



# *Historical Miscellany*

*Ad sensum* translations  
by  
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## **1 *Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims***

An anonymous minstrel from Reims in Champagne is the author of what, on first reading, looks very much like a Medieval French prose chronicle. The minstrel in question was not, however, by any stretch of the imagination, a historiographer. He was simply a story teller who chose to frame his narrative within a vaguely historical perspective. His subject matter centres on the French monarchy from the first crusade until St Louis in 1250. But his is above all else a work of imagination which sets out to be entertaining and amusing, not informative. Truth and verisimilitude were not among the minstrel's priorities. Indeed he seems on occasion to go out of his way to surprise, if not to shock his listeners. This he does by reformulating the familiar, by introducing embroideries and anecdotes into his story which fly in the face of what his audience would have been expected to know. He writes with a self-conscious humour and with irony, not to mention an unusual degree of anti-clericalism. The interest of his work lies less in what it tells us than in the manner of its telling. His work is historical only in the light it sheds on the mentality of the age that produced it. Composed around 1260, the *Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims* survive in twelve manuscripts, of which BL MS Addit. 11753 is the base adopted by Natalis de Wailly in his still standard edition of the work published in 1876 for the Société de l'Histoire de France. A number of the anecdotes it contains have their roots in Anglo-Norman England, and I have translated a selection of those that might still be of interest to today's medievalists. The whole text has been translated before into English, by E.N. Stone (1939) and by T.R. Levine (1990). A translation and commentary in French was published by M.-G. Gossel in 2002. An extensive bibliography will be found in Arlima.

... It was agreed among the French barons [in 1137] that king [Louis VII] should marry, and the bride they selected for him was duchess Eleanor [of Aquitaine], an exceedingly evil woman. Her lands included Maine, Anjou, Poitou, Limoges and Touraine, in fact easily more than three times as much territory as the king himself held. What happened next was that Louis conceived the idea of going to the Holy Land, having eagerly resolved to liberate it from the hands of the Saracens. So he took the Cross and prepared to set out with a large contingent of troops. They embarked on the feast of St John, and spent a whole month sailing wherever the winds happened to drive them until they finally made landfall at Tyre. This was the only part of Syria over which the Christians had control at that time. Louis spent all of the following winter staying in Tyre, doing nothing more than fritter away what money he had.

When Saladin saw how supine Louis was and how crassly he was behaving, he challenged him on several occasions to do battle. The king, however, had no appetite for a fight. Queen Eleanor, whom Louis had brought with him, realised how inadequate the king was. She had already heard talk about Saladin and his excellent qualities, his prowess, his intelligence and his generosity, and this was enough to make her fall madly in love with him. She sent him greetings by way of one of her interpreters, and let him know that, if he could contrive somehow to abduct her, she would be willing to accept him as her husband and renounce her religion. When Saladin learned of all of this from the letter that the interpreter delivered to him, he was absolutely delighted because he knew that Eleanor was the grandest lady in the whole of Christendom, and the richest. He ordered an armed galley to be made ready, and set out from Ascalon, where he happened to be, and sailed to Tyre, taking the interpreter along with him. They landed at Tyre shortly before midnight.

The interpreter used a secret passage to go up to the queen's chamber where she was expecting him. When she saw him, she asked: 'What news do you have for me?' 'My lady,' he replied, 'as you will see, there's a galley here, ready and waiting for you, but make haste, otherwise we'll be spotted!' 'Well now, that's excellent work', said Eleanor. She sent for two ladies-in-waiting, and had two chests brim full of gold and silver fetched which she intended to have taken on board the galley. It was at that moment that one of her attendants realised what was happening, and she slipped out of the chamber as quietly as she could. She went straight to the royal bed-chamber where the king was sleeping. She woke Louis and said: 'Sire, we're in trouble! My lady's on the point of leaving to go to Saladin in Ascalon, and the galley's waiting in the harbour. In God's name, hurry, sire!'

On hearing this, the king leapt out of bed, threw on his clothes and got himself ready. He called his household knights to arms and hurried down to the harbour. He found the queen with one foot already poised on the boat. Taking her by the hand, he brought her back to her chamber. The king's men took possession of the boat, and everyone on board was taken prisoner. They had been taken so much by surprise that they were not even able to put up any defence.

The king demanded to know why Eleanor had done what she did. To this the queen replied: 'In God's name, I did it because you're such a failure, a worthless good-for-nothing! I'd heard such good reports about Saladin that I now love him more than I do you. One thing you can be certain of is that you'll never again find any pleasure in my arms.' At this, the king turned away and had Eleanor placed under heavy guard. It was then that he took the decision to go back to France, both because he was running out of money and because staying would only bring more shame on him.

So he took to sea again and, bringing Eleanor with him, returned to France. He consulted all of his barons to see what he should do about the queen, having first explained to them how she had behaved. 'Quite honestly,' the barons replied, 'the best advice we can give you is to let her go. She's a diabolical sort of woman, and if you keep her around you any longer, our fear is that she will have you murdered. What is more, you've not even had any children with her' Louis accepted this advice, which was a foolish decision on his part. He would have been better advised to keep her in strict confinement. In that way he would have been able to keep control of her extensive lands for the rest of his life. Nor would he have suffered all the misfortunes that were to befall him, as you will hear me tell you shortly.

The king, accordingly, sent queen Eleanor away to her own lands. She immediately issued an invitation to king Henry of England, the one who had saint Thomas of Canterbury killed. Henry was happy to accept and he came and married her. He then did homage to the king of France for the lands that he was taking over, extensive and extremely valuable lands. He took the queen off to England, and lived long enough with her to have three sons. The eldest was called Henry Curtmantle [*sic*], a good and valiant knight who met an early death. The second son was called Richard, brave, intrepid, generous and a model of chivalry. The third, called John, was a bad and untrustworthy king who did not believe in God ... (§ 6-12)

[§ 17-19: *It was arranged that princess Alix, Philippe Auguste's sister, should marry king Henry II's eldest son. When she arrived in England, the Young King was temporarily absent, so it was his father*

*who received her –with great pomp and ceremony. Indeed, so solicitously and so attentively did he welcome her that Alix quickly ended up in the king’s bed.]*

... King Philippe could never forget the highly shameful act that Henry II had committed against his sister. One day, at the same time as the French king was staying at Beauvais, Henry found himself at the Benedictine abbey of Gerberoy, only four leagues away.

As soon as Philippe learned how close Henry was, he felt elated at the prospect of being able, if possible, to avenge the dishonour that had been inflicted on him. He ordered his knights and soldiers to eat earlier than usual and to see to feeding their horses. When evening fell, he instructed his men to take up their arms, but without letting them know what he intended to do. They rode to Gerberoy where they found that Henry, who had just undergone a bleeding, had not yet retired for the night. Philippe walked into the room where Henry was to find him propped up on a couch.

Philippe had no sooner caught sight of him than he drew his sword and rushed boldly up to him. He was on the point of smashing his skull when a knight jumped in between them both and managed to deflect the blow. Absolutely terrified, king Henry leapt to his feet and fled into a chamber, firmly bolting the door behind him. Philippe was extraordinarily dejected when he realised that he had missed his chance. But he had nothing to gain from staying, so rode off back to Beauvais.

When king Henry learned that his would-be assassin was king Philippe, he said: ‘A curse on it! How can I go on living now that that French whippersnapper, son of a calamitous king, can come here and try to kill me!’ Jumping to his feet, king Henry grabbed hold of a horse’s bridle. Plunged into utter despondency and urged on by the Devil that possessed him, he went off to the latrines and there strangled himself with the bridle reins.

When the king’s attendants realised that he was no longer with them, they searched high and low for him. They finally found him in a vile and wretched state, hanging there with the reins around his neck. The full horror of the scene came home to them. They took his body down and laid it in his bed. What they told the public was that he had died suddenly and unexpectedly. It does not happen very often, in the case of high-ranking individuals such as Henry, that no one at all knows the truth. Something that is known to the attendants and menials does not stay a secret for very long.

The king’s body was prepared for burial, and this took place in the cathedral at Rouen [*sic*] in Normandy where he had been taken. I will speak no more here about king Henry and turn instead to his son, king Richard [Coeur de Lion], who inherited his lands. He was a splendid, handsome knight, brave, intrepid, courtly and generous. He used to come to fight tournaments in the lands bordering the Ile-de-France and Poitou, and enjoyed a long period when people had nothing but good to say about his behaviour ... (§ 22-27)

[*Returning from the Holy Land in 1192*] ... king Richard set sail for Germany as best he could. When he landed, he set out across country accompanied by a small group of household knights. He journeyed on until he reached Austria. There he was recognised by some of duke [Leopold’s] spies. As soon as he realised this, he disguised himself as a domestic servant and found employment in a kitchen where his job was to turn the spit on which the capons were roasting. But there another spy denounced him and informed the duke, who thereupon sent enough knights and armed men to

ensure that they outnumbered Richard's people. The king was taken prisoner and sent to the well fortified castle [of Dürnstein], while all those in his retinue were sent elsewhere to another castle. They kept moving Richard from one castle to another with the result that no one knew exactly where he was being held—not even the people guarding him. The duke alone knew ... (§ 65)

... Richard was, then, the prisoner of the duke of Austria, and only the duke and his closest advisers had any idea of his whereabouts. Now it so happened that a minstrel by the name of Blondel had been brought up by Richard at court, from an early age. This Blondel decided to go travelling from one country to another looking to find news of where his king might be. He set out and spent a year and a half in different foreign countries without ever discovering where the king actually was.

As chance would have it, he finally landed up in Austria and found himself standing before the very castle where king Richard was imprisoned. He took lodgings in town with a widow, and he asked her who this fine, beautifully situated fortress belonged to. She replied that it belonged to the duke of Austria. 'Dear lady,' asked Blondel, 'would there happen to be any prisoners in the castle at the present time?' 'Yes, indeed there is', the good lady replied, 'and he's been there for at least four years, but none of us can get to know who he is. What I can tell you for sure is that he's kept under extremely close guard. We all think he's a nobleman and some great lord or other.'

When Blondel heard what she said, he was elated and felt in his heart of hearts that he had found what he was looking for. He was careful, however, not to show his feelings to the widow. He had a very comfortable night and slept through until morning. When he heard the night-watchman's horn signal daybreak, he got up and went to church where he prayed for God to help him. He then made his way into the castle and introduced himself to the castellan. He told him he was a minstrel and would be happy, if he so wished, to stay a while with him at the castle. Being a young and pleasure-loving knight, the castellan willingly agreed to retain Blondel's services.

Blondel was delighted and went off to fetch his fiddle and other instruments. The castellan was very pleased with the entertainment the minstrel provided. Blondel was happy in the castle and got on well with all the people there. Despite spending the whole of the winter there, however, he never succeeded in identifying the person who was being held prisoner. One day during the Easter celebrations, he was strolling alone through a garden next to the castle keep. Looking round he wondered whether he might possibly catch a glimpse of the prisoner. As he was mulling this over, king Richard happened to look out through one of the arrow slits in the tower, and he recognised Blondel. The king began to think how he might make his presence known to Blondel, and then remembered one particular song that he and Blondel had composed together. Only the two of them knew the song.

Richard began to sing the first verse of the song, and, being an excellent singer, did so in a loud, clear voice. As soon as Blondel heard him, he was certain that the prisoner was indeed his king. He had never been as happy in his whole life. He left the garden and went to the room where he slept. Here he took up his fiddle, and to express his joy at having found his lord again, began playing a tune. Blondel stayed in the castle until Whitsun, during which time he succeeded in keeping his true purpose hidden from everyone else in the castle.

Blondel came one day to the castellan and said: 'My lord, I would very much like, with your permission, to go back to my homeland, for I have been away for a very long time.' 'Blondel, dear friend, my advice to you would be not to leave, but to stay with us here, in which case I'll see to it that you are well rewarded.' 'To tell you the truth, my lord,' Blondel replied, 'there is actually no question of my staying.' When the castellan realised that he could not possibly keep him from leaving, he gave him permission to go, and presented him with a horse and a new set of clothes.

