

THE ANNALS OF CHANGE:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
TWO FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH CHRONICLES

The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
Bilkent University

by

FERİSTE BAYKAN

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

in

The Department of History  
Bilkent University  
Ankara

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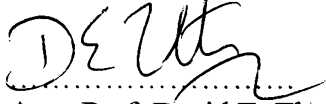
**in**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
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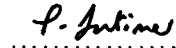
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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.



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## ABSTRACT

In the late fourteenth century, history writing in England was in the process of change. There was a shift from the monastic chronicles in Latin to secular chronicles in the vernacular. This historiographical transition was accompanied by the turbulent years of Richard II's reign, famous for the deposition of this king at the end of this century. Richard II's reign was also remarkable because of the number of chronicles written during that time. This thesis examines two of these chronicles, Adam Usk's *Chronicon* and the *Westminster Chronicle*, with a comparative approach.

In the first place, the tradition of historical writing especially in the late medieval period is examined, looking at the stylistic features and the content characteristics of the chronicles. Secondly, the thesis deals with Adam Usk's chronicle and analyses its significant features. Thirdly, a similar approach is applied to the *Westminster Chronicle*. Finally, these two chronicles are compared.

The conclusion of this thesis is that, the transition from the monastic chronicles to the secular chronicles can be exemplified by these two late fourteenth century chronicles and that an analysis of features in terms of style and content enables historians to reach a better evaluation and understanding of them.

## ÖZET

Ondördüncü yüzyılın sonlarında İngiltere'deki tarih yazıcılığı bir değişim süreci içindeydi. Latince yazılan manastır kroniklerinden (vakayiname) anadilde yazılan secular (dindışı ağırlıklı) kroniklere doğru bir farklılaşma söz konusuydu. Bu tarihsel geçiş, bu yüzyılın sonunda tahttan indirilmesiyle bilinen kral İkinci Richard'ın çalkantılı saltanatıyla çakışıyordu. İkinci Richard'ın saltanatı ayrıca o zamanda yazılan kroniklerin sayısı yüzünden de önem taşımaktaydı. Bu tez, bu kroniklerden iki tanesini, Adam Usk'un *Chronicon* adlı kroniğini ve *Westminster Kroniği*'ni karşılaştırmalı bir açıdan incelemektedir.

İlk olarak, özellikle geç ortaçağ dönemdeki tarih yazıcılığı geleneği, kroniklerin biçimsel özelliklerine ve içerik niteliklerine bakılarak incelenmektedir. İkinci olarak, tez Adam Usk'un kroniğini ele almakta ve onun biçimsel özelliklerini analiz etmektedir. Üçüncü olarak, benzer bir yaklaşım Westminster kroniğine uygulanmaktadır. Son olarak, bu iki kronik karşılaştırılmaktadır.

Bu tezin sonucunda görüyoruz ki, bu iki ondördüncü yüzyıl sonu kroniği, manastır kroniklerinden secular kroniklere geçişi örneklemektedir ve bu kroniklerin biçimsel ve içeriksel özelliklerinin analizi tarihçilerin onları daha iyi değerlendirmesini ve anlamasını sağlayacaktır.

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I want to thank my fiancé Aykut Zaralı, too, for his unending support during the writing process of this thesis. Of course, I must record my gratitude to my friends Zehra Sözer and Özlem Boztaş Büyükyumak who were my source of happiness and hope in my difficult times. Besides them, the Baykan family and the Zaralı family were always with me with their love and patience.

Above all, I would like to thank the founders of Bilkent University, the Dođramacı family, for giving me an opportunity to study in such a university, and the founder of the History Department at Bilkent University, Halil Inalcık.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **A Methodological Question: How to Study a Medieval Text**

Until the 1980s, medievalists neglected studies relating to the composition of medieval chronicles, their cultural position and reception as well as their stylistic features. Moreover, little attention was paid to language and writing even though these are important issues while handling a historical text. Most historians depended on allegorical reading, and medieval texts were seen as the products of an “interregnum” period which was between the Bible-influenced texts of the early medieval period and the classical Latin texts of the Renaissance. Apart from that it was argued that chronicles were unreliable as primary historical sources as they were subject to the prejudices of the time in which they were composed and of the chroniclers themselves. So, chronicles have been source of debate for historiography as it is concerned with the study of historical texts.

