have composed *The Knight of the Cart* at the request of the Countess Marie of Champagne, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine.
- The love sick Lancelot of the poem undergoes all kinds of humiliations to prove his devotion to Queen Guinevere, culminating at a tournament, where he fights as well at Guinevere's command. The Queen is eventually abducted and Lancelot goes on a quest to rescue her.
- In the end, Lancelot beats Meleagant, King Bagdemagu's son, thereby saving Guinevere and strengthening their love. The story is reminiscent of Greek tales of underworld. Through the foolish actions of the love struck Lancelot, de Troyes satirises love and mocks the effects of perpetual love on those who pursue it.

## Roman de Eneias

- It is a French romance written by an anonymous Norman poet probably between 1155 and 1160.
- According to **Kathryn Talarico**, it is “One of the earliest ‘romances’ in the 12th century meaning of the term and is one of the most curious admixtures of influences of both Virgil and Ovid”.
- The story taken from Virgil’s Aeneid concerns Eneas, shipwrecked and stranded, who lands in Carthage-an extraordinary city ruled by Dido, an extraordinary woman.

### Roman de Thebes

It is believed to be an adaptation of the epic Thebais by the Late Latin poet Statius. It is composed in the 12th century, the poem consists of around 10000 lines. Its main theme is a fratricidal combat.

The story describes how the curse of Oedipus was passed on to his two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, who go to war with each other over, who shall rule Thebes.

## King Horn

It is an English romance written around 1250. It is considered to be the earliest extant ‘*Matter of England*’ romance. The romance narrates the story of a king’s son, Horn, whose father was murdered by Saracen pirates.

Horn and his companions are then sent to exile and find themselves in Westernesse. At Westernesse, the king’s daughter, Rymenhild, declares her passion for Horn and declares her desire to marry Horn.

However, Horn refuses to marry until he has proved his worth by killing the Saracens. He does indeed manage to kill some invading Saracens.

As his fame spreads, one of Horn’s companions, Fikenhild grows jealous and reports to the King of Westernesse that Horn plans to kill him. As a result of this, he is banished by the King. In exile for the second time, Horn now finds himself in Ireland, where he again impresses the king with his military exploits. The king offers the hand of his daughter, Reynild in marriage as a reward, but Horn remains loyal to Rymenhild.

He returns to Westernesse and disguises himself to rescue Rymenhild from a proposed marriage. Finally, Horn avenges his father’s death by killing the Saracens, who murdered his father and regaining his kingdom. Both he and Rymenhild finally marry and become the king and queen of Horn’s paternal kingdom.

## Havelok the Dane

*Havelok the Dane* is a Middle English metrical romance written between 1280 and 1290. It consists of some 3000 lines of rhymed octosyllabic couplets. Havelok the Dane tells the story of the English princess Goldeboru and the orphaned Danish prince Havelok, who defeats a usurper to become the King of Denmark and part of England.

The first mention of Havelok’s story occurred around 1135-1140 in Geoffrey Gaimar’s *L’Estoire des Engles*. The story begins in England, where the beloved Christian King, Athelwood, has died, leaving his daughter, Goldeboru, sole heir to the throne.

She is left in the care of Earl Godrich of Cornwall, who sets up an oppressive rule and imprisons Goldeboru in a tower, denying her the kingdom. Meanwhile, the story shifts to Denmark, where the king of Denmark also dies, entrusting his three children and his kingdom to Earl Godard. Godard kills the two young girls and threatens the life of the king’s son, Havelok.

Godard hands the boy, Havelok over to a fisherman, Grim, with instructions to kill him. Before Grim can carry out his order, a blazing light leaps from Havelok’s mouth, indicating his kingly origin and divine mission. Further, ‘Grim sees a king-mark’ on Havelok, a birthmark in the shape of a cross. As a result of this, Grim spares the boy, adopts him and takes him with his family to England.

Havelok eventually grows into a strong young man. He becomes employed as a cook’s helper in Godrich’s household. Godrich, believing that Havelok is of common origin, marries him to Goldeboru. On their wedding night, again a beam of light appears from Havelok’s mouth. Because of this, Goldeboru recognises that her husband is a prince. The two then travel to Denmark alongwith their family. Havelok raises an army, defeats both Godard and Godrich and unites the two kingdoms. Havelok the Dane is also an important historical source for the understanding of political and legal procedures of the time.

## Athelstan

*Athelstan* is Middle English romance written in 14th century. It is composed of 812 lines, the tale concerns four main characters- Athelstan, Egelond, Alyrke and Wymound. All four of these become sworn brothers. When Athelstan inherits the English throne, he makes Egelond- Earl of Stane, Wymound- Earl of Dover and Alyrke- Archbishop of Canterbury. He also marries Egelond to his sister, Edith.

However, as years proceed, Wymound becomes jealous of Athelstan's favouring of the family of Egelond. He tells Athelstan that the Earl is plotting to poison him. The enraged King vows to kill Egelond's, whole family and invites them to the capital on the pretext of knighting their sons. When they arrive, Athelstan condemns them to death. When Athelstan's own wife, who is pregnant at that time, intercedes on their behalf, Athelstan kicks her in the stomach causing her miscarriage.