So Blondel left the castle and journeyed all the way back to England. Once there, he told the king's friends and his barons that he had found Richard and explained to them where the king was. Everyone was overjoyed at the news, because king Richard was the most generous knight who ever wore spurs. They took the collective decision to send envoys to the duke of Austria with the aim of buying the king's freedom. Two of the most accomplished and wisest knights were selected for the task.

The knights made the journey all the way to Austria, and there they found the duke in one of his castles. They greeted him in the name of the barons of England, saying: 'My lord, we are here as envoys of the barons of England because we have heard that you are holding king Richard prisoner. What they ask and request of you is that you set a price for his ransom, and they are willing to pay whatever you want.' The duke replied that he would consult his counsellors and, having done so, he said: 'My dear lords, if you want to have your king back, you will have to pay a ransom of two hundred thousand marks in sterling silver. And it's no use haggling; you would simply be wasting your time.'

The envoys took their leave, declaring that they would report back to the barons in order to see what they decided. They returned to England and informed the barons of the duke's demands. There was no reason, they said, not to go ahead. They set about raising the ransom and had it taken to the duke. He handed king Richard over to them with the added assurance that he would never in future seek to ill-treat him.

This is how king Richard came to be ransomed. On his return to England, he was received with great pomp and ceremony. However he found his lands to be greatly impoverished. The same was true of the kingdom's churches, for they had even been obliged to give up their chalices when the ransom was raised, and for a long time mass was celebrated using chalices of tin or wood.

One night Richard was lying in bed unable to sleep when an exceedingly dark and vengeful thought occurred to him. He found himself remembering how his father king Henry had strangled himself with his horse's bridle on account of the resentment he felt against king Philippe for having attacked him with drawn sword at Gerberoy.

He thought back also to how he himself had been captured and ransomed by the duke of Austria at the request and instigation of king Philippe. He felt such anger and outrage that he swore to himself that he would never ever find peace of mind until he had got his revenge ... (§ 77-87)

... King Richard took his evening meal and went to bed. He was not, however, able to sleep as he kept thinking about how he had lost Gisors and Niort. So he resolved to go and lay siege to Gisors and, taking advantage of king Philippe's illness, capture it by force of arms. Richard happened to have the majority of his troops with him and a fleet of boats that was ready equipped. The next day he

ordered his men to take their arms and set out to sea. This they did all the more willingly seeing that Richard had hands that leaked like sieves, so generous was he.

They set sail for Dieppe, one of Richard's towns, where they landed, then pressed on to Rouen, one of Richard's favourite places, where they acquired all the provisions they needed. The king then led his troops to a castle that belonged to king Philippe called Loches [*sic*]. It was well situated, well fortified and well defended with troops, and it posed a considerable threat to Richard. He went, therefore, and laid siege to it, swearing that he would not leave until he had taken it by main force. They attacked it day and night but encountered fierce resistance from the defenders who were both numerous and well armed.

One particular day Richard was standing gazing at the castle from behind the shelter of his shield. He was spotted by a crossbowman who was in a small corner tower that jutted out beyond the other towers. The archer slipped a bolt into his bow and shot Richard directly in the unprotected part of his upper shoulder on the right-hand side. The wound was a very serious one, and as soon as Richard felt it, he withdrew into his tent. Physicians were called and they managed to extract the whole of the bolt from his shoulder. After examining the wound, they said that, providing he took proper care, it should not cause him any trouble. The king, however, a very determined sort of man, completely ignored the wound and rejected the physicians' advice. He ate and drank as much as he wanted to, and then went off to bed taking a woman with him. His wound became infected and fever set in. Soon the infection had spread all over his arm and the whole side of his body.

When the king realised that the infection was spreading all over, he knew that he was going to die. He began to lament and bemoan his lot: 'Ah, Richard,' he cried, 'so you are going to die, are you? Ah, death, how foolhardy you were when you dared attack king Richard, the most gifted of knights, the most courtly, and the most generous person in the whole world! Ah, chivalry, how you fall into decline! Ladies and knights, how you are to be pitied, and what is to become of you? Ah, God, who will now preserve chivalry, generosity and courtliness?'

Such was the king's plaint. Realising that death was near, Richard gave orders for his heart to be buried in his beloved Rouen, and for his body to be taken to London for burial in Westminster abbey. Whereupon, giving up the ghost, he passed on. His men gave vent to the bitterest grief that men anywhere had ever known. From there the army returned to Rouen where king Richard's heart was buried. His body was taken to London to be met with the greatest display of grief ever made for anyone. With great ceremony Richard was buried in the cathedral. A beautiful tomb was erected for him and richly decorated, as befits a king ... (§ 129-133)

... Let us now turn to king John, the brother of king Richard of England, who inherited the kingdom after Richard's death. He was consecrated king only to become the worst monarch ever to have existed, surpassing even king Herod who had small children beheaded. This John was a bad knight, a pervert and a traitor, as I will now tell you.

He had a nephew called Arthur, the son of his uncle who was count of Brittany. There being no further heirs, it was Arthur who quite legitimately inherited the county of Brittany. One day, the cruel and perfidious king John had a boat fitted out to take him to visit one of his castles. Arthur was



on board the boat with him when he set out to sea accompanied by John's close household knights. Once he reached the open sea, John simply pitched his nephew overboard to join the mackerel. He did so in order that he could take possession of his land and of the whole county of Brittany which he considered to be his by right. After committing this crime, the king made his way back to London ... (§ 244-245)

... John, that no-good king of England, was in the habit of bringing disgrace on his barons, of forcibly sleeping with their wives and daughters, and of taking their land from them. What he did rightly incurred the hatred of the whole world and of God. This explains why the barons of England came to the unanimous decision to send word to king Philippe Auguste declaring that they were willing to do homage to him for the kingdom of England. They would hand over their children to him as sureties and aid him in conquering their kingdom. They selected two of their number, the wisest and the most valiant, and sent them off to king Philippe to relay to him what the barons of England were asking for.

King Philippe replied that he would take advice, which he did. He then declared that he had enough land already, and this proposal was something he did not wish to get involved in. When prince Louis saw that his father wished to have nothing to do with the barons' offer, he said to him: 'Sire, if you were to so wish, I would be willing to undertake this task.' 'By the lance of St James,' replied the king, 'do as you please. Personally I don't think you will be successful because the English are perfidious and treacherous and will never keep their word.' 'Sire,' said prince Louis, 'may God do with this enterprise what he will!'

To the two messengers he said: 'My fair lords, if you wish, I will undertake this operation and, with God's help and yours, bring it to a successful conclusion.' 'Well then,' replied the messengers, 'we are only too happy to accept.' Both sides made firm commitments there and then, and the messengers handed Louis the sealed letters they had brought with them from all the English barons. They solemnly swore that, within a month after their return to England, they would send over their children as sureties.

They left, crossed the Channel and arrived back in London. They called a meeting of the barons and told them what they had done, and they were congratulated on their good work. The English barons' children were sent over to France as sureties, as had been agreed. Prince Louis saw to it that they were well looked after and treated with respect. He fitted out a number of large boats, and made the necessary preparations for provisioning an army before then enlisting a huge number of troops who volunteered either out of friendship for him, or out of self-interest or for family reasons. He was joined by the counts of Le Perche, Montfort, Chartres and Montbéliard, by sir Enguerrand de Couci and by many other great lords whose names I omit.

They set sail one Monday morning and by evening had landed in Dover. So well organised were they that they arrived unseen and were able to set up their tents and pavilions on the shore. The men defending the castle were astonished to see this, and wondered what sort of people they could be. They ran to arm themselves and took up positions on the battlements. The walls were very well fortified, and the men stood ready to defend the castle with their own lives. The following day prince

Louis began his attack on the stronghold using his war engines. They did not succeed, however, in causing the slightest damage, and their ten-day stay there was to no avail.

Seeing how things were turning out, prince Louis and his advisers took the decision to abandon the siege of Dover and to go instead to lay siege to London. He had the tents taken down and his baggage packed, then led his army off to London. The French attacked the city from three sides. Those defending strenuously set about strengthening the fortifications and securing the city gates and walls. They hurriedly sent messengers to king John their lord to ask for his help. His reply was that he was powerless as all his barons had deserted him: they had all crossed over into Louis' camp.

On hearing this news, the Londoners immediately surrendered the city. The French army took possession of it and installed themselves wherever they wished. Prince Louis issued a proclamation forbidding any wrong-doing by his men on pain of death by hanging. The French army spent eight days in London, and on the ninth day the troops set out for Lincoln. The vanguard was under the control of the count of Le Perche, and he led his troops right up to the city gates. The defenders rushed out and fell on them. Many an arrow was fired that day, many a spear thrown, many a horse killed, many a knight unsaddled, many a foot soldier wounded or killed. The count of Le Perche was killed by a looter who lifted up the skirt of his chainmail and stabbed him to death. The loss of their commander caused the rear-guard to collapse. When Louis heard the news, he felt it was the greatest misfortune he had ever experienced in his life, for the count was a close friend of his and a family member.

The siege of Lincoln ended with the city being captured on the third day. Louis installed a garrison of first-class soldiers there. He spent the next two and a half years travelling up and down the country, during which time he captured seven fortified cities and a large number of smaller towns and villages. King John meanwhile sent word to Rome, and his messengers set out carrying an enormous quantity of valuables. He informed the pope that he was ready to send him, in perpetuity, a tribute of four sterling silver pennies per household. All he was asking was for the pope, for the sake of God, to adjudicate regarding the situation in which he found himself.

When the pope saw the enormous riches that John had sent, and calculated the huge sum of one thousand sterling silver marks that they were to receive every year in perpetuity, he was absolutely delighted, as were all the members of his curia. Accordingly the pope sent word to prince Louis requiring him to return home to France, and if he refused, he and all his followers would be excommunicated ... (§ 292-300)

... When king John realised that he was in danger of entirely losing his kingdom, he summoned his barons and begged them to take pity on him. He declared himself ready to implement all the reforms they demanded, and to hand control of the kingdom over to them together with all of his strongholds. But let them at the very least have mercy on him! When the barons saw the king humbling himself in this way, they felt sorry for him. As the old saying goes, a sincere heart cannot lie, and it is true also that one's legitimate lord is always to be preferred to a foreigner. They accepted the oath John made to behave better in future when it came to agreeing to their demands, and accepted also his undertaking to make the whole of his kingdom over to them. And this is how the barons came into possession of the king's castles.

The barons of England then came before prince Louis and said: 'We are here, my lord, to tell you that we can no longer tolerate the sorry plight of our king now that he has declared himself willing to redress the wrongs he has committed against us. In these circumstances you should know for certain that we will no longer be providing you with aid, but will become, from now on, your enemies.' Louis was absolutely furious when he heard this and shouted: 'What, my fair lords? So are you betraying me now?' Came the reply: 'It is better for us to break our promise than to let our legitimate lord suffer exile and ruin. In God's name, do the wise thing and go back home, since there is nothing to be gained by your remaining in this country.' (§ 303-304)

## ***2 Croniques de London***

This is a little known Anglo-Norman prose chronicle (Dean # 71) covering the years 1259 to 1343, and is preserved in BL MS Cotton Cleopatra A.VI, ff. 54-106. It was published by G.J. Aungier for the Camden Society in 1846, and first translated by H.T. Riley in 1863. The extract I have translated, an interpolated anecdote presumably taken from popular literature, appears in Aungier's text under the year 1263, allowing us to suppose a confusion, at some stage in the compilation, between Henry II and Henry III and their respective Eleanors. The author's injecting episodes that are clearly fictional into otherwise sober historical narrative had been a routine literary technique since Gaimar in the 1130s. Here the story is told straightforwardly with no particular literary skill beyond the competent. The chronicle does not figure in the Arlima bibliography.