More recently, however, medieval scholars like Brian Stock, A.J. Minnis and Paul Strohm have challenged those ideas and have argued for the necessity of studying in the fields of historiography, literacy, language, textuality and linguistics with reference to historical writings. As a result, while once historians focused only on political and social implications, currently cultural studies and the political and ideological role of the texts have replaced this focus. Now medievalists such as Gabriela Spiegel, David Aers and

Marjorie Reeves study the theoretical and ideological structures underlying the medieval texts in order to illuminate the medieval historical writing and the medieval mind.<sup>1</sup>

In order to do a research related to the historiography of Middle Ages, I propose that the first step should be to make a survey of the theories concerning the study of the medieval historical writing. Such a survey will hopefully enable us to learn about the different methodological approaches to the medieval chronicles. Among the works concerned with the theory of historiography, the studies of A.J. Minnis, Paul Strohm, Brian Stock and Gabriela Spiegel stand out as being fully concentrated on the late medieval historiographical studies that are closely related to the subject of this thesis.

A.J. Minnis claims “the study of late medieval literary theory is still in its infancy” because of the few number of studies in this area.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, she attempts to find a way to facilitate the development of such theories in her work. According to Minnis, for the Later Middle Ages, the central event was the emergence of the view that the human author possessed a high status and stylistic strategies of his own. That meant that the authorship moved from the divine realm to the human (from divine authorship to human authorship). Therefore, Minnis argues that medievalists should take into account this human element while studying a medieval text since the text is increasingly the personal construction of this author whose intention in writing is a determining factor in the content and style. Apart from that, Minnis emphasizes the element of inter-textuality in medieval writings as these are inclined to possess many references such as to biblical sources. For Minnis, knowledge of how a text was understood in its own time is also of

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<sup>1</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. *The Idea of the Vernacular. An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. xiii-xvi.

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Minnis. *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), p. vii.

considerable importance in our attempt to grasp the significance of what was written. For such an understanding Minnis argues that we should focus on the style of the text.<sup>3</sup>

Paul Strohm argues that an historical text is evasive, silent and that it has its own suppressions and omissions. The text can also sometimes be misleading or forgetful; as a result of which the textual condition is non-transparent. For Strohm, this is why the text itself should be object of study: one should look for what the text includes and excludes. Concluding from this, Strohm maintains that the historian's task should be to try to find out what the text hides. The ideas of Sigmund Freud have influenced Strohm's premises and, following Freud, Strohm argues that a text has its own mind, which contains repressed ideas underneath it. Therefore, he claims that by making a textual analysis which focuses on the stylistic and linguistic features of the text, the historian can unearth the text's knowledge and its implicit or cancelled opinions.<sup>4</sup>

Brian Stock is another scholar who writes about the theory of medieval studies by working on a wide range of medieval texts as well as modern ones.<sup>5</sup> Differently from Paul Strohm, Stock draws our attention to the growth of interest in language in the Middle Ages. He discusses the possibilities in this area opened up by new forms of cooperation between history and literature. He argues for the necessity of uniting the literary techniques with the studies of mentality for studying medieval texts. On this issue Stock states: "if one wishes to understand medieval culture, to the degree that this is possible, one is obliged to adopt methods that are medieval in origin but have only recently been rediscovered by investigations in linguistics, philosophy, anthropology and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. vii-xviii, 10-15.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis, Ms.: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. xi-xv.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text; on the Uses of the Past* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 16-30.

psychoanalysis”.<sup>6</sup> What stands out in Stock’s ideas is the handling of linguistics as a major element of historiography. Stock’s references to Ferdinand Saussure and Michele Foucault set his basis for the discussion of the relation between language, culture and history. Stock’s ideas have become very fashionable among medievalists, and he is now considered to be one of the leading scholars whose ideas have influenced medieval studies, especially the study of medieval historical texts.

