The Polychronicon
Ranulf Higden, transl. by John of Trevisa

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A Social and Cultural History of English
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Presenters: Chris Lohse and Anja Bleicher
General Introduction

- England – after the Norman Conquest
- A melting pot of peoples
- A country torn and troubled
  - Medieval Warm Period / Little Ice Age / Famine / War / the Plague
Environment

- MWP - ~AD 800 – 1300
- LIA – starting at beginning of 14th century
Environment 2

• Consequences of MWP / LIA
  – Population grows during MWP to a possibly critical size (population began to exceed the number that could be sustained by productive capacity of land and farmers – possibly Malthusian crisis) \( \rightarrow \) High water mark
  – LIA starts with a span of wet and cold summers and extremely harsh winters
    \( \rightarrow \) consequence: no harvest (grain and fodder) possible, livestock dies, people starve, health deteriorates, diseases occur more frequently (tuberculosis, bronchitis, infections)
Environment 3

- Agriculture is at an all-time low
- Food production is hindered
- Population of England decreases drastically
Dates / Events – Great Famine / The Plague’s first outbreak

• Important dates / events:
  – 1315 – the Great Famine
  – 1337 – Beginning of the 100 Years’ War
    1342 – Trevisa was born
  – 1348/49 – The Plague hits Weymouth / London
  – 1349 – Ordinance of Labourers (Edward III)
    December: The first outbreak of The Plague “ends”
  – 1351 – Statute of Labourers (Parliament enforcing the Ordinance of Labourers)
Dates / Events 2 – Statute of Labourers

• Important dates / events:
  – 1351 – Statute of Labourers:
    → fixed wages (pre-Plague)
    → able-bodied men (i.e. people) have to work
    → restricting movement of labourers
    → Serfdom re-instated
  → ~ 1400 Serfdom was replaced by copyhold
Changes in society:
- The labour force is extremely small, and has understood its importance demanding better wages, better conditions, free movement.
- A lot of priests / monks died during plague.
  - Lay priests / public action / participation in church / revitalisation of “medieval church”.
- A lot of (French-speaking) teachers died.
  - Teaching in English Wycliff’s translation of Bible.
- Omnipresent death leads to greater piety.
  - Foundings of colleges, churches, monasteries.

Dates / Events 3 - Society
Dates / Events 4 – Language Act/Peasants’ Revolt

• Important dates /events:
  – 1361 – recurrent outbreak of plague
    → this time: mainly young males and children died
    → further decrease in the population
  – 1362 – Language Act: English becomes official language in court (Baugh and Cable - § 104)
  – 1381 – Peasants’ Revolt: Lollard / Wycliffian teachings influence the discontented population
  – 1381 – Wycliffe expelled from Oxford, leaders of the Revolt executed
Dates / Events – First native-speaker on the throne

• Important dates / events:
  – 1384 – Wycliffe died
  – 1399 – Henry IV: first King of England who is a native speaker of English (House of Lancaster)
  – ~ 1400 Serfdom ended in England, replaced by copyhold tenure
  – 1401 – *De heretico comburendo* – forbids translation of Bible (into any vernacular, including English)
  – 1423 – all English court records are written in English
The Kings - Normans

• The Normans:
  – William I (a.k.a. The Conqueror) - 1066-1087
  – William II (Rufus)- 1087-1100
  – Henry I - 1100-1135
  – Stephen - 1135-1154
  – Empress Matilda (Queen Maud) - 1141
The Kings - The Plantagenets

• The Plantagenets:
  – Henry II - 1154-1189
  – Richard I - 1189-1199
  – John - 1199-1216
  – Henry III - 1216-1272 (B&C: § 97)
  – Edward I - 1272-1307
  – Edward II - 1307-1327
  – Edward III - 1327-1377
  – Richard II - 1377-1399
The Kings - House of Lancaster

- House of Lancaster
  - **Henry IV - 1399-1413**
  - Henry V - 1413-1422
  - Henry VI - 1422-1461
The Kings - House of York

• House of York:
  – Edward IV - 1461-1483
  – Edward V - 1483
  – Richard III - 1483-1485