The queen was disgracefully heckled and insulted at London Bridge, on her way from the Tower to Westminster, for having caused the death of a noble young lady, the most beautiful known to man, who was accused of being the king's mistress. This is why the queen had her seized and stripped naked, and then made her sit between two huge fires in a securely locked room. The fair young lady was extremely frightened, thinking that she was about to be burnt alive, and began to sob in great distress. Meanwhile the queen had a bath prepared and forced the fair maiden to sit down in it. Immediately she ordered an evil old crone to pummel her in both arms with a sharp implement. When the blood began to flow, a second woman, some godless witch or other, came up carrying a shovel with two hideous toads on it. These she placed on each of the noble maiden's breasts, and the creatures at once grasped her nipples in their mouths and began sucking. Two other old hags kept her arms stretched out to prevent the fair young lady from sinking down into the water until all the blood had drained out of her body. The filthy toads in the meanwhile were still sucking at the beautiful maiden's breasts, and all the time the queen was laughing and jeering at her, in raptures at having found this way of getting her revenge on Rosamond. When the maiden was well and truly dead, the queen had her body taken and buried in some foul-smelling ditch with the toads still attached to her breasts.

When news reached the king of how the queen had treated the beautiful young girl he so deeply loved and cherished, he was absolutely distraught and gave way to grief: 'Alas, unhappy man that I am, what am I to do without my beautiful Rosamond? No one was ever found to equal her in beauty, kindness and courtliness.' After a long period of grieving, the king wanted to know what had happened to fair Rosamond's body. He had one of the evil witches captured and tortured to force her to tell him the whole truth about what they had done to the noble maiden. He swore by almighty God that if she lied in the smallest detail, she would suffer the most degrading punishment that anyone could ever devise. She duly divulged everything, and told the king the whole truth. She explained exactly what the queen had done with the noble maiden's fair body, and precisely where it was to be found. The queen, meanwhile, had the fair maiden's body retrieved and gave orders for it to be taken to a convent called Godstow, two leagues from Oxford. There it was to be buried in order to cover up the queen's evil deeds, so as to efface any trace of her sordid and shameful behaviour, and thus exonerate her from responsibility for the noble maiden's death. (ed. cit. p. 3-4)

### **3 Geffrei Gaimar: *Estoire des Engleis***

Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire* (Dean # 1) is the oldest surviving example of historiography in the French vernacular. It was written in Lincolnshire ca. 1136-37 and is, in large part, an Anglo-Norman verse adaptation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Chronologically it covers the period from the arrival of the Saxons in 495 until the death of William Rufus in 1100. It stands as an early example of informative literature written in a secular perspective for a predominantly baronial audience. It also ranks among the earliest extant witnesses of the rise of courtly literature in French, and of female literary patronage. The translations here are taken from my edition (Short 2009), which is based on a manuscript of ca. 1307, BL Royal 13. A. xxi, ff. 113-150. Bibliography in Arlima.

When the people in Ely learnt [of the Conqueror's arrival in 1072], they placed themselves in the king's mercy. Everyone emerged to beg for mercy except the valiant Hereward, who escaped with a handful of his followers, together with Geri, one of his kinsmen. There were five others with them.

A man whose task it was to bring provisions of fish to those keeping guard along the fens performed a service worthy of a true courtly nobleman: he took [Hereward and his men] aboard his small boat, covered them over with rushes and reeds, and began to row in the direction of the guards. As evening was closing in to night, his boat drew near to the soldiers' camp. In one of the tents were the French, under the command of a sheriff by the name of Guy, who immediately recognised the fisherman. Since they all knew that he was due to arrive, none of them took any notice when they saw the fisherman come rowing up. It was dark, and they had already sat down to their meal.

Out of the boat, leopard-like, slips the daring Hereward. His companions come ashore after him, and they set their sights on the tent at the edge of a wood. The fisherman, who had previously served under Hereward, comes along with them. What more should I say? The knights are taken by surprise as they sit eating. Their assailants break into the tent brandishing their axes; bumpkins they are certainly not when it comes to dealing fine blows: they killed twenty-six Normans, and there were twelve [of William's] Englishmen killed as well. Great was the commotion throughout the camp. To a man they all took to their heels, leaving behind their ready saddled horses. These the outlaws were able to mount safely and unhurriedly, and they did so without any interference. Being in the habit of stealing in this way, each one selected a first-class animal for himself.

They made off into the nearby woods, and, knowing the country well and having many allies there, they had no difficulty in finding their way. They came to a town where they met up with ten of their closest associates, and these allied themselves with Hereward. Where once there had been eight of them, they are now ten more – in fact, eighteen companions in all. Before they had ridden beyond Huntingdon, they had a hundred fully armed men who recognised Hereward, in his personal capacity, as their liege lord; they owed him fealty and were his men. Before the sun rose on the next day, seven hundred men had rallied to his cause and followed him into the Forest of Bourne.

By now theirs was a huge body of men. One fortified town in particular they attacked – for their sins – and this was Peterborough. The wall was breached in less than no time, and once inside they seized a vast amount of gold, silver, and miniver-lined cloaks. There was a great deal of other booty too, though they did place the property of the monks under special protection. From there they make their way to

Stamford. The spoils they seize here are legitimate, for its citizens had connived in Hereward being sent into exile: unfairly and without any justification they had been instrumental in his incurring the king's displeasure. In seeking vengeance against the inhabitants of Peterborough and Stamford, Hereward was, therefore, not acting in the least unlawfully.

What more should I say? For several years Hereward held out against the Normans. He and his companion Winter, and the noble lord Geri, Ælfric Grusgan, Saiswald and Azier, these and his other fighters waged war against the French in this way: if one of them standing alone attacked three of the enemy, these three would not get away without taking a beating. The memory of this still persists today in the Forest of Bourne. ... (5479-5580)

... Gaimar now declares that, provided he has a patron, he will continue his narrative and deal with king Henry [I], for if he is willing to talk about the king even briefly and write an adaptation of even part of his life, he will be able to recount thousands of things that David never had copied down, nor did the queen from Louvain ever hold in her hand any book recording this sort of material. She did, however, have a large book made [of David's work], the first verse of which she had illuminated with musical notation. David is a good narrative poet, and he composed good verse and constructed his song skilfully. Lady Constance owns a written copy of it, which she often reads in her chamber; and for the copying of it she paid a mark of silver, duly assayed and weighed. The material of which this book was composed has achieved some circulation and reached several places. But as for the festivities that the king held, – and still today Henry, that [true] Christian of blessed memory, ranks as the best king that ever was – as for the drinking and boasting bouts, the courting and the love affairs over which he presided, David's book has hardly anything to say.

Gaimar now declares that he is not after all going to go into any of this here, though if he were willing to work hard at it, he could compose a verse account of the finest exploits [of Henry's court], namely, the love affairs and the courting, the drinking and the hunting, the festivities and the pomp and ceremony, the acts of generosity and the displays of wealth, the entourage of noble and valiant knights that the king maintained, and the generous presents that he distributed. This is indeed the sort of material that should be celebrated in poetry, with nothing omitted and nothing passed over.

I call on David, then, to continue his narrative if he so wishes, and not leave it as it is, for were he willing to compose a sequel, he could greatly improve his book. And if he is unwilling to turn his mind to this, I will go and fetch him myself and have him arrested; he will never again get out of my custody until he has completed the song. We are now reconciled and can rejoice. Gaimar's narrative goes all the way from Troy as far as here; he began it at the point where Jason left in pursuit of the Golden Fleece, and has now, at this precise moment, brought it to a close. God's blessing on us all! Amen. (6483-6532)

## 4 Brut Continuation

Wace tells us that he completed his *Roman de Brut* in 1155, but in one of the thirty or so copies and fragments of it that survive today, an anonymous Anglo-Norman poet has continued the historical narrative down to the year 1241. The manuscript in question is BL Cotton Vitellius A.X., dating from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in which the poem's 3220 octosyllables fill ff. 115v – 137v. A 426-verse fragment of the same text, which may well have originated from Tewkesbury, is to be found on ff. 63r-69r of MS BL Cotton Cleopatra A.XII, also from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. The extract is interesting, has clear literary merit, and is skilfully structured. I translate vv. 2327-2594 of the recent re-edition of the text by Maud Becker (2019), with minor modifications. Dean # 24.

Such was the territory that he had conquered that William the Conqueror was crowned king, at which point his thoughts turned to the future, to what the world would be like once his own life was over, and to what the future held in store for his three sons. He was much preoccupied with discovering what sort of death they were each to have. He convened a meeting of the most knowledgeable clerics, the most learned teachers, and the wisest men of those he ruled over both at home and abroad. His intention was to discover from them what he most wanted to know, namely what future his sons were destined to have. The king addressed all the members of the assembly: 'My lords,' he said, 'I should like very much to thank each of you present for coming. At this particular moment I am in need of your wisdom and experience. There is one matter that is very much on my mind, and which I cannot stop thinking about: the sort of death that my three fine sons will have. Here is what I am asking and requesting you to do: be so kind as to debate among yourselves what future lies in store for each of my sons and how each one will die. Once you have come to your conclusion, do not attempt to hide the truth from me!' Thereupon the king took his leave, and the wise men began their deliberations. (2360)

They debated earnestly and with great seriousness, discussing the young men's qualities, their demeanour, their way of life, their appearance as well as their character. They made little progress, however, for the speeches they made and the opinions they expressed were all very different from each other. They were quite incapable of reaching any sort of unanimity. As they continued to debate without making any headway, up jumped an elderly scholar, a highly educated and intelligent man, and took the floor and began to speak in measured tones: 'My lords, why go on dithering? Why spend day after day arguing? Have someone summon the youngsters to come and address us here one after the other!' The young men were immediately fetched, just as the master had instructed. (2382)

The first to appear before them was Robert Curthose, the eldest of the three. On seeing him, the master said: 'Welcome, fair prince! Do not be alarmed! In what follows, just give a truthful account of yourself for our benefit! Let us suppose that almighty God had created you as a winged bird, which of all those capable of flying would you choose to be?' Robert, a well brought up young man who expressed himself with considerable self-confidence, replied: 'My lord, if I were given the choice, I would prefer to be a hawk. The reason I would be a hawk is this: it is a noble bird and the best looking of all winged creatures. When required to, it is a powerful flyer and performs particularly well when it comes to taking its prey. It enjoys a high reputation among all and sundry, and is cherished and respected by the cream of the nobility. I might add that, as far as my own character is concerned, I

would wish to be a person of courtly refinement and elegance at the same time as a valiant and accomplished knight, the object of universal respect, feared and loved by everyone.’ Whereupon Robert took his leave and left the chamber. (2412)

The second brother, known under the name of William Rufus, then made his entry. Everyone rose to their feet when he appeared, and he greeted the assembly with appropriate courtesy. The same wise master addressed William as follows: ‘Fair prince, tell me the truth and hold nothing back from me! Let us suppose that God, whose power is limitless and whose will governs all manner of things, had created you as a bird, which one would you be if you were given the choice? William reflected for a moment before giving a judicious answer: ‘My lord, let me say that I would prefer, were I given the choice, to be an eagle, and here is the reason why: The eagle is a strong and powerful bird, and is greatly feared when it takes to the sky. It is the king of all other birds, and acts with discrimination when it comes to taking its prey. I might add that, as far as my own character is concerned, my wish would be to be overlord and king, to be in a position of power over everyone else, and to acquire extensive possessions and to be extravagantly generous.’ With that William Rufus, having nothing more to add, took his leave. (2440)

The third brother, whose name was Henry, then entered the chamber. Being an educated and literate person, he was received with great respect. The senior master then said: ‘Fair prince, listen here! On no account must you tell us anything other than the truth. Let us suppose that God, creator of all the world, both heaven and earth, as the Scripture tells us, and who holds in his power everything that exists, suppose that he had created you as a bird. Which of all the birds you have ever seen would you have been if you had been given the choice?’ Despite his youth and despite his being the youngest of the three, Henry gave proof of great wisdom when he replied: ‘ My lord, I will truthfully and sincerely tell you what my thoughts are: If God had intended me to be a bird, and if such was his will, and if I had been able myself to choose which bird I would be, of all those which fly the skies I would prefer to be a starling. And I will give my reasons for this in the presence of all of you assembled here: As you all know, the starling is a good-natured and unassuming bird. It flies in large flocks all over the countryside with no other aim than to feed itself, and with no intention of harming anyone. It is not predatory by nature and has no interest in molesting any of its fellow birds. And even if it is brought up in captivity, it will remain harmless; indeed its gift for mimicry and its singing make it a continual source of entertainment. I might add that, as far as my own character is concerned, I would wish to be a good-natured and unpretentious person, criss-crossing the country with a substantial retinue to ensure that my properties have plentiful supplies. I would not seek to harm anyone or to increase my possessions by stealing what belongs to others. Within my own household I would have friendly relations with my officers, live in harmony and peace, and lead a life of serenity.’ With these words Henry rose and took his leave. (2490)