Gabrielle Spiegel’s theories of the study of medieval historical writing are mostly influenced by Jacques Derrida and, therefore Spiegel emphasises the formal properties of the texts more than the contextual ones. According to her, the content of the chronicle may be real and the style optional but the text is inclined to include miracles, myths, saints and visions and it is liable to be affected by the prophetic view dominant in the medieval period. This situation and the fact that the text reflects political goals and propagandistic aims, create various problems for the study of historical writings. Spiegel asserts that these problems can only be overcome by a textual strategy, which means focusing on the formal properties of the text such as its language and style. Apart from that, in her chronicle studies, which are not limited to Europe, Spiegel looks at the chronicles’ responses to literary traditions and their relation with the social realities in order to set a linguistic and intellectual framework for the text.<sup>7</sup>

When we look at these theories in general, the trend towards the textual analysis of medieval historical writings becomes clear. In a way, for these scholars, the content of the chronicles should no longer form the primary focus of research, presumably because

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text, the Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. xiii-xx, 44-56, 83-98; Gabrielle Spiegel, “Forging the Past: The Language of Historical Truth in Middle Ages”, *The History Teacher*, 17 (1984), 267-78.

their reliability was susceptible owing to their biased accounts or their deficiencies or omissions. So, for these scholars, the solution for this problem about chronicles might be looking at the text, in addition to the study of the context. Currently historians, under the influence of such theories adopt new perspectives while handling medieval historical writings. I think it is proper to look at some of the leading historians studying chronicles in order to see how they have studied them and what they have emphasized about them.

One of the foremost historians working in the field of medieval chronicles, especially those of the late medieval period, is John Taylor.<sup>8</sup> Taylor has handled various chronicles and he was the first one to study most of them by making an analytical synthesis of the chronicles and by trying to put them in a context of historical writing. He has looked at histories by Peter (Pierre) Langtoft and Ranulf Higden, and identified the problems raised from the manuscripts. He has also emphasized the literary and cultural achievements of the fourteenth century. The period from 1950 to the 1990s was very productive in his field and, although he started his studies in an early decade, his concentration on the chronicles and manuscripts enabled him to undertake fresh and modern research which has been acknowledged by more recent scholars. Another reason why Taylor is so significant is that he has studied a great number of chronicles.

Another important historian who has dealt with medieval English chronicles in depth is Antonia Gransden whose two-volume study has become the basic reference work on historical texts for medievalists. Gransden not only studies the content of the chronicles with their political and social aspects but she also joins the modern movement and deals with their formal aspects such as their language and structures. While studying

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<sup>8</sup> Barrie Dobson, "John Taylor: A Tribute", in *Church and Chronicles in the Middle Ages, Essays Presented to John Taylor*, ed. by Ian Wood and G. A. Loud (London: Rio Grande: Ohio: Hambledon Press, 1991), pp. xi-xviii.

chronicles she first organizes the chronicles according to the reign or period to which they belong. Then she analyzes them according to the tradition in which they were written, such as monastic, secular or lay. When she handles an individual chronicle she explains what it tells and how it tells it. In her work Gransden covers a wide period, from the sixth century to the sixteenth century and introduces in detail hundreds of chronicles. Therefore hers is a kind of principal introductory work into the world of chronicles, which has been left untouched for many years by historians. Gransden's peculiarity lies in the fact that she is aware of the on-going discussion on the study of chronicles and she seeks to make her work receptive to them by including all kinds of information about the chronicles.<sup>9</sup>

G.H. Martin is another historian who has studied chronicles belonging to the late medieval period, especially those written during the reign of Richard II. He describes a chronicle as a monograph on the then recent and recoverable past. While handling a chronicle, Martin chooses to concentrate on the issues of patronage, the importance of the date of chronicle's composition, and the properties of its author. He groups the texts according to their date of composition. For him the aim of the chronicler is very important and we can only understand it from the stylistic nature of the chronicle.<sup>10</sup> This emphasis on the author is also shared by Robert A. Albano. For Albano, the rise of the concept of historical imagination in 1966 was a turning point in historiography because it acknowledged the human element and human perception in history. According to Albano, writing history is an interpretative and reconstructive act and this causes many

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<sup>9</sup> Antonia Gransden. *Historical Writing in England*. 2 vols. (I: c.550-c.1307; II: c.1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974-1982). II, iii-xv, 454-60.