Alryke challenges the king to have the trial of treason heard in the parliament, but Athelstan refuses and instead removes him from the position of Archbishop. In response, Alryke threatens to excommunicate the kingdom, forbidding priests to say mass or baptize children and denying the king absolution. Athelstan finally relents and hands over the family to Alryke.

Alryke arranges for an ordeal by fire to prove the innocence of Egelond and his family. All of them emerge from the fire unscathed, but the pregnant Edith falls into labour and gives birth to St Edmund. Edmund is announced as the heir by Athelstan. The name of the traitor is finally revealed by Athelstan and Wymound hanged.

### Guy of Warwick

Guy of Warwick is a Middle English romance composed around 1300. The story concerns Guy, the son of a steward, who falls in love with Felice, daughter of the Earl of Warwick. Felice rejects Guy because he is not a knight. The Earl awards Guy with knighthood, but Felice still demands that he prove his worth.

He establishes his worth through a series of battles and adventures across Europe. When he returns to Warwick, Felice still refuses to marry him until he proves that he is the greatest knight in the world. Guy then departs again to Europe. Guy and his companion, Herhaud travel to Constantinople, where they help the Eastern Emperor defeat a Saracen army.

On his way, Guy also encounters Tirri of Gormoise. Tirri explains how the Emperor's steward Berard falsely accused him of the death of his uncle, Duke Otoun, imprisoned him, but later released him on agreement that he would find and bring Guy to defend him against Berard's accusation.

Guy eventually defends Tirri, without revealing his identity. Still disguised, he then returns to England, which is being attacked by the Danes and their champion, a ferocious African giant called Colbrond. Guy beheads the giant and attains victory. After a brief anonymous visit to Felice's castle, Guy retires to a hermit's cell, where Archangel Michael tells him to prepare for his death. He sends his ring to Felice, who arrives just as her husband's soul ascends to heaven. When Guy's body becomes heavy, he is buried in the hermitage, where Felice dies at his graveside. An abbey is constructed in honour of Guy and Felice at Lorraine.

## Bevis of Hampton

*Bevis of Hampton* is an English metrical romance of the early 14th century. Orally composed and transmitted, Bevis comprises 4620 lines, of which the first 474 are in tail-rhymed, six-line stanzas and the remainder in short rhyming couplets. The tale concerns Bevis, who is sold into slavery at the young age of 7 by his wicked mother. Bevis' mother had earlier arranged for her husband's death through hands of her lover, the Emperor of Germany. Bevis eventually finds favour at the court of pagan King Hermine, whose daughter Josiane falls in love with him.

Bevis agrees to accept her love, if she converts to Christianity. Meanwhile, Bevis is accused of having seduced Josiane and imprisoned. Josiane is forced to marry someone else. After 7 years, Bevis finally escapes from dungeon. Over the following years, he engages in a series of perilous adventures, including conflicts with Saracens, giants, lions and a dragon; returns to England to kill his father's murderer and witness his mother's death and repeatedly endures the treachery of trusted aides and allies.

Finally, after Josiane has been forced into two hateful marriages, she and Bevis are wed and she gives birth to twin boys. According to critics, Bevis is more fully developed in terms of literary form than some other romances of the period *e.g.*, King Horn and Havelok the Dane.

## Floris and Blancheflour

*Floris and Blancheflour* is a verse romance composed around 1250. It was probably adapted from a 12th century French original. This romance tells the story of a Christian lady, who has been captured by the Saracens. The Saracens recognising her nobility make her a lady-in-waiting to their queen. Both the lady and the queen bear children on the same day, during a festival of flowers: A daughter Blancheflour is born to the lady, while the queen bears a son, floris. Both the children are brought up together and eventually fall in love.

Fearing that they will marry, the king decides to execute Blancheflour. His queen persuades him to send Floris away instead, hoping that the separation will dull their love. The king gets a false tomb erected to convince Floris that Blancheflour has died.

When Floris tries to kill himself, the queen finally reveals the truth. Floris goes in search to seek Blancheflour, while his parents give him a cup and a magic ring for protection. Both are united at Babylon and eventually married.

## Sir Cleges

It was written in the 14th century, *Sir Cleges* is a chivalric verse romance. It is composed in 12-line tail-rhyme stanzas. The plot concerns Sir Cleges, one of Uther Pendragon's knights and his wife, Clarys. Both of them give alms generously and hold annual feasts.

However, after some years, their wealth depletes and they sell of their property. On Christmas Eve, Cleges discovers that one of his cherry trees is miraculously covered in fruit. He worries that it is a bad omen, but Clarys urges him to take the fruit to Uther's court in Cardiff. At the court, none of the ushers or stewards let him enter. However, on seeing the cherries, they agree, in return for a third of whatever reward is offered by the king.

As his reward, Cleges asks the king to administer twelve blows with his staff. The king reluctantly agrees, and Cleges divides his 'reward' between the porter, the usher and the steward. When the reason for his strange request is eventually revealed, the king and his court are delighted. King Uther gives Cardiff Castle and other goods to Cleges, makes him his steward and his son a squire.

### Ipomedon

- Ipomedon is a 12th century Anglo-Norman romance composed by Hugh de Rotelande.
- It is a highly comic romance, in which a knight feigns cowardice and repeatedly and consciously deceives two women.
- According to Kathryn Gravidal, Ipomedon has structural similarities with Trubert, a 13th century fabliau.

