The Canterbury Tales
Yeoman (ll. 101-117)

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What context were the CT written in?

- Geoffrey Chaucer was born between 1340 and 1345
- Chaucer probably started to work on the CT in the late 1380s
- Chaucer wrote in English → understandable for everyone
- Written during a time of social and political unrest
- 1337: Hundred Years' War between England and France began
- 1348: The Black Death arrived in Britain and 30 to 50 percent of the population died → medieval medicine was helpless and people were depressed, lost their faith and joy in living
What context were the CT written in?

• 1377: Richard II became king at the age of 10
• 1381: Peasants‘ Revolt
  → agricultural workers were needed, but landlords did not want to pay them more money
  → higher taxes
  → unsatisfied with the young king
• Chaucer died around 1400

What is a Yeoman?

• 1 a man holding a small landed estate, a freeholder. 2 servant in a royal or noble household.
Yeoman (ll. 101-117)
Middle English – Modern English

• A Yeman hadde he, and servaunts namo
• A yeoman had he, nor more servants, no
• At that tyme, for him liste ryde so;
• At that time, for he chose to travel so;
• And he was clad in cote and hood of grene;
• And he was clad in coat and hood of green.
• A sheef of pecok-arwes brighte and kene
• A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen
• Under his belt he bar ful thriftily
• Under his belt he bore right carefully
• (Wel coude he dresse his takel yemanly:
• (Well could he keep his tackle yeomanly:
Yeoman (ll. 101-117)
Middle English – Modern English

• His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe),
• His arrows had no draggled feathers low),
• And in his hand he bar a mighty bowe.
• And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
• A not-heed hadde he, with a broun visage.
• A cropped head had he and a sun-browned face.
• Of wode-craft wel coude he al the usage.
• Of woodcraft knew he all the useful ways.
• Upon his arm he bar a gay bracer,
• Upon his arm he bore a bracer gay,
• And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler,
• And at one side a sword and buckler, yea,
Yeoman (ll. 101-117)

Middle English – Modern English

- And on that other syde a gay daggere,
- And at the other side a dagger bright,
- Harneised wel, and sharp as point of spere;
- Well sheathed and sharp as spear point in the light;
- A Christofre on his breast of silver shene.
- On breast a Christopher of silver sheen.
- An horn he bar, the bawdrik was of grene;
- He bore a horn in baldric all of green;
- A forster was he, soothly, as I gesse.
- A forester he truly was, I guess.
Language

- Great Vowel Shift: /i:/ (= ME) → /ei/ (= ModE)
  - *tyme* - *time* (l. 102)
  - *syde* - *side* (l. 112)
- Past tense of the 3rd person singular: -(d)e
  - *hadde* (l. 101), *ryde* (l. 102)
- Word order is not consistent:
  - V - S: *hadde he* (l. 101) [note that this is preceded by material thus putting the verb in the second position]
  - S - V: *he was* (l. 103) [no preceding material]
Yeoman in the CT

• He is one of the servants of the Knight
• He is a forester
• Chaucer describes him only external; only some adjectives and adverbs ("he bore right carefully") describe his personality
Who is Christofre?

- Martyr
- probably lived in the third century
- Patron saint for travelers
- “A Christofre on his breast of silver shene“ (l. 115) → Yeoman carries a medal of St. Christopher with him
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