<sup>10</sup> G. H. Martin, "Narrative Sources for the Reign of Richard II", in *The Age of Richard II*, ed. by James L. Gillespie (Stroud: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 61-5.

problems for the study of chronicles. Among these are the authorship problems, the issue of genre, plagiarism and the aim of the chronicler. Albano states that, in order to overcome those problems, one should look at the stylistic devices of a text such as its organization, method and ideology. This approach can also provide us with a medieval perspective and the historiographical style.<sup>11</sup>

Marjorie Reeves' main concern in studying medieval texts is the pattern and purpose of the texts. In her essays, Reeves quotes the ideas of A. J. Minnis on authorship, and argues for the necessity of identifying underlying patterns in historical texts as much as their political dimension.<sup>12</sup> According to Reeves, it is necessary to understand the religious and ideological background of the period to which a text belongs in order to understand and evaluate the text because, especially for the Middle Ages, prophetic expectations were at the highest, as Gabriela Spiegel's theory mentioned above states. Almost all medieval texts were shaped under the influence of the prophetic sense of the medieval people. As a result, for Reeves, one of the recurrent themes of historical writing was religion and church reform.<sup>13</sup>

Thea Summerfield and Roger Mott deal with the chronicles in a different way because they make comparative studies of various chronicles. Summerfield acknowledges the theories of Brian Stock and Gabriela Spiegel and emphasizes the need for textual analysis of the chronicles.<sup>14</sup> In her comparison of the early fourteenth-century verse chronicles by Peter (Pierre) Langtoft and Robert Mannyng, she first focuses on the

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<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Albano, *Middle English Historiography* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 5-35.

<sup>12</sup> Marjorie Reeves, *The Prophetic Sense of History in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Aldershot: Brookfield, Vt: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 12-63.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-111.

<sup>14</sup> Thea Summerfield, *The Matter of King's Lives: The Design of Past and Present in the Early Fourteenth-Century Verse Chronicles by Pierre de Langtoft and Robert Mannyng* (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 2-17.

interaction between each text and the social and political circumstances of the period, and then on the stylistic features of the texts. For her, the existence and the meaning of the texts become understandable after close reading and comparison of narrative strategies. She also argues that the texts are highly valuable for the history of ideas (history of mentality) and thus we must pay attention to the aims of the chroniclers. In his study of the crisis of 1397 in Richard II's reign, Mott takes two chronicles and compares them according to their interpretation of the crisis. However, instead of making a traditional type of comparison, which focuses on different narratives of political events, he focuses on why the chroniclers wrote differently. He argues that the authors' perspectives, attitudes towards politics and their writing styles were important contributing factors in this difference.<sup>15</sup>

Barrie Dobson deals with the monastic tradition of English medieval historiography.<sup>16</sup> He studies monasticism and church history, its development and especially its decline in the fifteenth century. In this study Dobson's main concern is the personnel of the historical text. Therefore, he puts more emphasis on the history writer than the actual writing because the characteristics of the writer and the circumstances around him are influential factors affecting the history writing. As a result, the background of the author, his profession, his world view and the social group to which he belonged, stand out as determining factors for how the text was written and what it included or excluded.

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<sup>15</sup> Roger Mott, "Richard II and the Crisis of 1397", in *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages, Essays Presented to John Taylor*, ed. by Ian Wood and G. A. Loud (London: Rio Grande: Ohio: Hambledon Press, 1991), pp. 165-178.