Once the young princes had given their answers and departed, the senior advisors came together to exchange views on the three brothers. The first to speak was the person responsible for summoning them and for asking the questions, and he made the following masterly statement: ‘My lords,’ he said, ‘we have deliberated at length and spent much time debating the merits of these young princes. All three have appeared before us and have given us an account of their preferences. We have heard them name three different birds when asked which they thought they most resembled. On the reply we decide to give the king depends how much increased credit we will have in his eyes (2506)



The first person we have to consider is Robert Curthose, the one who wished to be born a hawk. The hawk is indeed a brave and highly esteemed bird, much valued as a strong flyer. It has, however, a very serious drawback in that it is not free to fly as it wishes, its feet being firmly attached as it lives the whole of its life in captivity. This applies equally well to Robert in my opinion: he will be a most valiant and exemplary knight who will come to be renowned, enjoy a high reputation and earn universal respect. But once his many achievements are behind him, he will be forcibly taken into custody and led away. In the end, to cut a long story short, Robert will die in prison. (2522)

Let us now turn to William Rufus whose wish was to be an eagle. The eagle is indeed a strong and powerful bird, but it is at the same time an evil-minded and malevolent creature. It is not renowned for its valour, and is neither esteemed nor cherished. It is destined to die a violent death, caught in a snare or shot with an arrow. We find that the same applies to Rufus: he will be a great lord and king, a man of considerable power and great wealth. But he will also be exceedingly vicious and a man of great violence, widely feared for his acts of cruelty, hated by many and enjoying a poor reputation. He will be a licentious individual who will behave immorally, and I can tell you for certain that he will meet with a violent death. (2538)

We must now consider Henry, the youngest brother who likened himself to a starling. The starling is a good-natured and unassuming bird which flies round in large flocks. Its only wish is to live in peace, and to avoid doing harm while waiting to end its days with serenity. What we can definitely say is that we have found qualities in Henry that he shares with the starling. He will be a wise king of excellent character, and as far as it lies within his power, he will not wage war. He will have extensive lands and appropriate revenue and will travel across the country with a substantial retinue. Despite encountering frequent and serious setbacks, he will finally end his days in peace. (2552)

What I have said to you here about the young princes is what God has inspired me to think. If I have made errors in the speech you have just heard, I would ask you to correct me.' When the master had finished speaking, everyone present cried out: 'What you have to say is entirely appropriate, and it is not possible for anyone to correct it. We all of us approve your summing up. Let us declare the meeting closed and go to the king and tell him, in the name of all of us, what you have just told us!' (2564)

They all came before the king and were received with great ceremony. The person best qualified to make the formal speech presenting the assembly's conclusions made a detailed and orderly report to the king. He explained how the eldest brother Robert Curthose would become an accomplished and highly esteemed knight, but how he would, in short, finally die in prison. And this is indeed what happened, for good duke Robert was in fact to die in prison in Cardiff. As far as the second son, William Rufus, was concerned, he would be a most powerful king, but would turn into a licentious individual whose behaviour would be outrageous and who would finally die as the result of an accident. And this did indeed happen: for his sins he was killed by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest. The youngest of the sons, Henry, was destined to be more fortunate, becoming a prince of nobility and a king, and ending his life in peace. The Conqueror felt distressed on hearing about his first two sons but was happy for Henry, and gave thanks to God. To show his respect for the masters he gave them all expensive gifts, and once they had thanked him, they immediately took their leave. (2594)

## **5 Prose Brut**

Surviving in several versions in over one hundred manuscripts (more than 200 if one includes its Middle English and Latin versions), the Anglo-Norman *Brut* was by far the most popular prose chronicle of the day. It is a revealing illustration of the historical culture of the English aristocracy and gentry from the final third of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. A compilation from a wide variety of different sources, it traces the history of the kings of Britain from its supposed Trojan origins down to Edward III. I translate here from MS BL Harley 200, ff. 6r-79r, copied in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, in the edition published by Heather Pagan (2011). Dean # 45. Bibliography in Arlima.

King William of England had been staying in Normandy for a long time without carrying out a single act of aggression against king Philippe [I] of France. One day the king of France made a joke at the Conqueror's expense. 'The king of England,' he said, 'has been lying in bed in confinement for a long time now. He's been resting just like women do when they are about to give birth.' This reached the ears of the king of England who at that time was staying at Rouen. This sarcastic joke made him extremely angry and very ill disposed towards the French king. He swore by God and all his saints that, once he had got up from his childbed and go to church, he would light a thousand candles for the king of France.

William proceeded immediately to raise a large army of Normans and Englishmen and, at the start of August [1087], made an incursion into the territory of the king of France. He set fire to towns over a wide area, plundered, pillaged and caused a great deal of damage. He finished by setting the city of Mantes alight. He instructed his troops to add fuel to the fire by using Greek fire and wooden beams and any other combustible material. William himself joined in energetically, but it was excessively hot, not only because of the fire that was raging, but also because of the weather which was boiling hot. William, as a result, grew very short of breath and felt as if he was suffocating. He fell ill. He put all his affairs in order by bequeathing the whole of Normandy to his son Robert Curthose, all England to his second son William Rufus. To his third son, Henry Beauclerc, he gave all his moveable property. He donated his personal valuables to churches and to the poor. He gave instructions that all those in prison be released and were to be free to go wherever they wished. When he had done all this, and when he had received the last sacraments from Holy Church, he died. His reign had lasted twenty-two years, and he was laid to rest in Normandy at Caen. (4129-4158)

## **6 Benoît de Sainte-Maure: Histoire des ducs de Normandie**

Better known as the author of the romance *Le Roman de Troie*, Benoît, a monk from Touraine, also wrote an unusually long verse history of the dukes of Normandy, which was completed under royal patronage. It covers much the same ground as Wace's *Rou*, which it supplanted, following a change in Henry II's literary taste, sometime in the 1170s. Benoît's is a very conformist and propagandistic history which carefully adheres to its Latin sources. While his narrative lacks the zest characteristic of Wace, Benoît can deploy sophisticated poetic language on those occasions when he strays from the orthodoxy that is his hallmark. I translate from the text of Carin Fahlin (1951-54), which is based on the late 12<sup>th</sup>-century MS Tours Bibliothèque municipale 903. Dean # 2.2, and Arlima for bibliography.

News quickly spread, and it was soon known, across a large number of countries, that king William had died [in November 1087]. Our source book recounts that even in Calabria and in Rome several people knew –by what means I cannot say –the exact day, hour and minute that he died, as they later themselves verified.

Ah! Worldly glory and splendour, all material riches, imperial power, you deserve nothing but our contempt, since all your raising up only results in things falling down again and reverting to nothingness, for even those who in life are the finest of people, the most inspiring, the cleverest and the most innovative, return to ashes and dust in more or less no time at all. Of all the land an individual owned and of all that he acquired in his lifetime, only a few feet remain for him –you know which they are: those he is invested with to lie there alone on his back and to be devoured by worms and lizards. Happiness in this world is nothing: like the bubbles of a babbling fountain, it is over and gone in a trice. Everything that is in nature become exhausted, everything passes away and comes to naught.

Just listen to what transpired in this particular case! Someone who had been so powerful, noble, rich, had carried out so many conquests, and had been served by hundreds, sometimes thousands, of knights, could not even muster ten people to accompany his body for burial. But the archbishop, clergy and monks did come, with great emotion and in solemn procession, to perform the commendation prayers. William's body was carried to Caen in conformity with his instructions. He had wished to be laid to rest in the abbey he had founded and had built. Everyone, his relatives and well-wishers, his closest personal attendants, were now scattered all over the place, with the result that there was no one to take care of the body. Accordingly –the Latin history informs me –a certain knight, one Herluin, a native of the surrounding area, when he saw William abandoned in this way, was overcome with pity and grief, and together with his sons and his friends, nobly undertook the task. With his own money he paid for the wherewithal to transport and deliver the body and do everything else that was necessary. Before evening fell, the body had been placed on a boat on the Seine, and with a very modest procession they made their way downstream towards the sea under a fine, bright sky. When they reached their destination with the body, the monks disembarked first, with the abbot, duly robed, at their head. Such a great outpouring of grief as greeted him when William was taken into the town will never again be seen. But just hear what the Devil, that enemy of everything good, contrived to do! When the common people had gone up to the body and shed their floods of tears, a sudden fire swept through the town. No one could possibly stay with the body then, except the monks.

The event caused great commotion and considerable disturbance. The body was then carried to the abbey, by which time more than half the town had burned down before the fire could be put out.

The Latin history and the life record how, before the actual burial, time was left for the bishops, abbots and prominent members of the nobility to arrive from all over Normandy. William's son Henry arrived, pale and ashen-faced with grief. Only twelve abbots and six bishops –seven if you count the archbishop –were present at the burial. It was an extremely solemn and splendid ceremony with full honours. The ground in which the king was buried was purchased on that very same day. A local by the name of Ascelin had been repeatedly claiming ownership of the plot, maintaining that the ground on which the abbey was built was part of his inheritance. Before today he had never received any payment for it, but on this occasion his request was finally granted, and this gave him great satisfaction. The ceremony came to an end, and many a tear was shed before the time came for people to leave.

I can state in all truthfulness that I have translated and recounted this history exactly as I found it written down. I have added nothing false or untruthful. Since the fruits of my labour have cost me a great deal, I pray to our Lord God that the work be pleasing to my lord Henry II. This is what I seek and desire more than anything else, for his approval would be greatly to my advantage. ... I have been translating the history of the dukes of Normandy –a very voluminous history in which I have found a great deal of material to treat, much learning and many different subjects –and have now come right up to Henry I who is to be the eighth duke and one of the most important. It would not be right for me to stop at this point and give up writing. My task is to keep going straight ahead in an orderly and uninterrupted fashion until I come to good king Henry II, the place on which my heart is set. May God be willing to grant me the opportunity of recounting his illustrious deeds! I am sorry that it is taking me so long, but in the same way as artists apply plaster and colour to the wall on which they are painting, so that the brush strokes are better-formed, more delicate and richly coloured, so I have taken a long time to prepare the plaster for my painting without being lackadaisical or allowing myself to be distracted. The reason I am so assiduous, determined and persistent is so that the work can be brought to completion this side of Judgement Day. (41920-42071)

## **7 Wace: Roman de Rou**

A Norman by birth, Wace is sometimes portrayed as a resident vernacular historiographer at the court of Henry and Eleanor. His *Roman de Brut*, completed in 1155, and his *Roman de Rou* stand as major achievements of 12<sup>th</sup>-century narrative poetry in French. A lively and influential stylist, he had a particularly scholarly attitude to the gathering and presentation of his historical material, but can also be outspoken. He takes care to enliven his narrative by introducing anecdotes and making skilful use of what is now recognised as romance discourse. Wace wrote his *Rou* (Dean # 2.1), a history of the dukes of Normandy down to 1106, between 1160 and 1174. I translate from the text published by Anthony Holden (1970-73), who for Part III of the poem selected as his base the Anglo-Norman MS BL Royal 4. C. xi, ff. 249-278, copied in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. A literal translation facing Holden's text was published by Glyn Burgess in 2002, with a second edition reproducing the translation alone in 2004. Bibliography in Blacker (2008) and Arlima.

People only know who Alexander and Cesar were by what is said about them today, and this in turn is derived from what can be found written in books. This is the only means of keeping their names alive. They would have been forgotten had they not been written about. All objects fall into decline, everything is diminished, everything dies, everything comes to an end. Towers collapse, walls fall, roses wilt, horses stumble, clothes wear out, iron rusts, wood rots, people die, everything man-made perishes. I fully recognise and am well aware that all humans will die, clerics as well as lay people, and that after they die, their fame lives on only if it is committed to writing in a book by a cleric. Otherwise it cannot survive.