## Amis and Amiloun

*Amis and Amiloun* is a 13th century romance composed in East Midlands. It consists of 12-line tail-rhymed stanzas.

According to Anne Wilson, *Amis and Amiloun* is "A tale of ideal friendship, a didactic tale in, which the friendship is tested increasingly severely up to the point of supreme sacrifice". The story revolves around Amis and Amiloun, who are the sons of neighbouring barons in Lombardy, born on the same day and identical in appearance.

Both attain high positions in the Duke's court and swear an oath of brotherly loyalty towards each other. Because of the death of Amiloun's father, the two have to part ways. In Amiloun's absence, Amis becomes a prey to the machinations of the Duke's steward. He is accused of having an affair with the Duke's daughter, but offers to prove his innocence

through a combat. Amis sets off to ask Amiloun for help. Meanwhile, Amiloun has already dreamt that his friend is in danger.

Amiloun agrees to undertake the trial for Amis. He proceeds to the court, while Amis assumes his friend's place in his household, avoiding sex with his wife by placing a sword in the bed.

As Amiloun prepares to face the steward, a heavenly voice warns him against continuing the combat. The voice warns him that he would turn into a leper, if he does not desist. However, remembering the oath made to his friend, he fights and defeats his opponent.

Convinced that he is Amis, the Duke offers him Belisaunt in marriage. The two knights exchange clothes again and each returns home. Amis marries Belisaunt and has two children, inheriting the Duke's estate, when he dies. Meanwhile, Amiloun reveals the truth to his wife, who becomes disgusted with him. After he turns into a leper (as the heavenly voice had warned), his wife drives him out, leaving him with only his golden cup and his young nephew, Amoraunt.

Both Amiloun and his nephew are forced to beg for food in nearby areas. One day, they eventually reach Amis' palace, where a knight admires Amoraunt's beauty and offers him a place in the court.

Amoraunt refuses and the knight informs Amis, who praises the youth's loyalty and sends him his golden cup full of wine. When Amiloun produces his identical cup, Amis assumes that the leper has killed his 'brother' and beats him until Amoraunt reveals his identity. Delighted and remorseful, Amis welcomes Amiloun into his court.

After a year, both friends are visited by an angel, who informs them that Amis can cure his friend by anointing him with his children's blood. Amis does as the angel says and gets his children killed. Even Belisaunt supports him in this. To their surprise, they finally discover that their children are also alive. Amiloun's disloyal wife is imprisoned and her lands given to Amoraunt. The story ends with both the friends dying on the same day.

## Sir Isumbras

*Sir Isumbras* is a popular Middle English romance, which circulated in England before 1320. The poem is composed in 12-line tail-rhyming stanzas. Dieter Mehl describes it as a 'homiletic romance,' which carries similarities to both saints' lives and romance.

The story concerns Isumbras, a chivalric and courteous knight. Isumbras lives happily with his beautiful wife and 3 sons, but forgets that his happiness is due to the mercy of God.

One day, Christ sends down a bird to remind Isumbras of his son and offers him a choice between suffering in youth or old age. Isumbras repents and promises to serve Christ while he is young and strong. He and his family leave the county and wander, where Christ leads them, begging for food.

While they are crossing a river, Isumbras' sons are carried away by a lion and a leopard. Accepting the will of God, they move ahead and encounter the war ships of a Saracen king. The king forcibly takes Isumbras' wife from him, gives him a cloth full of gold and badly beats him. Before the ships sail, Isumbras is granted a final meeting with his wife, where she gives him half of her ring and tells him to search for her.

Left alone, Isumbras joins a community of ironsmiths and spends years learning to make armour. When he hears that the Saracens are waging war against a Christian ruler, he rides a work horse into battle and defeats them, killing their king. Isumbras continues his travels further and reaches the court of a generous queen. However, instead of eating the feast that is laid before him, he starts weeping. Filled with pity, the queen then gives him a room in her castle,

where he regains his strength and beats her best knights in a tournament.

One day, Isumbras finds a nest containing his cloth of gold, which he conceals under his bed. When the jealous Saracens discover it, they show it to the queen, who realises that it belonged to her husband. Isumbras narrates his story and shows her his ring. She produces her half and the couple is re-united.

Isumbras is crowned the king. But soon after, his kingdom is attacked by the Saracens. He is helped by three knights, who turn out to be his children. The entire family is thus, united.

### William of Palerne

Dated between 1335 and 1350, William of Palerne is a courtly romance, rich in fantastic adventure. It is an adaptation of the French Guillaume de Palerne, composed around 1200. It was commissioned by Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford.

The romance has been translated by William, the poet, about whom, little is known. It is written in the Picard dialect. The poem traces the adventures of two princes. One is Prince Alphouns, heir to the Spanish crown, who as a youth was transformed by his step mother into a werewolf; the other is William, Prince of Apulia and Sicily

William's evil uncle, in an effort to become heir to the crown, attempts to have the young William murdered. However, the little boy is rescued by the werewolf (Alphouns). Throughout William's life, he is followed and guided by the werewolf. William is eventually taken under the wing of the Roman emperor and falls in love with the emperor's daughter, Melior. The two run off together.

The werewolf guides them back to Sicily. There, finding his family under attack by the Spaniards, William goes to war and conquers his enemies. Meanwhile, Alphouns is restored by his stepmother to his human form. The story ends with the marriage of Alphouns to William's sister, Florence and William to Melior.