<sup>16</sup> Barrie Dobson, "Contrasting Chronicles: Historical Writing at York and Durham in the Later Middle Ages", in *Church and Chronicles in the Middle Ages, Essays Presented to John Taylor*, ed. by Ian Wood and G. A. Loud (London: Rio Grande: Ohio: Hambledon Press, 1991), pp. 201-18.



Looking at these historians and their works, we can see that they apply theories concerning the stylistic features, but also it is clear that they have not completely failed to work on the content. The merit of all these approaches is that they provide us with an almost complete assessment of an historical text and thus the text becomes more vivid with all its contextual and stylistic elements. Moreover, the content of a chronicle in the light of formal studies becomes more enlightening as a source for political, social and especially cultural histories.

Keeping in mind all of these, I propose that we should relate them to the subject of this thesis, which is the analysis of two late fourteenth-century chronicles. In this analysis, my method will be adopting both the contextual and formal approaches. That means, I will make analysis of these chronicles' features in terms of both style and content, because none of these features is sufficient alone for a complete assessment of the reliability of the chronicle. The study of the text can tell us about how it was written, while it is only through the contextual analysis that text's content and omissions become comprehensible.

For a better understanding of a medieval chronicle, the first chapter of the thesis will deal with the tradition of chronicle writing in the medieval England. For this purpose the general characteristics of chronicles written in the late medieval period will be presented. Moreover, the most famous fourteenth-century chronicle in England, Ranulf Higden's the *Polychronicon*, will be introduced and there will be discussion of reasons why it was such an influential work for the period.

In the second and third chapters, I will analyze respectively two fourteenth-century chronicles, Adam Usk's *Chronicon* and the *Westminster Chronicle*. In these

analyses both the content and the formal aspects of the texts will be under inspection. Namely, I will look at their content, their style, their language and their structure along with their purpose. These chapters will have basically the same structure which begins with an introduction of the chronicle and then continues with the biography of the chroniclers. Then they will both analyse the stylistic features of the chronicles and, finally there will be discussions concerning the characteristics of the contents of these chronicles. The structuring of the analyses in the same order, applied in Chapters II and III, intends to aid comparison between the two chronicles.

In the concluding chapter, these two chronicles will be compared. Here I will first seek what a non-monastic chronicler would have in common with a monastic chronicler, and then focus on the differences between the two chronicles. Meanwhile, I will be trying to discover the reasons for the similarities and differences. In order to achieve this aim, I will take accounts of the same events from both chronicles and compare them, such as the accounts of the Peasants' Revolt, the advisors of Richard II, the Barons' Revolt, or issues such as patronage and the portrayal of the king. This inquiry will hopefully provide an insight into the diverse mentalities and priorities of medieval historians because these two chronicles are concerned with the same time span and, to a large extent, the same events from different perspectives. Finally, there will be a short discussion of the historiographical assessment of these chronicles in the framework of medieval chronicle tradition. Here I will also suggest what can be concluded at the end of such a research on these chronicles, and will ask whether we can describe them as valuable sources for history and why or why not.

# CHAPTER I

## THE LATE MEDIEVAL CHRONICLE: A TRADITION OF THE *POLYCHRONICON*?

### **Stylistic Features of the Late Medieval English Chronicle:**

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were similar from the historiographical perspective because historians used almost the same methods and the same outlook in their writings. Monasteries continued to produce chronicles; however, at the same time secular clergymen were also becoming productive in Europe. History was still being written in Latin, but the fourteenth century became more famous for its vernacular chroniclers.<sup>1</sup> That is, at the end of the fourteenth century the medieval tradition of historical writing was still intact in England. Contemporary history was being written by monks, secular clerks and laymen, who mainly produced chronicles in Latin prose. In the reign of Richard II, there was a marked revival in the production of chronicles. Substantial works were written by Thomas Walsingham at St. Albans, Henry Knighton at St. Mary's, Leicester, and by anonymous monastic chroniclers (this situation was common characteristic of the monastic chronicles) at Westminster, Canterbury and Evesham. An important secular clergyman of the period writing a chronicle was Adam of Usk.<sup>2</sup> Almost all of those chronicles were continuations to Ranulf Higden's the *Polychronicon*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Beryl Smalley. *Historians in the Middle Ages* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974). pp. 191-3.