People who composed tales of high deeds and wrote historical narratives used to be held in very high esteem, much valued and much loved. They would frequently receive handsome gifts from members of the nobility, both lords and ladies, for ensuring that their names went down in written history so that they would be remembered for ever after. These days, however, I can spend a great deal of time thinking, writing and adapting books, composing narratives in the vernacular and producing satirical verse, and it will be a long time before I find anyone with sufficiently good taste to present me with enough money to hire a scribe for a single month. I will find no one, either, to do me any greater favour than telling me: 'Master Wace, you compose extremely good stories. You should keep on writing, you are such a skilful poet and so eloquent.' I restrain myself and keep mum. This is as much as I will get from the majority of people. My audience are the rich and powerful who have money and regular income. These are the people books are made for, for whom good stories are composed and skilfully written.

What people used to refer to as nobility of character is a thing of the past, and generosity has died out with it. I cannot find anyone who still observes its tenets, no matter where I travel, near or far. I find hardly anyone to be my benefactor, the exception being king Henry the Second. It was he who had a prebend at Bayeux assigned to me, and may God reward him for it! He made me many other gifts as well, and again may God acknowledge the kindness of all of these. Henry II was the grandson of the first Henry and was father of the third, the Young King. I personally saw and knew all three of these king Henrys as a clerical assistant / record clerk, which I was at the time. All three of

them were kings of the English, and all three were both kings and dukes –kings of England the Plentiful and dukes of Normandy ... (125 -184)

... Lo and behold, war broke out [in 1105], and there would be no end to it until duke [Robert Curthose] was taken prisoner and king [Henry I] had secured total victory. The hostility between the two brothers had been stoked by certain ill-intentioned individuals, rumour-mongers, cajolers and sycophants –may all of them get their come-uppance! There had been much coming and going, much backbiting, and no heed given to the harm that war would cause, just as long as everyone could do as they pleased. Henry relied on money, of which he had bucketfuls. He crossed over into Normandy, and because he could afford to do so, took a large number of fighting men with him. He was received by the lords of the Cotentin who were very pleased to see him. He brought with him waggon loads of money in barrels. This he distributed to those barons and castellans who had towers and houses with fortifications, and to marcher lords and experienced warriors he was so generous and made so many promises that they forsook duke Robert and fought the war on the king's side. Even those who were the duke's vassals and owed him fealty abandoned their rightful lord in favour of the king. You could see panic seizing the country, and fear was widespread. The fighting was fierce enough to cause general unease, and people emptied their houses and took all their belongings to places of sanctuary / cemeteries for fear of plunderers and criminals. The king, with so much cash at his disposal, was able to call on his supporters everywhere, and they readily came to join him from Le Mans, Anjou and Brittany at the prospect of making money. In fact the king was able to enlist as many men as came forward, and no one who stayed on after his stint ended went short of food rations.

Duke Robert, on the other hand, being such a spendthrift, had hardly any money at all. His income soon dried up completely, and he spent all the dues he was owed by his tenants. This sort of expenditure in addition to what he gave away made it impossible for his duchy to thrive. He spent on having his castles rebuilt, on repairing and strengthening their walls, on constructing defensive parapets and battlements, and having trenches dug in front of castles. In Caen he built a ditch, traces of which can still be made out today, from the rue d'Hiémois to the Milet Gate; a stretch of the Orne where the river is tidal flows along it. When duke Robert hired mercenaries, he paid them well whenever he was able. When he could not pay them, he did not dare displease them for fear of them going over to Henry and fighting on the king's side. So he would call on the townspeople and introduce a system of taxation to pay the mercenaries' wages, some were taxed to the tune of twenty pounds, others thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, or even a hundred. The burgesses were reluctant to perform this service, and many of them hated him as a result. They re-directed their wealth and property and transferred it to the abbeys, and they themselves took refuge there rather than stay in the towns to be taxed by the duke, thereby in many cases breaking their oath of loyalty to him. Whenever Robert discovered this was happening, he would always say: 'Let's just forget it! We can't cross swords with everyone. Let them go; others will come! We can't keep everyone on our side.'

Robert was not a very skilful duke. On the contrary he was extremely negligent, and he had been widely considered negligent since his return from the Holy Land. Negligence can be confused with weakness, and this is what many people reproached him with. But, however insistent his critics were, he was not capable of mending his ways. When duke Robert had nothing to give others, whether

he was not in a position to, or simply did not want to, he got out of difficulty by making promises. And he promised much more than he ever gave. (10839-10934)

## **8 History of William Marshal**

Regent during the minority of Henry III, William Marshal earl of Pembroke was a political as well as chivalric celebrity, and as such was more likely to have been celebrated in Latin prose than in vernacular verse. Yet, after his death in 1219, his son commissioned what one is tempted today to describe as a biography, albeit in poetry, and this was completed in 1226. A patchwork of often fictionalised and heroicised reminiscences written up by an entirely competent poet, it can also be considered a historical document in that certain of its written sources contain useful and authentic material. It is preserved in a single MS, New York Pierpont Morgan Library M 888, dating from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and my new translation follows the ANTS edition, translation and commentary by Holden, Gregory and Crouch (2002-6). Dean # 57. Arlima for bibliography.

When [in 1141] the empress [Matilda] heard it reported that king [Stephen] was coming with great menace and with such a large army to defeat her, either by killing or taking her prisoner, and when she was told in essence that, in terms of numbers, her army was less than one tenth of his, the outlook looked very bleak indeed for her. Moreover she lacked the sort of senior counsellors able to give her the advise she needed –with the exception, of course, of [John] Marshal. His decision was to have her immediately set out and go straight to Ludgershall. That was a very difficult journey, however, because the king and all his army were hot on their heels, and the lady's escort frequently had to turn round and fight them off. I can tell you that in these skirmishes many a saddle was turned upside down, many a knight knocked to the ground and taken prisoner.

Soon the men accompanying the empress could not put up any more resistance and rode off as best they could. At full gallop and without stopping, they arrived in the vicinity of Wherwell. What was hindering them from making good speed, however, was the fact that the empress was riding side-saddle, as women do. The Marshal did not consider this a good idea or well suited to the circumstances, so he said to her: 'My lady, so help me God, it's not possible to ride fast if you ride side-saddle. You need to open your legs and put them each side of the saddle-bow.' Like it or not, she complied, since the enemy was hot on their heels, closing in and putting them under pressure.

The Marshal did not know what to say or do about the empress's predicament; he could see no one to help them by coming to their rescue. He ordered Brian of Wallingford to take charge of the lady, with instructions that, even if it were to imperil his soul, they should not stop anywhere, however urgent the need, and whatever might happen to them on the way, until they reached Ludgershall. Brian lost no time in carrying out his orders. The Marshal made a stand at the ford and offered what resistance he could. But the whole army fell on him and attacked him with such ferocity that he could hold out no longer. It was too much for him to bear, so he ended up seeking refuge in a church together with one other knight.

When the king's men saw them enter the church, they said: 'Come on, quick, set it alight! He won't get away this time, the traitor.' When the fire got a hold, the Marshal took refuge in the tower staircase. The knight said: 'My fair lord, we're going to meet a martyr's death if we stay here, and that would be a real calamity. The wise thing for us to do would be to surrender.' The Marshal replied angrily: 'Not another word, I forbid you! If you say just one word more like that, I'll kill you with my own hands.' The intense heat all around them caused the lead roof to melt. It came flowing down the



tower and hit the Marshal on the face. It was a horrendous accident, and he lost one of his eyes. He thought his time had come, but, thank God, he did not die. The king's men immediately assumed that he had burnt to death and they rode off back to Winchester. The Marshal, however, had not died, nor had his life been extinguished ... (187-269)

... Fortune, however, can change in an instant and turn friend into foe. In this case it changed its shape in a very short space of time to become a stranger and an enemy. The transformation was horrible to behold: chivalry itself changed into lethargy and idleness, generosity lapsed into want. The world was plunged into darkness by what Fortune swallowed up. You must be told what it was, there is no alternative: Young King Henry fell ill and died [in 1183]. You need now to hear me tell of the pain and suffering he endured, and the pious act of repentance he made as death drew closer. Fortune, ever keen to topple and overthrow what is good, had always been ready to swoop down on him, and it now succeeded in plunging joy into sorrow throughout the world.

When the moment came to read the Young King's will, a document which he had drawn up wisely and prudently, this is what he said: 'Marshal, Marshal, you have always been loyal to me and supported me in all good faith, so I bequeath you my cross to take, on my behalf, to the Holy Sepulchre and pay my debt to God.' William Marshal replied: 'Sire, my grateful thanks to you! Since you have made this provision and chosen me to carry it out, I shall be extremely happy to do so, for anyone who fails you in your moment of great need is no true friend of yours. But savage and treacherous death has launched the most overwhelming of attacks against you by not allowing you to continue living.' Henry replies: 'Marshal, my guide and master, since that is the will of God, it cannot be otherwise. So die I must, it seems to me.' Thereupon his cheeks grow pale, and that fresh young face, so handsome and genial, turns sallow, wan and grey. The hall erupts in grief, none could possibly be greater, for never did God grant life to a knight so worthy of such mourning. No one could have deserved more than he to be spared by all the tears shed for him by others. But this is all to no avail: death is the bow that never misses. (6869-6922)

## **9 *Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle***

Jordan Fantosme, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century Anglo-Norman cleric, wrote what purports to be, at least in part, an eyewitness account in verse of the revolt of 1173-74 which saw the Young King, in alliance with William I of Scotland, at war with his father Henry II. It is the earliest history of contemporary events to be written in the French vernacular. Jordan's prosody is bizarrely unsystematic, his discourse betrays epic influences, and he proves to be something of a literary plagiarist. My new translation is made on the basis of R.C. Johnston's edition (1981) of Durham Cathedral Library MS C.IV.27, ff. 139-167. Dean # 55. Bibliography in Arlima.

Hear a story that is true, and may God bless you! I have taken it into my head to compose some verse about the best king who ever lived, and it is only right that I should share it with you. A wise man, in my opinion, is one who is able to live a better life by learning from the experiences of others. Noble and most valiant king of England, do you not remember that, when your son was crowned, you made the king of Scotland do homage to him by one of them placing his hands in the other's, saving William's fealty to your royal self? You then said to both of them: 'God's curse be on anyone who withdraws their love and affection from you. Stand by my son –you said to William –with your aid and all your might against everyone on earth, saving my own lordship. There then arose a deadly resentment between you and your son, causing many a noble knight to lose his life, many a man to be unhorsed, many a saddle to be emptied, many a trusty shield shattered, many a chainmail split open. Once this crowning ceremony was over, and once the change in status camee into effect, you then deprived your son of some of his new-found authority, you frustrated his wishes and refused him power. This is what lies at the origin of this heartless war. May God put his curse on it! ... (1-20)

... It was Walter fitz Robert –so help him God! –who began the battle [of Fornham in October 1173] by urging his horse forward and leading a fierce attack on the Flemish mercenaries. Not in any way intimidated, the Flemings fought back. They vastly outnumbered the royalists and succeeded in driving them back, but Walter was not slow to avenge this setback. The Flemings had cause to regret that they ever set foot in England, for they were all to bitterly rue the day they came. Walter happened to come across [Robert de Beaumont] earl [of Leicester] and spoke curtly to him: 'Come on, don't hang back! You're one of my lord king Henry's vassals, and you can see that he's about to be overpowered by his enemies. Dig in your spurs, my lord earl, and come over to our side!' Swearing his usual curse of 'by God's lance', he added: 'What a disaster it was that earl Robert ever brought these people over here from Flanders!' You would then have seen the earl of Leicester go galloping fiercely into the fray. With him were lord Roger Bigod who performed great feats that day, and Hugh of Cressi who never once failed in his duty. However, before these men could carry on fighting as they would have liked, Humphrey de Bohun had already taken more than a hundred of the rebels prisoner. (1032-1050)

Without a doubt, Robert fitz Bernard also performed admirably in clearing the field of countless numbers of these foreigners. Be they Flemings or Lombards, they had no chance to show their mettle to any advantage, and were making a very bad start to their plot to take the wool of England back home with them to Flanders. Crows and buzzards swoop down on their corpses. They carry off their souls to the ever-burning pit of Hell, where the St Stuart priest will sing mass for them.