## Other Writers of the Period

### Chretien de Troyes

(FL 1160-1191)

Chretien de Troyes was a French poet, who is known for the five Arthurian romances he wrote in the 12th century. Information about Chretien comes almost solely from indirect evidence in his works and scholarly speculation has led to much controversy on this subject. Chretien was a court poet, probably attached to the court of the count and countess of Champagne.

Chretien's tales, written in the vernacular, followed the appearance in France of Wace's

*Roman de Brut* (1155), a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, which introduced Britain and the Arthurian legend to continental Europe. Chretien's romances were probably composed between 1160 and 1180. They were imitated by other French poets and were translated and adapted frequently during the next few centuries as the romance continued to develop as a narrative form.

His five romances are *Erec*; *Cliges*; *Lancelot* (ou Le Chevalier a la Charrette); *Yvain* (ou Le Chevalier au lion); and *Perceval* (ou Le Conte du Graal). *Erec* is about an Arthurian knight, who is put to various trials to claim the love of Enide. *Cliges* is about the knight Cliges and

#### Works

- Erec
- Cliges
- Lancelot
- Yvain
- Perceval

his love for his uncle's wife, Fenice. Lancelot deals for the first time with the love affair of Guinevere and Lancelot. Yvain centers on a knight, who is exiled from the favours of his lady and required to perform a number of heroic deeds before regaining her. His last unfinished romance Perceval is dedicated to his patron Philip, Count of Flanders. It narrates the adventures and growing pains of the young knight Perceval. Chretien de Troyes might also have written a non-Arthurian tale Guillaume d'Angleterre, based on the legend of St Eustace.

## Marie de France (Fl 1160-1190)

Marie de France was the earliest French poet of the 12th century. Her actual birth date is not known. She was born in Normandy, France. The exact city of her birth is not known, but the area of Normandy is about 50 miles outside of Paris. Marie de France later moved to England. She was perhaps a half-sister of Henry II (r 1154-1189). She is considered by many to be Marie, daughter of Geoffrey IV of Anjou, who was the father of Henry II.



De France wrote in Anglo-Norman, the dialect spoken among the aristocracy of England and large parts of Northern France. She was part of a generation of writers (notable among them Chretien de Troyes), who were in the process of inventing the French verse romance. She was perhaps a habitual guest at the brilliant court of troubadours and Gascon knights, who gathered in the castles of Anjou and Guyenne around Henry II and Queen Eleanor.

She is best known for her 'Lais', which are short narrative or lyrical poems, usually in octosyllabic couplets, intended to be sung. This poetic and musical form was popular among the poets (trouvers) of Northern France. Marie's lays, which number 15, belong to the Breton Cycle. They are written in eight-syllable rhyming couplets. The lays range from 118-1184 lines in length. The Lais, which may be definitely attributed to Marie are: Guigemar, Equitan, Le Frêne, Le Bisclavret (the werewolf), Les Deux amants, Laustic, Chaitivel, Lanval, Le Chèvrefeuille, Milon, Yonec and Eliduc.

Another type of literature Marie is known for is fables. She has written 103 short fables with a prologue and epilogue. Half of the fables written by Marie are derived from Aesop's fables. 63 of the fables came originally from Marie herself. Most of Marie's fables are about beasts. Only one-third of her fables include human characters. Marie de France's fables tell a moral lesson. Her fables are meant to set examples.

## Lais of Marie de France

'The Lais of Marie de France' is a collection of 12 narrative poems that were written sometime in the 12th century. The subject of the Lais is love and courtliness. De France's Lais have been considered by many to be the first significant collection of medieval courtly romance. The Lais begins with a 'Prologue', in which Marie states her reason for composing the lays and confesses her hope that her audience will enjoy the work.

*A summary of major 'Lais' has been provided below*

### Guigemar

This particular 'Lai' is about Guigemar, son of Oridial, vassal of King Hoel of Brittany. Guigemar is a proficient knight. But he does not have any interest in love. Once, Guigemar tries to kill a white hind during a hunt, but the arrow rebounds and wounds him. The hind curses him to remain wounded until cured by a woman's love.

Binding his wound with the hem of his shirt, Guigemar boards an empty ship that he comes across in the harbor. He falls asleep and awakens in another land, where he finds a young woman married to an oppressive lord. Guigemar falls in love with her.

Both Guigemar and the woman exchange of tokens of fidelity (the woman makes a knot with his shirt and he gives her a kind of chastity belt). When the Lord discovers their relationship, he banishes Guigemar. Heartbroken, the lady goes in search of Guigemar, but becomes captive of Lord Meriaduc. Guigemar defeats Lord Meriaduc, rescues her and the two are then united.

### Equitan

This lay centers on Equitan, king of Nauns. Equitan had a right brave and loyal knight as his seneschal. Equitan's seneschal was married to a beautiful woman, whose beauty was incomparable.

One day, the king went to his seneschal's lodging and caught a sight of the seneschal's wife. Awestruck by her beauty, the king fell in love with her. Whole day, the king experienced pangs of love. The seneschal, surmising that the king was ill sent his wife to the king's care. Left alone with her, the king opened to her his heart. He told her that he was dying for her love and that, if she had no more than friendship to offer, he preferred death before life.