The Houses of Lancaster and York were the main opponents in the Wars of the Roses 1455 – 1485. The Wars of the Roses finally ended when the first Tudor king took the throne: Henry VII - 1485-1509
The 100 Years’ (War 1)

- 100 Years’ War:
  - the Edwardian War 1337 – 1360
    - Battly of Crécy: 1346
    - Calais captured: 1347
    - Battle of Poitiers: 1356
    - Ends with Treaty of Brétigny: 1360
  - →The English seize land in France
The 100 Years’ (War 2)

• 100 Years’ War:
  – The Caroline War 1369-1389
    • Charles V of France re-kindles the war, by illegally summoning Edward III to Paris
    • The English lose many of their territories in France
    • Both leaders die during war: Their sons continue
    • The sons of Charles V (Charles VI) and Edward III (Richard II) sign a truce
  – ➔ English territories lost
The 100 Years’ (War 3)

- 100 Years’ War
  - The Lancastrian War 1415 – 1429
    - Henry V invades Normandy, thereby completing his father’s (Henry IV – first Lancaster King) plans.
    - Battle of Agincourt: St. Crispin’s Day (25 Oct) 1415 (a replay of Crécy)
    - Caën (1417) and Rouen (1419) in English hand
    - Treaty of Troyes 1420

→ Normandy back under English Rule (after 200 years)
The 100 Years’ (War 4)

- 100 Years’ War
  - Joan of Arc 1412 – 1431 (interlude)
    - Partly responsible for Charles VII inthronisation at Reims in 1429
    - Claimed divine guidance, to free her country from English rule.
    - Was executed; later canonised by Catholic Church
  - End of 100 Years’ War: 1453
    Treaty of Arras – loss of alliance with Burgundy
Peasants’ Revolt

- Peasants’ Revolt (1381)
  - Consequence of:
    - Great Famine
    - Plague
    - Lollard movement (John Ball’s interpretation)
    - Taxation issues (poll tax, to finance the 100 Years’ War)
  - Not a full scale riot, but aimed attacks
    - The Temple, the Savoy, Tower of London
Other important people

• (Other) important names:
  
  **John Wycliffe: (1320’s – 1384)**
  
  • translated the Bible into vernacular (from vulgate)
  • dissident (heretic/rebellious) doctor & teacher of theology
  • considered the founder of the Lollard movement
  • at times protected by John of Gaunt (Lancaster)
  • criticised clergy, teaching, eucharist-theory and other issues; demanded reform of western Christianity
  • influenced Jan Hus
  • his teachings probably influential for the Peasants’ Revolt
Other important people (2)

John Ball (1338 – 1381)

- lay priest / hedge priest (no parish)
- prominent leader of the Peasants’ Revolt
- drew on John Wycliffe’s teachings
- fanatic advocate of a kind of egalitarian world-view
  - Quote from Sermon in Blackheath: *When Adem delved (dug) and Eve span, who was then the gentle man?*
- executed in 1381

The Lollards

- acted against the corruption of Roman Catholic Church
- believed (amongst other things) in lay priesthood and that priests should not have secular offices / power
- influence on *Piers Plowman*
- were completely assimilated in Protestant Reformation
Other important people (3)

Ranulf Higden (1280-1363)

- Benedictine monk in St. Werbourgh (Chester) (Lancaster)
- wrote the: *Ranuiphi Castrensis, cognomine Higdon, Polychronicon (sive Historia Polycratica) ab initio mundi usque ad mortem regis Edwardi III in septem libros dispositum* (dubbed: the *Polychronicon*) up to 1342/44 – was continued by another monk (John of Malvern, Worcester) until 1357
- *Polychronicon*: summary/compilation of general history, became standard in 15th century
- *Polychronicon* was translated by John of Trevisa in 1387
- *Polychronicon* was printed by Caxton in 1482
Other important people (3a)

- World map with east at top, Jerusalem at center, and the Red Sea shown in red at upper right. Ranulf Higden.
Other important people (4)