It would be much better for them to be hanging by their necks from a noose somewhere in Flanders. Your Fleming would have been a decent sort of fighter if only he had had God to help him. As it was, this was not what they deserved, given what greedy plunderers they were. The earl of Leicester should never have got involved with them, and lord Hugh del Chastel will have no grounds to rejoice over them. In the thick of battle they are incompetent and helpless. (1063)

My lady the duchess of Leicester [Petronelle de Grandmesnil] had fled from the battlefield and taken refuge in a ditch where she came close to drowning. She forgot her rings there and left them in the sludge. They will not come to the surface again for as long as she lives. The earl's wife was intending to let herself drown when Simon of Odell arrived to pull her out: 'My lady, let me take you away from here. Don't do this! That's what happens in war: you lose some and you win some.' When earl Robert saw his wife taken prisoner, he was dismayed, and on seeing his fellow fighters lying dead in their hundreds and thousands, he grew exceedingly angry, as well he might. The colour began to drain from his face. ... Throughout the whole of the countryside there was not a single villein or peasant who did not set off, with fork and flail, to wipe the Flemings out. The knights in armour had simply to knock them over, and it was the peasants who finished them off. They sent them violently tumbling into the ditches in their dozens, scores, hundreds and thousands. (1085)

## **10 Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence**

Guernes came over from France to Canterbury to gather firsthand information from Becket's acquaintances, and from his sister, to incorporate into his verse history of the archbishop's murder, a second version of which he completed in 1174. His pro-clerical partisanship is omnipresent and unshakable, and what sets out to be a life of Becket quickly turns into a polemical hagiography. The poem, however, contains many details which can be regarded as authentic and of documentary interest. The text survives in five manuscripts and three fragments, all of which are Anglo-Norman. Walberg's standard edition of 1936, based on MS Wolfenbüttel Herzog August Bibliothek Cod. Guelf 34.6 Aug. 4<sup>to</sup>, ff. 1-38, from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is the one I have translated (Short 2013). There is a new edition, Modern French translation and commentary by Jacques Thomas (2002), and several other translations into French and English. Bibliography by Serena Modena (2012) and in Arlima. Dean # 508.

Satan's henchmen had by now come into the church, each one holding a drawn sword in his right hand and a hatchet in his left hand – the fourth had a two-edged axe. They were unable to see the holy archbishop because of a pillar that supported the vaulting. Three of them went round one side of the pillar, shouting out for the man who had betrayed the king. Reginald fitz Urse, going round the other side, came across a monk and asked him where the archbishop was. Up spoke the saint: 'Reginald,' he said, 'if it's me you're looking for, then you've found me, here.'

St Thomas had not responded when he was called a traitor, but on hearing the word archbishop he stood still and took notice. He came down the steps towards Reginald. 'Reginald,' he said, 'if it's me you're looking for, then you've found me, here.' Reginald caught hold of him by the skirt of this cloak. 'Reginald,' said the good priest, 'I've done you many favours, so what are you looking for from me now, coming into a sacred church fully armed?' Reginald fitz Urse replied: 'You'll know soon enough!' He pulled him towards him, giving him a severe shaking, then said: 'You're a traitor to the king. Come over here!' His intention was to drag him out of the sacred church. I am sure that being shoved around and tugged by Reginald annoyed Thomas a great deal. He gave Reginald such a push that he forced him back and snatched the skirt of his cloak from out of his hand. 'Get out of here, you evil man!' said the holy priest. 'I am no traitor, and should not be accused of being one!' After a moment's thought Reginald said: 'Get out of here yourself!' 'I will not,' said the saint. 'This is where you'll find me, and this is where you will carry out your evil crimes.'

Thomas made his way towards the north transept. Here, he stopped next to a pillar, and placed his back up against it. The pillar had been constructed between two altars, the upper one dedicated to the Mother of God, the lower consecrated to St Benedict. The king's demented servants, having driven and pushed him thus far, shouted out: 'Absolve those who are under excommunication, and those you have had suspended and banned!' 'I will do no more than I have already done,' said Thomas. Whereupon all of them, speaking in unison, threatened to kill him. Thomas replied: 'Your threats do not frighten me. I am ready and fully prepared to suffer martyrdom. All I ask is that you let my people go and do not lay a finger on them. Do what you have to do to me, and me alone.' Even when faced with death, the good priest did not forget his people. ... (5495 - 5540)

... When the knights had attacked, Master Edward Grim had grabbed hold of Thomas, seizing him bodily round the shoulders. He clung on to him fearlessly, and the knights were unable to make him let go. Everyone else, clerks, monks and servants, had taken to their heels, but master Edward kept hold of him as the knights tried to pull him away. 'What do you think you're doing?' he said. 'Have you taken leave of your senses? Just look at where you are and at what feast it is we are celebrating. Laying a hand on your archbishop is a great sin.' But neither the Christmas celebrations nor being in church was enough to stop them.

It was at this moment that St Thomas understood that his martyrdom was at hand. With hands joined in front of his face, he gave himself over to the Lord God, hurriedly commending himself, the cause of Holy Church and his own cause to the martyr St Denis, patron saint of sweet France, as well as to the patron saints of his own church. William de Tracy was the first to step forward – not, however, in order to worship God! To avoid being weighed down, he had decided not to put his hauberk on. He started by shouting out for the person who had betrayed the king. It having proved impossible for them to get the saint out of the church, William proceeded to strike him a violent blow to the head with his sword, knocking off his bonnet, cutting deeply into the top part of his scalp and severing it. The sword ended up on St Thomas's left shoulder, cutting through his cloak and the clothing beneath right into the skin. It almost sliced master Edward Grim's arm completely in two. It was this blow that caused master Edward to loosen his grip. 'Hit him! Hit him!' shouted William. Reginald fitz Urse was the next to strike him, but he did not succeed in knocking him to the floor. William de Tracy then struck him a further blow, this time literally sending his brains spilling out, and St Thomas fell. (5566-5595)

## **11 Anonyme de Béthune**

The anonymous author of the prose *Histoire des ducs de Normandie et des rois d'Angleterre* came from Artois and was attached to the household of Robert VII of Béthune whom he accompanied to England, as part of a contingent of Flemish mercenaries, between 1213 and 1217. He was therefore an eye-witness to many of the more turbulent events of king John's reign. These he described by way of a lively and consistently secular narrative interspersed with amusing anecdotes, dialogues and details that show him to have been well informed and close to the centres of power. He seems to have written in retrospect sometime between 1220 and 1230. I follow Francisque Michel's edition of 1840 established on the basis of MS BnF fr. 12203, ff. 131v-184. Bibliography in Arlima.

When [in 1205] news reached king John in England that he had lost his castle at Chinon, and that Hubert de Burgh was forcibly held captive inside, it is hard to imagine how profound his distress was, though he gave no indication of it. He gave himself over entirely to the pleasures of hunting and hawking, and enjoying the company of his wife the queen. He was very much in love with her despite the fact that she indulged in a great deal of tittle-tattle and often outsmarted him in what she said. Once, at the news of some setback or other that John had suffered, he said to the queen: 'Just listen, my lady, to all I've lost on your account!' Her immediate reply was: 'And I, sire, lost the best knight in the world because of you!' On another occasion he said: 'My lady, it doesn't really matter because, I tell you in all honesty I know a clever move whereby, for the next ten years, you won't have to bother any more about the king of France, not for all his power.' To which the queen replied: 'What is certain, sire, is that you're looking to be the sort of king whose deviousness ends up getting him cornered and checkmated.' She would often speak in this way, and suffered a great deal from it as a result.

There was a very nasty streak in king John's character. He was the most cruel of men, and too easily attracted to beautiful women. He often humiliated the most prominent men in the land because of this, and this was the cause of a great deal of hatred. He would never willingly tell the truth. He did his utmost to create friction between his barons, and took great delight in seeing this develop into hatred. He was envious of all decent individuals to the point of hating them, and the sight of anyone doing good caused him great offence. Despite having many character flaws, he was extremely fond of spending money. His hospitality was wholehearted and generous, and at mealtimes the doors to his hall always stood open. Anyone at all wishing to eat at his court could do so. On the four major feast days he was happy to distribute fine clothes to his knights. This was one of his most conspicuous redeeming features.

One winter towards Christmas, Hubert Walter came to see John. He was a well respected archbishop of Canterbury, an exceptionally worthy and generous man and a person of considerable standing. He invited the king to his Christmas court at Canterbury which he intended to be a truly splendid occasion. He was someone who unsettled the king because he was so goodhearted, and of this John was extremely jealous. He nevertheless accepted Hubert's invitation and came to spend Christmas at Canterbury. The court was attended by a large number of important people, and was a sumptuous and ceremonious occasion. The hospitality was superb, and king John spent three days there.

When the time came for John to leave, he summoned the archbishop and said: 'My lord archbishop, do you know why I have stayed here so long?' 'For what other reason,' replied the archbishop, 'than to honour me with your presence?' 'By all that's holy,' said the king, 'the opposite is true. You are so worthy, so generous and so hospitable that no one else could possibly reach the standard you set. Your aim is to have the monopoly of pomp and extravagance throughout the whole of England. But, by the grace of God, I've made arrangements to reduce you to penury so that you won't even be able to find enough to eat.'

When the archbishop heard this, he was most upset and replied: 'How could you possibly think you could ruin me like this? You haven't done what you say you have. You won't find me as easy as that to destroy. In view of what you've just told me, tell me where you intend to be at Easter.' 'What's it matter to you?' replied the king. 'I swear by St Julian that you can't hide information like that from me. Do you know why I ask? Because I want to be in the same place as you, and if the town in question is not big enough to accommodate your retinue and mine, then I'll set up my quarters outside. But even then, I wager you that my court will be more splendid than yours, that there will be more money spent there, more clothes distributed, more aspiring knights knighted, and more good done to everyone than in yours. And, if I live that long, I'll do precisely the same at Whitsun. And you'll find that Hubert Walter still has enough to eat!' ... (ed. cit. pp. 104-106)

... Now here is a truly remarkable event for you to listen to! When [in 1215] the members of the army had taken leave of the king, the archbishop of Canterbury [Stephen Langton] arrived to discuss with John how to reestablish peace between him and his barons. Discussions finally lead to John agreeing to a conference between him and the barons to be held at Staines. There the king was obliged to accept the terms that the barons were demanding, and he did so without waiting to consult either with his brother or with the Flemings.

Under the agreement he was forced to undertake never to arrange a marriage that would result in the woman being disparaged by losing her status. This was the best of the concessions he was obliged to make, always assuming, that is, that he would keep his word. He was forced to promise also that no man would ever lose life or limb for having poached any wild animal in the royal forests; a fine could be an alternative punishment. These were two concessions that could be accepted without too much difficulty. As far as property transactions involving inheritance were concerned, the reliefs the king imposed were too high, and he would be obliged to accept rates as set by the barons. They demanded also that high justice be available in courts in baronial jurisdictions and not only in royal courts. There were many other demands made by the barons, all quite unreasonable, which I refrain from listing here.

Most importantly of all, they demanded that a committee of twenty-five barons be elected, and that the king should conduct all business in consultation with this committee and in accordance with the decisions its members took. The king should also redress, through their good offices, all the wrongs that he might commit against them, while they for their part would take it upon themselves to redress all the wrongs they may commit against the king. In addition to all this, they demanded that the king would never be able to appoint any royal officials throughout his land without the approval of the twenty-five. All this the king was forced, under compulsion, to grant. In confirmation of this agreement, the king granted the barons his charter, without there being any possibility of his

amending it. ... The Flemings were incensed when they heard of the dishonourable agreement which the king had reached. (ed. cit. pp. 149-50)



## **12 Fouke le fitz Waryn**

Originally a rhymed Anglo-Norman romance dating from the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* survives today only in a prose version copied into a single manuscript, BL Royal 12.C.XII, ff. 33r-60v, in Ludlow between 1330 and 1340. It tells of the life and imagined adventures of an unlikely hero brought up at Henry II's court. Closely associated with, and eventually outlawed by, king John, Fouke is eventually rehabilitated. Distant echoes of contemporary characters and events are scattered throughout a swiftly moving story. The original poet can presumably be credited with having written a rich, lively and varied narrative, though in its present state it can seem, to some readers, more like a jumbled string of chivalric adventures. I translate from the ANTS edition (1975). Dean # 156. Arlima for bibliography.