At first, the woman was undecided and did not give any answer. But, when the king kept offering his protestations of love, the seneschal's wife agreed and

gave him the gift of her heart. The two granted rings one to another and pledged affiance between them. Since, the king refused to marry anyone else, the people of his kingdom started blaming him. The seneschal's wife fearing that the king would be forced to marry daughter of some king, extracted a promise out of him that he would not marry anyone else.

The king promised not to marry anyone until her husband died. The woman then plotted to kill her husband in a tub of boiling hot water, with Equitan's help. They kept two heated baths together and waited for the seneschal to come. Meanwhile, both the king and the seneschal's wife laid together in each other's embrace and kept a waiting woman outside to warn them, if the seneschal arrives. When the seneschal arrived, he saw the door of the bath chamber closed. Without heeding the waiting woman's warning, he went inside and saw his wife and the king together.

When the king saw the seneschal, he had no thought but to hide his dishonour. He started up, accidentally jumped in the bath that was filled with boiling water and died. Enraged, the seneschal then threw his wife in the same boiling tub. Thus, both of them died together.

**Le Fresne (The Ash Tree)**

This lay is about a knight in Brittany, who had twin sons born to his wife. The wife of the knight's neighbour and friend (who was also a knight) grew jealous and spread rumors that the 2 sons were born to the woman because she had slept with two lovers. Soon, the jealous woman also got pregnant and gave birth to two daughters. However, she wanted to get rid of one to avoid disgrace. The woman's attendant took away one of the daughters, wrapped her in a cloth of silk and left her in the branches of an ash tree near an abbey.

An abbess took the child under her care and named her 'Fresne'. Fresne grew up into a beautiful young woman and went to live with Lord Gurun, who was in love with her. However, Gurun is persuaded to get a wife and he gets engaged to Codre ('Hazel'), who without anyone knowing, happens to be Fresne's twin sister.

Gurun and Codre get married, while Fresne becomes a servant of Codre. Fresne arranges the bridal bed spreading over it the silk cloth, in which she had been wrapped as an infant. Eventually, the mother recognises the cloth and Fresne as her daughter. The marriage to the sister is dissolved and Gurun marries Fresne.

**Bisclaveret (The Werewolf)**

This lay is about a nobleman, who gets married to a lovely lady. For three whole days in every week, the nobleman would disappear from her side. She knew not, where he went, nor on what errand. The nobleman's wife insisted that he reveal, where he went and on what errand, but he refused. One day, the nobleman finally revealed to his wife that he turns into a werewolf, Bisclavaret, enters the forest naked and lives on prey and roots.

To return to his human shape, he needs to don his clothes again. The nobleman's wife extracts from him the secret of where he hides the clothes; she then plans to get rid of him and takes a lover to help her in the task. She asks her lover to steal the nobleman's clothes so that he remains in the form of a werewolf forever. After this, she marries her lover.

One day, the king goes hunting and has mercy on a wolf (who is the nobleman). The wolf follows the king all the way to the court. There, he sees his wife's lover and attacks him. On another occasion, the wolf's former wife comes to the king and the wolf sees and attacks her also, tearing off her nose. Surprised at the wolf's behaviour towards the two, the king's counselor advised him to question the woman and her lover.

On being questioned again and again, the two reveal the truth about the wolf. The wolf's clothes are returned and he assumes human shape again. The woman and her lover are exiled to a faraway land.

**Lanval**

At the time of Pentecost, King Arthur gave a great feast. There, he awarded many rich gifts to his counts and barons and to the *Knights of the Round Table*. King Arthur awarded gifts to all, except the loyal Lanval. Lanval was in dire financial situation. Depressed, he went off to the countryside.

There, he met two beautiful maiden, who led him to their mistress. The mistress was beautiful and rich. She professed her love and offered him untold riches. The mistress' only condition is that Lanval keep their relationship secret. If he discloses the truth of their relationship to anyone, he would lose her friendship and never again be able to see her face.

Lanval agrees to do as the mistress wishes and comes and departs as per her wishes. Once, Queen Guinevere makes a pass at Lanval, who rejects her. Enraged, she accuses him of homosexuality. Defending himself against this charge, Lanval starts boasting that his love was already set on a lady, so proud and noble, that her meanest wench went more richly and smiled more sweetly, than the Queen.

Angrily, the Queen falsely informs the king that Lanval tried to seduce her. The king demands that Lanval be put on a trial. Persuaded to defend himself in the king's court, Lanval finds himself at a loss since, he has no proof of his love for the mistress. He is then asked to give pledge and surety to the King that he would come before the court on the day of judgement in his own body.

On the day of Judgement, as the court is about to pronounce sentence on Lanval, two maidens, who are attendants of Lanval's lover appear and request preparations to be made for arrival of their mistress. Lanval's lover proclaims her love before the court and proves the truth of Lanval's innocence. Lanval is set free and leaves with the lady for the island of Avalon.

### Les Deus Amanz (The Two Lovers)

*The Lay of Les Deus Amanz (The Two Lovers)* concerns the King of Pistrians, who had a beautiful daughter. The king laid down a condition that none can marry his daughter unless he can carry her in his arms, without rest, all the way up a high mountain. Nobody is able to fulfill this condition. A Squire, son of a count falls in love with the king's daughter and asks her to run away with him. The daughter refuses because she doesn't want to upset her father.