John of Trevisa (1342 – 1402)
• translator,
educated at Oxford (where Wycliff worked / taught),
Vicar of Berkeley, Gloucestershire,
chaplain to the 4th Lord Berkeley (Maurice de Berkeley 1330-1368)
Canon of Westbury on Trym
• Richard Pencrych (mentioned in the text for today) and
John of Trevisa were both Cornishmen, and were,
together with John of Cornwall, responsible for
keeping the English language from extinction
• May have contributed to Wycliffe’s translation of the Bible
What Higden says:

- There are as many languages as there are different peoples in England.
- Welsh & Scottish remained pure (of what? French?)
- Scottish was influenced by Pictish input (contradiction?)
- Welsh have converted to Saxonlych – the Saxon way (English)
- There were three dialects: Northern, Southern and Middle
- Mixing with: first the Danes then the Normans led to some impairment/strange effects on the language
- School children were forced to speak / write French
- Non-nobles tried to learn/speak French to improve social standing
Higden (continued)

• Expresses surprise: the difference of the sound of language / dialects (North <-> South; East <-> West) and the mutually unintelligible manner of speech / language / dialect

• Example: York dialect cannot be understood by people of the South. Claims that the mixing with foreigners (Danes?) is responsible for that – and the distance from the royal court.

• The kings (royalty / nobility) dwell in the south because of the better agriculture, more people, better harbours, and nobler cities.
Trevisa’s comments

• Although French was the dominant language in teaching (grammar school), that changed after the Plague (1348)
• 1385 – all teaching in grammar schools is conducted in English (responsible: John of Cornwall / Richard Pencrych) (B&C: §§105f)
• Advantage: English children learn faster than before
• Disadvantage: if they cross the channel / go to the continent (France) or distant lands, the children do not know enough French to keep out of trouble’s way. (cf: B&C: § 98 – quote from Martino da Canale: “because the French language is current throughout the world …”)
• Teaching French is now the responsibility of the parents.
The East Midlands Triangle

Middle English became the most prominent / dominant dialect

because every other dialect-area shares borders with it, and

because of the concentration of wealth, power, education and administration in the triangle between Cambridge, Oxford and London. (Scotland ignored)

( B&C: §§ end of 104, 105, 109, 110)
De incolarum linguis
About the language of the inhabitants

• As hyt ys yknowe hou meny maner people buþ in þis ylond, þer buþ also of so meny people longages and tongues

• As it is known how many manner (types) of people are in this island, there are also as many languages and tongues
Present / Past form of *be*

- *ys*
- *b∦*
- *was*
- *were*
- *is*
- *are*
- *was*
- *were*
Passive present

- **Ys + pp.**
  - ys yknowe
  - ys apeyred
  - be ytold
  - ys ychaunged

- **buþ + pp.**
  - buþ ymelled
  - buþ compelled
  - buþ yrokked
  - buþ ytauʒt
  - buþ yturnd

- **is + past participle**
  - is known
  - is impaired
  - is told
  - is changed

- **are + past participle**
  - are mixed
  - are compelled
  - are rocked
  - are taught
  - are turned
Passive past

• *was / wer + pp.*
  
  – *wer ywoned*

• *Was / were + past participle*
  
  – *Were used to*
Present singular and plural of *have*

Passive with *have*

- habbeþ – present singular
- habbeþ – present plural
- hadde – preterite (simple past)
- **Have / has** – present singular
- **Have** – present plural
- Had – (simple) past (preterite)

- **Habbeþ + pp.**
  - habbeþ yleft
- **Have + past participle**
  - Have left
Present tense, infinitive / first person

• Present
  – come
  – leue
  – construe
  – speke
  – lykne
  – passe
  – trauayle
  – teche
  – trowe

• Modal verbs
  – may be
  – wol
  – scholle

• Present
  – come
  – leave
  – construe
  – speak
  – liken / compare to
  – pass / cross
  – travel
  – teach
  – trust (in) / believe