Summoned to king Henry [II's] presence, Fouke was appointed constable of all the kingdom's armies. The king placed him in command of all his forces, with instructions to proceed, with a large contingent of soldiers, to the Welsh Marches. There his mission was to expel Iorworth Drwyndwn and his army from the region. It was Fouke's strength and courage that gave him mastery over everyone else. King Henry, being unable himself to travel far because of illness, stayed behind in Gloucester. The whole of the March, from Chester to Worcester, was under Iorworth's control, and he had expropriated all the barons' lands there. With the king's army, lord Fouke launched fierce attacks against Iorworth on many occasions. During one particular encounter at Wormsley, near Hereford, Fouke forced him to flee the field of battle, though there had been a number of casualties in both camps. For four years the savage and unrelenting war between lord Fouke and Iorworth dragged on, until finally, at the request of the king of France, a loveday was arranged at Shrewsbury between king Henry and prince Iorworth. They were reconciled and exchanged the kiss of peace, and the prince returned all the marcher barons' lands he had taken possession of. ... (21.27 - 22.4)

... King Henry had four sons: Henry, Richard Coeur de Lion, John and Geoffrey, who was later to become count of Brittany. Young Henry was crowned during his father's lifetime, but he died before his father. When Henry II died, Richard succeeded, and after him his brother John. For as long as he lived, John was wicked, quarrelsome and spiteful. (22.24 - 22.30)

As a young man Fouke had been brought up together with king Henry's four sons. They were all very fond of him except John, with whom he would frequently get into fights. One day it so happened that Fouke and John were sitting alone in a room playing chess when John suddenly grabbed hold of the chessboard and gave Fouke an almighty whack with it. Sensing that he had been wounded, Fouke lifted up his foot and gave John a kick in the chest that sent his head crashing against the wall. This knocked John right out and he lost consciousness. Fouke was alarmed, but at the same time glad that there was no one else but the two of them in the room. He massaged the sides of John's head, and he came to. John immediately went off to his father and complained bitterly. The king replied: 'Stop moaning, you scoundrel! You're always getting into quarrels. If Fouke did anything wrong to you, you must certainly have deserved it.' He called for his schoolmaster and had John given a right royal hiding for having complained. John was furious with Fouke, and from that day on found it impossible ever to show him any affection. (23.5)

When old king Henry died, Richard acceded to the throne. He was extremely fond of Fouke because of his sense of loyalty. He summoned his five sons to appear before him at Winchester: Fouke the Younger, Philip the Redhead, William, John, Alan, and in addition Baldwin de Hodnet, their cousin. With elaborate ceremony Richard dubbed and made them all knights. Fouke the Younger and his brothers crossed the Channel with their retinue in quest of fame and renown. They did not hear of a single tournament or joust without Fouke wanting to participate in it. The praise showered on him everywhere meant that people were unanimous in declaring him to have no equal in strength, prowess and courage. Such were his charm and elegance that he never took part in any contest without being considered and recognised as the best of everyone there. ... (23.17)

... King John lacked any sort of conscience. He was wicked, quarrelsome and lecherous, an object of hate for all right-thinking people. If ever he heard talk of a beautiful girl or lady, the daughter or wife of any earl or baron –or of anyone else, come to that –, he wanted to sleep with her. This he did by seducing her with gifts or false promises, failing which he would forcibly rape her. This was the greatest cause of the hatred directed against him. It was also the reason why many great English barons withdrew their homage from him as king. For them this was the best means by far of avoiding the fear that he inspired. ... (35.34 - 36.3)

... Fouke and his companions had discovered from the local peasants that king John was at Windsor, so that is where they set off for –but without drawing attention to themselves. During the daytime they slept or rested. At night they pressed on until they reached the Forest of Windsor, and there they made camp in a particular place that they were already familiar with from before and which Fouke knew intimately. On hearing some huntsmen and their beaters blowing their horns, they understood that the king was intending to go hunting. Fouke and his companions were soon fully armed, and Fouke swore a solemn oath that, even though he were to die in the process, he would never give up seeking revenge on the king for having wrongfully stolen his lands from him by force. He would never stop calling him to account publicly and claiming what was his by right and by inheritance. Ordering his companions to stay behind, Fouke said that he would go and spy out the land to see what was happening. (48.27 - 49.2)

So off he set, and soon came across an old charcoal-burner carrying a pitchfork in his hand. As befitted a charcoal-burner, he was dressed from head to foot in black. Fouke asked him if, as a favour, he would be willing to hand over his clothes and pitchfork in exchange for some money. 'Lord,' he said, 'with great pleasure.' Fouke handed over ten gold coins. He asked him if he would be kind enough not to tell anyone else about their arrangement, and then off the charcoal-burner went. Once he was alone, Fouke lost no time in putting on the clothes the charcoal-burner had given him. He went over to where the charcoal was burning and tended the fire. He caught sight of a large iron rod which he picked up, then started poking here and there at the logs. (49.12)

As he was doing so, king John accompanied by three knights came walking up. Fouke recognised the king the moment he saw him, and, throwing down his fork, greeted him as his lord by kneeling down before him with a show of great humility. The king and the knights stood there for a long time laughing and making jokes about the charcoal-burner's breeding and good manners. 'My

lord peasant,' said the king, 'have you by any chance seen a stag or a doe pass this way?' 'Yes I have, my lord, just now.' 'What sort of animal was it that you saw?' 'Sire, my lord, one with antlers –long ones, she had.' 'Where is she, then?' 'Sire, my lord, I can easily take you to the exact spot I saw her.' 'Off you go, then, my lord peasant, and we'll follow.' 'My lord,' said the charcoal-burner, 'will I take my fork with me? If anyone stole it, I would miss it a great deal.' 'Yes, peasant, as you wish.' (49.26)

Fouke picked up his big iron fork and led the king, who was carrying a very handsome bow, to where he could do some shooting. Then Fouke said: 'Sire, my lord, would it please you to wait here while I go into the thicket and flush the animal out so it comes in this direction?' 'Yes,' said the king. In a trice Fouke had run into the densest part of the forest, and there ordered his waiting men to come immediately and take the king prisoner: 'I've got him to come this far with only three knights, and all the rest of his retinue is on the far side of the forest.' (49.34)

Fouke and his men came charging out of the thicket, whooping at the sight of the king and they had no difficulty in capturing him. 'My lord king,' said Fouke, 'now I've got you exactly where I want you. I'm now going to pass sentence on you in precisely the same way as you would have done if I had been your prisoner.' Utterly terrified of Fouke, king John began shaking with fear. Fouke swore that the king would die for having confiscated his lands and inflicted such damage not only on him, but also on many an upstanding Englishman. John begged for mercy and entreated Fouke to spare his life for the love of God. He would reinstate him unreservedly in all his inheritance, and would return whatever he had misappropriated from him and all his people. He would grant him the king's peace and favour for as long as he lived. Additionally he would provide him, in all matters, with such assurances as Fouke himself would stipulate. Fouke agreed to all his requests on condition that king John give him his word, in the presence of his knights, to honour this agreement. ... (50.8)

... King John proceeded to Westminster where he called an assembly of earls, barons and clergy. He announced unambiguously that, of his own free will, he had granted the king's peace to Fouke Fitz Waryn, to his brothers and to all of their followers. He gave orders for them to be received with all due respect throughout the kingdom, and he reinstated them without reservation in all the lands that were theirs by right of inheritance. When archbishop Hubert heard of this, he was extremely happy and immediately sent letters to Fouke, the earl of Gloucester, to Ranulf earl of Chester and Hugh, earl marshal, directing them to come to him in Canterbury as a matter of urgency. There it was officially agreed that Fouke, his brothers and the three earls, together with their armed forces, should go to the king in London. They made the necessary preparations and dressed up in such finery as they knew how and could. (57.31 - 58.4)

Elegantly attired as befitted their noble rank, they crossed London and knelt in submission before the king at Westminster. The king received them and restored to them everything that was theirs in England. He ordered them to stay with him in London, which they did for a whole month. Fouke then took his leave and went to stay with the earl marshal, during which time the earl made over to him Ashdown, Wantage among other lands. Fouke and his brothers took such arms as they thought necessary and came to Abingdon. There they seized everything they could find of saleable value and had it transported to Wantage. This they then made into a market town by instituting a fair which has been held there ever since, and still exists to this day. (58.14)

### **13 Histoire d'Eustache le Moine**

The historical Eustace the Monk (Eustache / Wistasse le Moine, Eustachius Monachus), a buccaneer and sometime pirate, hailed from the region of Boulogne, and is recorded as being in the service of king John between 1205 and 1212. Such was the reputation he acquired as a mariner, among many other accomplishments, that he appears to have become something of a folk hero. He found a place in vernacular literature in the years following his death in 1217. The rhymed romance that today bears his name appears to have been written around 1225, and is an imaginative account of his life interspersed with a few recognisable facts about its protagonist's career. The romance survives in a single manuscript, Paris BnF fr. 1553, ff. 325v-328v, dated 1284. The most recent edition is that by Monfrin and Holden (2005), though my translation of the extracts printed below has been made on the still authoritative text established in 1898 by Wendelin Foerster and Johan Trost. A French translation of the whole work was published by Roger Berger and Aimé Petit in 1987, and a literal English translation by Glyn Burgess appeared in 1997. A bibliography is to be found in Arlima.

Eustace went to England to seek a favour from king John. He prostrated himself at the king's feet in the style of a Hospitaler. The king enquired why he was lying on the ground like that, to which Eustace replied: 'I have come to beg a favour from you, sire.' 'Stand up, then,' said the king. 'As a Hospitaler, you will have no difficulty in obtaining the favour.' Eustace said: 'Listen, my business here is to speak on behalf of Eustace the Monk. He begs you to do him the favour of granting him employment as a member of the royal household.' Without hesitation the king replied: 'The position is his if he is willing to swear to serve me in good faith and never to fail in his duty to me. And I will require sureties from him.' 'Sire, I will hand over my daughter to you as a pledge, or even my wife, should you wish me to.' The king asked: 'Is it you, the Monk, then? Are you speaking on your own behalf?' 'I am indeed, sire, and the name is Eustace.' 'By my rightful lord St Edmund,' replied the king, 'I am happy for you to have the job. A very warm welcome to you!' (1880-1908)

This is how Eustace was appointed by king John, who then gave him the command of a number of galleys. Eustace set out to sea with thirty boats and went to the Channel Islands. The islanders were ready drawn up and armed, and were under the command of a castellan. On seeing this fleet appear, he said to his men: 'Now, wait until they've landed. As soon as we see them step ashore, we'll attack and destroy them on the spot.' When Eustace touched shore, he was the first to jump out of the boats, with his companions leaping out hot on his heels, and the islanders launched their attack. Eustace goes charging up to confront the castellan who is out in front at the head of his troops. For his part the castellan, like it or not, urges the men under his command to advance right up to where Eustace's boats are. 'God with us!' is Romerel's war-cry; 'Winchelsea!' is Eustace's. Fierce is the fighting and stupendous the slaughter; audacious the aggressors and dogged the defenders. The hand-to-hand fighting is ferocious and relentless. Eustace wields a huge axe and rains down blows all round him. Many a helmet is shattered, many a warhorse dismembered. Striking out to the right then to the left, Eustace is soon lord and master of the field. 'Hit hard!' he shouts, 'it won't be long before they turn their backs and run.' After a battle of such violence, corpse after corpse was carried off for burial. Eustace cleared all the inhabitants off the islands, to which he then laid waste until there was not a single castle or a single house left to burn ... (1951)