She, however, gets a magic potion made, which energises a person and refreshes him. She herself loses weight, so that her lover would be able to carry her. On the day of the climb, the lover carries the king's daughter halfway up the mountain and starts to grow weak. When she offers her the magic potion, he refuses to drink it out of pride. He climbs upon the summit of the mountain and tries grievously to bring his journey to an end. On reaching the top, he dies out of fatigue.

The princess kisses his eyes and mouth, falls upon his body, takes him in her arms and dies by his side. When the king arrives, he is filled with grief. On the third day after their death, he gets them sealed in a goodly coffin of marble and by the counsel of all men, lays them softly to rest on that mountain, where they died.

### Smart Facts

- The 'Lais' or Lyrical poem of Marie de France deals with love and courtliness.
- Anglo-Norman aristocrats loved the old celtic oral tales sung by Breton story tellers also called Breton 'lays'.
- Romance was the main narrative genre for late medieval readers.
- A **chivalric romance** focusses on knightly adventures, knightly love and display of martial prowess against supernatural foes.
- Romances reflected the social aspirations of members of the lower nobility.

### Yonec

The Lay of *Yonec* is about an old and rich man in Britain, who was lord of the town and realm of Chepstow. This old man marriage a young and beautiful woman to give him a heir. He keeps him locked so that she may not go astray and remain devoted to him. He set in charge of the woman, his elder sister, a widow, to hold her more surely in ward. These two ladies dwelt alone in the tower, together with their women, in a chamber by themselves.

After 7 years in confinement, the woman grows increasingly pale and depressed. She longs to die. One day, a hawk flies into her chamber and is transformed into a handsome and courteous young knight. The knight advises her to pretend to feel ill and call for a priest. Both of them lie together in bed and then the knight takes on the lady's shape and receives communion from the priest.

The knight leaves and promises to return whenever the woman desires. As a result of the frequent visits of the knight, the woman regains her vigor. The king turns suspicious and tries to discover the cause behind his wife's happiness.

He arranges to have his old sister hide herself and find out what the lady is doing when alone. The old woman witnesses the encounter of the lovers and the young man's transformations from man into bird. She reveals the truth to her brother. The old man then hatches a plan and fashions four blades of steel with point and edge sharper than the keenest razor. These he fastens firmly together and sets them securely within the window, by which the hawk would come to his wife.

Next day, the hawk is fatally wounded while trying to fly into the woman's chamber. The knight comforts the woman telling her she will soon give birth to his son, whom she is to name Yonec and who will avenge the lovers. The woman pursues the bird with many shrill cries, tries to follow him and springs forth from the window. Travelling forth, she reaches a city made of silver; where she sees a palace. Here, she finds two knights sleeping on beds and then finds her lover, who embraces her and the two lament their misfortune. The knight tells her that he will die soon and advises her to go away.

The knight then bestows her a ring, teaching her that as long as she wear the gift, her husband will think of none of these things, nor care for her person, nor seek to revenge him for his wrongs. He also gives her his sword to pass on to their son.

On reaching back, the woman gives birth to a son, whom she names Yonec. When he comes of age, she narrates the entire story of his father, gives him the sword and dies soon after. Yonec cuts off his stepfather's head and avenges his real father's death. The people of the kingdom proclaim him as their Lord.

### The Nightingale

The *Lay of the Nightingale* is about two knights, who live next door to each other at Saint Malo. One of them is married, while the other is a bachelor. The bachelor sets his love upon his neighbor's wife. By means of constant persuasion, he wins the lady's love. Both of them kept their relationship a secret. The lady kept guard, when her husband was present. However, when the season grew warm and sweet, the lady frequently rose from her bed at night to catch a sight of her lover and talk to him through the window.

When the lady started rising too often from the bed, her husband grew suspicious and inquired the reason. In reply, she answered that she rises to hear the song of the nightingale. Hearing this, the husband resolves to catch the nightingale. His servants successfully capture the nightingale, kill it and fling the body of the bird in front of his wife.

The lady then wraps the body of the little bird in a silken cloth and sends it to her lover through a trusty servant of her house. She charges him with a message, and bids him to bear it to her friend. The servant then narrates the whole incident to the lady's lover, who then puts the bird in a gold vessel, seals it and carries it with him from then on wherever he goes.

### Milun

The Lay of Milun is about a proficient knight from South Wales, whom nobody is able to defeat. A Lord's daughter falls in love with Milun and sends him a message saying that, if her love was to his mind, sweetly would it be to her heart. Milun rejoices greatly on reading this, thanks the lady for her words and gives her love again in return for her own. Both become lovers and meet each other often. The lady becomes pregnant and gets distressed about her situation.

When the child is born, both of them secretly arrange to send him to Northumbria to be raised by an older sister of the lady; the child bears with him Milun's ring and a letter, which are to inform him of his identity when he grows up. While Milun goes away to serve beyond the seven seas, the lady is married off to a rich baron. Milun gets depressed, but devises a way to keep communicating with her. He writes a letter and makes a swan his messenger. Both of them keep exchanging letters through the swan for more than 20 years.

Meanwhile, Milun's and the lady's son grows up and finds the truth about his origins. Their son becomes a matchless knight, whose fame spreads far wide. One day, Milun gets to hear about this matchless knight and desires to fight with him, not knowing that the knight is his own son.