• Modal verbs
  – may be
  – will
  – shall
### Present tense, third person

- **Root + (e) + ð**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Root + (e)</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>holdeð</td>
<td>He/she/it/</td>
<td>hold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>woneð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spekeð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vseð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leueð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construeð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>construe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lurneð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habbeð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conneð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semeð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>seem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acordeð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vndurstondeð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goð</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>go</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strong verbs vs. weak verbs

As a general rule:
all verbs: first pers. sing. pres. end with: –e
sec. pers. sing. pres. end with: -(e)st
third. pers. sing. pres. end with: -(e)p

• Strong Verb
• Past tense:
  – Change stem vowel
  – \( \rightarrow \text{ytau3t} \) (teche)

• Weak Verb
• Past tense:
  – Add: ed, ed(e), or t(e)
  – \( \rightarrow \text{chayngede} \)

Prefixes: i- / y- / bi- for past tense (preterite / simple past)
past tense + prefix, but without personal ending
\( \rightarrow \) past participle
Middle English differences from Old English

- reduction of inflected forms
- verbs simplified by analogy; strong verbs re-analyzed as weak verbs; loss of OE patterns
- word order / sentence structure became more rigid
- all case endings lost (apart from genitive, i.e. possessive)
- fixed location of stress; unstressed vowels realized as /ə/ (schwa)
- “new” loanwords now from Central French, while earlier they had come from the Norman French dialect.
Gerunds / Nominal verbs

root + yng

Gerund / nominal verb

- mell+yng  →  mixing / mingling
- wlaaff+yng  →  stammering
- chyter+yng  →  chattering
- harr+yng  →  snarling
- garr+yng  →  growling
- grisbitt+yng  →  gnashing (of teeth)
- tech+yng  →  teaching
- soun+yng  →  sounding

The gerund is a very typical Latin grammatical feature.
Loanwords

- maner
- people
- longages
- nacions
- confederat
- Germania
- commyxstion
- Normans
- apeyred
- scole
- vsage
- compelled
- gentil

- OF – manner
- OF – people / L populus
- OF – langage
- OF – nacioun
- L – confoederatus
- L – germania
- L – commixtionem
- OF – Norman / L
- OF – ampairier
- L – schola
- OF – usage
- OF – compeller
- OF – gentile / L
## Loanwords

- *moreyn* – OF – moraine / L mori
- *chaunged* – OF – changer
- *lesson* – OF – leçon
- *gramere gramer* – OF – grammaire / L
- *mayster* – OF – maitre
- *construccion* – OF – construcioun / L
- *secunde* – OF – seconde / L secundus
- *Conquest* – L – conquere / OF
- *avauntage* – OF – avantage
- *desavauntage* – OF – disavantage
- *trauayle* – OF – travailler
- *passe* – OF – passer
Loanwords

- acordeþ
- dyuers
- Mercii
- parteners
- contray
- cytés
- profytable

- OF – accorder
- OF – divers
- L – Mercianus / Mercianii
- OF – parçonier
- OF – cuntrée, contrée
- OF – cité
- OF - profitable
Bits and pieces

- for to
- because þat

- Saxonlych
- oplondysch

- Englysch / Frensch / Freynsch

- to (German: *um zu*)
- because (conjunction)

- adjectives with ending: -lych / -lysch

- spelling differs (chancery spelling not yet accepted)
Nouns

Loss of inflection: (ending simplified)

Baugh & Cable (§ 113): Early Middle English: two methods of indicating the plural remained;

strong verbs: (e )+s  weak verbs: (e )+n

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>sg</th>
<th>pl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominative (common)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusative</td>
<td>engel</td>
<td>name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genitive</td>
<td>-s</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dative</td>
<td>-s</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>engle</td>
<td>name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Pronouns in Middle English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal pronouns in Middle English</th>
<th>singular</th>
<th>plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second</td>
<td>thou</td>
<td>thee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third</td>
<td>impersonal</td>
<td>hit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masc</td>
<td>he</td>
<td>him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem</td>
<td>sche</td>
<td>hire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples from Hidgen / Trevisa:
here speche
*techying of hym*
þerefore hyt ys þat
Thank you for your attention and patience!