... Eustace, his many evil acts by land and sea now behind him, came to England and went directly to see king John. He addressed him with considerable self-confidence: 'Sire,' he said, 'I would like you to provide me with somewhere to live on your lands.' To this the king replied: 'You will have what you want. Just choose one wherever you wish. I can offer you a palace in London, splendidly built and beautifully appointed.' Eustace accepted gratefully, but had hardly been there for very long before he had the whole of the palace pulled down. He hired hundreds of workmen and, at a cost of at least a thousand marks of silver, set about constructing a new foundation. Before the building had reached ground level, the king of England came to see it. Eustace must be crazy, he said, to have started on a building of this size. He nevertheless made him a loan of four hundred marks so that he could fulfil his ambition. And Eustace did in fact complete the project and produced a splendidly built and beautifully appointed palace. (2134-2157)

Our Monk was still living in England when [Renaud] count of Boulogne appeared on the scene. He had fallen out with the king of France and gone over to king John. On seeing Renaud arrive, Eustace decided to go back home. So John gave orders for guards to be stationed at the ports in order to prevent the monk from crossing the Channel. But Eustace, who had the gift of the gab, took a bow and a fiddle and disguised himself as a minstrel. He put on a different coat, wore a cap with embroidered stripes and sported a foliage-covered baton. He went down to the coast and saw a merchant ship loaded and about to leave. All the crew were already on board, and Eustace lagged behind intent on carrying out his plan: putting his feet together he jumped aboard at the last moment. (2179)

The helmsman said: 'You'll get off this boat, sir minstrel, so help me God!' Eustace replied: 'I will indeed, when we get where we're going. Now you're not being reasonable, because I'm willing to pay for my passage: I'll either give you five sterling silver pennies or my fiddle. Why make so much fuss? I'm a jongleur and minstrel, and you'll find very few entertainers to match me. I know all the songs there are to know. For God's sake, take me with you, fine sir! I come from up Northumberland way, and I've also spent five years in Ireland. I've drunk so much ale that my face has turned pale and sallow. Now I'm heading back to Argenteuil or Provins to drink the wine there.' 'What's your name, tell me straight?' 'Sir, I'm called Dobad and I'm an Englishman from Gottosing. Oh yeh, be God I is!' The helmsman said: 'So you're English, then? I could have sworn you were French. What sort of songs do you know?' 'I can sing the exploits of Agolant, Aymon and Florence of Rome, and I know the whole of Blancandin as well. There's not a song in the world I don't know either the words or the tune of. I'd provide good entertainment for you, but it won't come free. Being at sea makes me really scared, and I couldn't concentrate enough to perform anything halfway decent.' No one made any more demands of him, so the Monk got his own way. (2214)

That evening he landed in Boulogne, but immediately set off again at speed as if he were a messenger boy. He was, in fact, carrying with him a large container holding a letter under lock and key. He came to where the king of France was and showed him the letter. Looking at it, king Philippe saw that Eustace had come to France from England, and he greeted him accordingly. The monk was angry, he understood, with king John for what he had done to his sister, killing, burning and disfiguring her, and he would never again be reconciled with him. He had also come to France because of the presence in England of Renaud de Boulogne. Eustace had no intention of betraying Philippe, but

wanted simply to enter his service and do his duty to the best of his ability. The king said: 'If this Eustace is over here in France, arrange for him to come and speak with me. He is to have safe conduct to come and go. It will be easy for him to come, as he will have nothing to worry about on his way here.' Thereupon Eustace declared: 'Then here I am!' 'So is it you?' the king asked. 'You're very small for a Frenchman. You may not be very tall, but you are a very accomplished and brave fighter. You're cunning and something of a trickster. You've no need for cat fat to help you on the road to success. But you won't work for me unless you behave yourself.' Eustace replied: 'I swear by St Simon, from now on I will do nothing but good.' (2247)

From that day on, the Monk proved to be an excellent fighter, fierce and intrepid. He did many a dastardly deed in the islands over the water. He enabled prince Louis to cross the Channel with a large fleet [in 1216], and singlehandedly and unaided contrived to capture the Boulogne boat. He had been with Philippe at Damme in the year [1213] when the king lost his boats. Eustace was accused of having abandoned his boats, which he strenuously denied. There being no one bold enough to offer any proof, the matter was taken no further. (2263)

On another occasion [in 1217] Eustace set out to cross the Channel together with Raoul de Tournelle and Varlet de Montagui. Once the accomplished and courageous Eustace reached the open sea, he saw more than twenty boats sailing across in front of him. They launched a powerful attack on Eustace's fleet using huge crossbows which they had installed on their vessels. Eustace and his men put up a stout defence by throwing spears and shooting arrows. They managed to kill a great many Englishmen, and the resistance they put up was a valiant one. Brandishing an oar, Eustace sent a large number of the enemy sprawling, some with broken arms, others with broken skulls, this one killed outright, that one upended, one felled and an other maimed, while a third had his collarbone smashed to smithereens. But the English attacked him from every direction, smashing the sides of his boat with huge axes and causing him great damage. (2286)

The French defence was so dogged that the enemy could not board their boats. The English then began to hurl big pots full of finely crushed limestone at them, and these shattered on contact with the deck, releasing great clouds of dust. This is what set the French back more than anything else. With their eyes full of dirt they could no longer put up any defence against an enemy sailing up wind of them and blinding them with lime. The English then leapt on to Eustace's boat and subjected the men aboard to some very rough treatment. They took all the barons prisoner, and Eustace the Monk was killed. The moment he was beheaded the battle came to an end. Someone for ever intent on evil deeds cannot possibly hope to have a long life. (2305)

## ***14 Ambroise: Estoire de la guerre sainte***

Sometime between 1194 and 1199 a Norman (perhaps Anglo-Norman) cleric, Ambroise wrote a long eye-witness account in verse of his experiences during the Third Crusade of 1189-92. As well as being of considerable documentary value, the poem has clear literary merit. It was skilfully written by a poet well versed in epic literature, with an elaborate sense of rhetoric and a gift for dramatising what could otherwise be a somewhat repetitive and long-drawn-out narrative. The history survives in a single Anglo-Norman manuscript in addition to a very short fragment. MS Vatican Reg. Lat. 1659, ff. 1-89v, from the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, serves as the base for the edition by Marianne Ailes and Malcolm Barber (2003), from which I translate the following extract. Dean # 56.1. Arlima for bibliography.

Just as time passed, so various incidents took place one after another. It so happened one day that a certain knight was sitting with his back turned towards the latrines, answering the call of nature, as each and every one of us has to. As he was crouching down to relieve himself, he failed to pay any attention to the Turks advancing in the vanguard of their army. One individual in particular came galloping up, basely and dishonourably intent on attacking and harming the knight at a time when he was otherwise engaged. A long way out in front of his army, the Turk came up with his lance fully extended and poised to kill the knight. On seeing this, the knight's comrades-in-arms shouted out to him: 'Run for it, sir, get out of the way!' Quickly finishing his business, the knight got to his feet with great difficulty and managed to stand up at the moment the Turk came charging at him as fast as his horse could carry him. He was on the point of knocking him flat on the ground, but –thank God –the knight jumped to one side and the lance missed its mark. Just listen to how our just God wrought vengeance! Picking up two large stones as the Turk wheeled round to renew his charge, the knight took careful aim and succeeded in hitting him. As the Turk came nearer and nearer, one of the knight's stones struck him right on the forehead below his helmet, and at that moment he fell dead to the ground. The knight took the Turk's horse, readjusted the reins and –as the person who saw all this happen told me –climbed into the saddle and rode off back to his tent. (3578-3618)

## **15 Foundation of Godstow abbey**

A short 65-line text in Anglo-Norman octosyllables, known previously only by way of a Middle English translation, finds a place in the Latin cartulary of Godstow abbey, a Benedictine house for women near Oxford. The cartulary was compiled in 1405 and survives in MS National Archives E164/20. Its f. 13, written out as prose, contains an artless and somewhat prosaic account of the abbey's foundation in the 1130s and its first abbesses. It looks to be an extract from an earlier and longer Anglo-Norman rhymed chronicle, the date of which can hardly have been earlier than the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is edited in Emilie Amt's edition of the Latin cartulary (2014), and the translation is mine. The poem is not included in Ruth Dean's handlist of Anglo-Norman texts, and its existence deserves to be more widely known.

There once was a lady from Winchester called Ediva who belonged to one of the most important families in the kingdom. Her parents having no other child but her, she was all the more loved and cherished. She was very beautiful and highly attractive, and was such as to find favour with God almighty. She was subsequently married to a worthy nobleman by the name of William de Lancelevé, and they were blessed by God with three fine, handsome children. One of them later became abbot of Abingdon, and his name was Jeannot [?].

I shall turn now from her children to the lady herself, and will explain to you how she came later to spend her life in the service of God. After the death of her husband, she often used to have a dream in which she was instructed to go to a place near the city of Oxford and stay there until she received a sign from God and learned how she was to enter God's service there. The place she went to, as instructed in the dream, was Binsey. There she lived a most holy life by spending her time in prayer. One night she heard a voice telling her what she was to do. 'Edith,' said the voice, 'get up from bed and go immediately to a place where a shaft of light comes down from heaven to earth. That is where you will establish a convent of nuns and consecrate them in the service of God.' This is truly how this abbey was first established. Ediva then sought out Henry the First –this is the actual truth I am telling you –and revealed to him everything that, in her dream-vision, God had summoned her to do. When the king had heard everything she had to say, they discussed together how best they might arrange things. So diligently did they work in the service of God that they came, [in the early 1130s], to build a church in honour of God, the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist. The truth is that the pains they took in God's service resulted to their bringing together twenty-four nuns, the most noble women that could be found [...]

Lady Ediva is now in God's hands. I will tell you what happened to her two daughters. The elder was called Emma, and she was the first prioress of this house. The younger daughter, lady Hawise, was the second prioress in her lifetime [...] Now may they both be in God's hands! And may God, born of the Virgin for our sakes, and who suffered death for us sinners, grant us, if he so please, his joy in time to come! Amen. (1-65)



## **16 Battle of Evesham**

Ostensibly an eye-witness account, in Anglo-Norman prose, of the Battle of Evesham, this short text was written soon after the event in August 1265. It is preserved on the dorse of a genealogical roll in the College of Arms (MS 3/23B), copied towards 1330. It can serve as an illustration of the changes, literary, stylistic and other, undergone by Anglo-Norman historiography since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. I translate an extract from the edition by Olivier de Laborderie et al. (2000).

As if giving advance notice of the harrowing event to come, the sun then withdrew its light, and a highly unusual wind, unpleasant, murky and menacing, sprang up and swept across the sky. Only one or two large drops of rain fell as it quickly blew over, leaving the sky clear again and the air calm. [Simon de Montfort] earl [of Leicester], meanwhile, was busy discussing something or other when someone said to him: 'We've been in severe difficulty for some time now, and haven't slept or eaten for three days. This means that we are almost dead-beat and on the point of exhaustion, and so are our horses. So why don't we take over the church. Its tower is a very strong one and can be defended with ease. We can stay here until our scattered allies are able to regroup and come and relieve us, and until your army has had time to recover its strength.' The earl immediately replied: 'No, my fair friend, no! Battlefields are where you find knights, and churches are where you find chaplains.'

As sir Guy de Balliol was coming out through the abbey gateway, he smashed the lance with the standard flying from it against the top of the gate, and it shattered to pieces. 'Now more than ever,' said the earl, 'may God help us!' When they had come as far as the wash-house gully in the town of Evesham, earl Simon addressed his assembled followers: 'Fair lords, there are many of you who have not yet had time to prove yourselves in life. You are young and have wives and children, and this is why you may have second thoughts and consider saving your own lives and theirs. The bridge is over there, and by crossing it you will be able easily to avoid the grave danger that awaits you here.' He then turned to sir Hugh Despenser and said: 'My lord Hugh, remember how old you are and consider saving your life. Think of how much the counsel you give can still be of great value to the whole country, because after you there will hardly be anyone left as trustworthy and as highly regarded as you are.' Sir Hugh's reply was immediate: 'My lord, my lord, no more of that talk! Today we will all drink from one and the same cup, just as we have done in the past.' (ed. cit. p. 407-8)

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