The two meet at a tournament held at Mont St Michel. Milun strikes his opponent so fiercely, that the lance splinters in his gauntlet; but the young knight keeps his seat without even losing a stirrup. In return, he aims his spear with such cunning that he bears his antagonist to the ground. Therefore, Milun is unhorsed by his own son.

The knight still treats him with courtesy, holds the bridle and asks Milun to get upon his horse. Milun recognises the ring on the fingers that hold the bridle and the father-son duo are united. In the meantime, the lady's husband also dies and she thereafter marries the knight.

### Chaitivel (The Unfortunate One)

- Chaitivel ('The Unfortunate One' or 'The Four Sorrows') concerns a beautiful young woman, who is being wooed by four suitors. Since, she does not want to discourage any of them, she gives all of them love tokens and keeps them in dark about it.
- A tournament is held, in which these lovers are tested. Three of the lovers are killed in this tournament and only one survives. In honour of the three dead lovers, the woman composes a song, which she calls the Four Sorrows. The surviving lover suggests that the woman name the song as the unfortunate one, since she refuses to give him her love.

**Chevrefoil** (Honeysuckle)

The Lay of Chevrefoil ('Honeysuckle') concerns King Mark, who was angry with Tristan, his sister's son because Tristan loved his wife, Queen Iseult. Therefore, the King exiles his nephew and he goes to live for a full year in South Wales, where he was born. After a year, Tristan becomes depressed, leaves his kingdom and returns straight to Cornwall, the realm of his banishment, because there dwelt the Queen Iseult.

He hides in the forest and lives there. He gathers information that King Mark purposed to hold high Court at Tintagel and keep the feast with pomp and revelry at Pentecost. Here, the Queen would also be present.

After the King has gone his way, Tristan enters within the wood and seeks the path by which the Queen would come. He cuts a hazel tree and carves his name on it with a knife; he intends for Iseult to see the sign and know of his suffering for her love.

Both Tristan and Iseult are compared to the honeysuckle that entwines itself around the hazel tree. The two thrive together, but die if separated. When Iseult comes, she spies the hazel wand set upon her road and recognises it as Tristan's sign. She then goes into the forest to meet Tristan. Iseult promised him that she will strive with all her might to remove differences between Tristan and the king. After this, they separated and Tristan composed a 'lai' to remember their meeting.

**Eliduc**

The Lay of Eliduc is about a brave and courteous knight, who lived in Brittany. Eliduc had married a noble lady of proud race and name in his youth. She was called Guildeluec. Eliduc was greatly loved by the King of Brittany because of his long and loyal service. However, certain men envious of him labeled charges against him that he had meddled with the royal treasure. The king then banished him from the land without giving any reason. Eliduc traveled to England, where he helped a king, who was having trouble with a peer who wanted to marry his daughter.

He set an ambush and defeated the peer. From that day onwards, the king cherished Eliduc very dearly. He held the knight and his company, for a full year in his service and at the end of the year, such faith had he in the knight's loyalty, that he appointed him Seneschal and Constable of his realm. When the King's daughter, Guilliadun heard Eliduc's deeds, she fell in love with him. She also sent him love tokens which he accepted without telling his wife.

Meanwhile, Eliduc's former Lord sent for him, asking for his help. He gets confused and finally decides to leave the land. But he also promises Guilliadun that he would return. Back in his homeland, Eliduc could not stop thinking about Guilliadun. After helping the king of Brittany solve his problems, he thus sails back to England and sends a secret message to Guilliadun. Guilliadun slips away from her father's home and joins Eliduc, who is hiding in the woods; they go back to his ship and sail away; when they are nearing Brittany a storm breaks out; one of the sailors says the cause of the storm is Eliduc's betrayal of his wife and asks him to throw Guilliadun into the ocean. Guilliadun, who has been in the dark about Eliduc's marriage faints.

*Eliduc believes that she has died and prepares for her burial. He then decides to delay the burial and seek advice from others. He lays down Guilliadun's body on a bed and goes to his castle, but his wife notices he is visibly unhappy. She then has him followed and finds the truth about Guilliadun. Whilst she is weeping, a weasel comes from under the altar and is killed by a servant. The companion of this weasel comes forth to seek him and places a red flower within his mouth.*

As a result of this, the weasel comes back to life. Guildeluec has the flower retrieved and uses it to bring Guilliadun back to life. She then tells Guilliadun that she will allow her and Eliduc to be together. While Eliduc and Guilliadun marry, Guildeluec joins a convent. When Eliduc gets old, he finds a monastery and joins it while Guilliadun joins the same convent, where Guildeluec lives. All three spend their last years in the love and service of God.

# Chronological History (Norman Conquest)

| Year            | Event  |
|-----------------|--|
| 1033            | Alliance between France and England against the Vikings, the Normans claim to the English throne.  |
| 1042            | Accession of Edward, the Confessor.  |
| 1043            | Edward crowned King of England.  |
| 1045            | Edward marries Edith, the daughter of Godwine, Earl of Wessex, the wealthiest and most powerful English subject.   |
| 1053            | Harold Godwinson succeeds to the Earldom of Wessex.  |
| 1058            | Harold Godwinson created Earl of Hereford.   |
| 1064-65         | Meeting between Harold Godwinson and Duke William. Godwinson probably swears to Duke William that, William, would be king of England after the death of Edward.  |
| 4th Jan, 1066   | Death of Edward the Confessor.   |
| 6th Jan, 1066   | Harold Earl of Wessex crowned King of England.   |
| Jul 1066        | Harold gathers the English army at the South Coast of England in preparation for the Norman invasion.  |
| Jul 1066        | William prepares his fleet for the English invasion at the River Dives in Normandy.  |
| 20th Sept, 1066 | <b>Battle of Fulford</b> Harald Hadrada and Earl Tostig sailed up the River Ouse on 20th September, 1066 in pursuit of their claim to the English throne. The combined forces of Mercia and Northumberland led by earls Edwin and Morcar heavily defeated outside York. Harold forced to march his army North to fight off the Norwegian invasion. |
| 25th Sept, 1066 | <b>Battle of Stamford Bridge</b> Harold offers Tostig his earldom back before the battle begins, if he would change sides, but Tostig throws the offer back in the king's face. Harold eventually defeats King Harald Hadrada and the Vikings at York.   |
| 27th Sept, 1066 | <b>Duke William Sets Sail for England</b> The Norman Invasion begins.  |
| 28th Sept, 1066 | Duke William lands at Pevensey, on the South coast of England.   |
| 29th Sept, 1066 | Duke William occupies Hastings, on the South coast of England.   |
| 1st Oct, 1066   | Harold receives news of the Norman invasion.   |
| Oct 1066        | King Harold arrives in London.   |
| 13rd Oct, 1066  | William demands that King Harold resigns his royalty in favour of William, refers it to the arbitration of the Pope or let it be determined by the issue of a single combat. King Harold declines.   |
| 14th Oct, 1066  | Battle of Hastings.  |
| 14th Oct, 1066  | An arrow strikes Harold above his right eye.   |
| 14th Oct, 1066  | The Normans adopt a strategy to deceive the Saxons. The English led into believing that the Normans are in retreat. The English pursue the Normans and foolishly break their ranks.  |
| 14th Oct, 1066  | The English unable to compete against the knights on horseback. The Saxon barricades break.  |
| 14th Oct, 1066  | The wounded King Harold killed and his body mutilated by the Normans.  |
| 14th Oct, 1066  | William wins the Battle of Hastings.   |
| 25th Dec, 1066  | Duke William crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey in London.   |
| Jan 1067        | William the Conqueror starts constructing castles in England Norwich Castle, Wallingford Castle and Chepstow Castle  |
| Mar 1067        | William returns to Normandy until December 1067.   |
| Dec 1067        | William returns to England.  |
| May 1068        | King William's wife, Matilda crowned Queen of England.   |
| May 1070        | Hereward the Wake leads the English with Harold's brother the Earl Morcar against the Normans at Peterborough, but is defeated.  |
| May 1070        | Norman conquest complete.  |

# Historical Chronology (The Anglo-Norman Period)

| Year    | Event  |
|---------|--|
| 1066    | Death of Edward the Confessor in January, Harold II accedes to the English throne. Norman invasion and conquest of England, Harold II is killed and William the Conqueror becomes King of England. |
| 1070    | Lanfranc appointed Archbishop of Canterbury.   |
| 1087    | Death of William the Conqueror   |
| 1100    | Death of William II, Henry I accedes to the throne of England.   |
| 1135    | Death of Henry I, accession of King Stephen to English throne  |
| 1137    | Beginning of a Civil War between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda over the succession to the English throne  |
| 1152    | Marriage of future Henry II to Eleanor of Aquitaine.   |
| 1154    | Death of King Stephen, accession of Henry II to English throne.  |
| 1164    | Constitutions of Clarendon, a set of laws, which governs the trial of members of the Church in England   |
| 1169    | Norman barons invade Ireland.  |
| 1170    | Assassination of Thomas a Becket   |
| 1189    | Death of Henry II, Richard I accedes to the English throne.  |
| 1192    | Richard is captured by Duke Leopold of Austria whilst returning from the Crusades.   |
| 1194    | Richard is ransomed and returns to England.  |
| 1199    | Death of Richard I, King John accedes to the English throne.   |
| 1204    | Loss of Normandy.  |
| 1209    | King John excommunicated by Pope Innocent III.   |
| 1215    | Signing of the Magna Carta.  |
| 1216    | Death of King John, Henry III accedes to the throne of England.  |
| 1221-24 | Arrival of Dominican and Franciscan friars in England.   |
| 1264    | Henry III defeated at the Battle of Lewes.   |
| 1272    | Death of Henry III, Edward I accedes to the English throne   |
| 1277    | England annexes Wales, a state of affairs, which lasted until 1283.  |
| 1279    | Statute of Mortmain (introduced by King Edward I of England and aimed at preserving the kingdom's revenues by preventing land from passing into the possession of the Church).                     |
| 1283    | English Conquest of Wales.   |
| 1297    | English defeated at the Battle of Stirling Bridge.   |
| 1307    | Death of Edward I, Edward II accedes to the English throne.  |
| 1314    | Scotland defeats England at the Battle of Bannockburn.   |
| 1322    | Edward II defeats a rebellious baronial faction at Battle of Boroughbridge.  |
| 1327    | Edward III usurps the English throne in January; Edward II is killed in September.   |
| 1328    | England recognises Scotland's independence in the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton.   |
| 1338    | Edward III claims the throne of France, initiating the Hundred Years' War.   |