<sup>2</sup>Antonia Gransden. *Historical Writing in England, II*, 465-6.

<sup>3</sup>For information on the *Polychronicon* see this chapter, pp. 28-31.

### **Authorship of the chronicles:**

It was the annals and chronicles of the monks that constituted the chief contribution of the Middle Ages to historiography.<sup>4</sup> Almost all of the chroniclers recorded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and most of the fourteenth century were clergy, mainly monks, although there were various history writings by secular clerks in the twelfth century. Among the monastic centres where history writing was at its highest was St Albans. For nearly two centuries the abbey maintained a continuous historical tradition. First, there had been Roger of Wendover, a didactic and inventive scribe, and then his pupil Matthew Paris; later there were William Rishanger and Thomas Walsingham.<sup>5</sup>

After the twelfth century, strangely enough, there was almost no historical writings by secular clergymen. In the late medieval period the classes of people who contributed to the medieval tradition of contemporary reportage changed again as the monastic chronicles declined.<sup>6</sup> Monks, friars and regular canons lost their dominance as the main observers, recorders and commentators on public affairs. The fifteenth century in particular marked the final decline of the full-scale monastic chronicle. As the main chroniclers of current events, the religious gave way to secular clerks during the fourteenth century. Then in the fifteenth century secular clerks in their turn gave their place to laymen. This change in the categories of men writing history had an important consequence: firstly, Anglo-Norman for a short time replaced Latin as the usual language of history writing, and then, English gained dominance.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the fourteenth

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<sup>4</sup> Paul K. Conkin and Roland N. Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge: the History and Theory of History* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Forum Press, 1989), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Chronicles of the Age of Chivalry* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1987), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Trevor-Roper, *The Chronicles of the Wars of the Roses* (London: Bramley Books, 1996), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, II*, xi-xii.

century was the transition period when we have both the monastic and secular personnel of the chroniclers.

While the prominence of the monasteries as centres of learning was fading, that of universities and town schools increased. In general, the towns and the way of life they fostered were far away from promoting the monastic life, the matrix of the medieval chronicle. Although the traditional ways of medieval Christian historiography were not quickly abandoned, it was apparent that the chroniclers were straining hard to accommodate the information and ideas produced by the intellectual explosion of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Not only in England, but also in the Continent, monastic chronicles diminished in number quality and scope.<sup>8</sup>

In the fifteenth century, the historiography of medieval England witnessed another change: a decline in the monastic and secular chronicle tradition which was partly counter-balanced by the rise of the town chronicles. At the same time the *Brut* chronicles, some in Latin, some in French but most in English gained in popularity. The earlier *Brut*, to 1333, was the earliest known work beginning with the Brutus legend to be written in Anglo-Norman prose. The fifteenth century *Brut* and the London chronicles are in fact directly related, because the *Brut* chronicles were partly derived from the London ones. But they also differed because the *Brut* chronicles all grew from one stock, the Brutus legend, while the London chronicles evolved from notes added to lists of the mayors and sheriffs of the city. In addition, the *Brut* chronicles with their patriotic and chivalric tone appealed especially to the noble and knightly classes, the London

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<sup>8</sup> Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 144-6.

chronicles suited the tastes of the city oligarchy.<sup>9</sup> As London developed, the first attempts were made by ordinary lay people, merchants, scriveners, craftsman, to write their own history. Despite their importance as a secular and largely vernacular voice, much about the London chronicles remains a mystery; we do not know how the chronicle trend started, why, or exactly when. They usually belong to the fifteenth century and are nearly always in English. Their focus is London and they are written by Londoners.<sup>10</sup>

One problem with the authorship in the medieval chronicles was the existence of multiple authors. This fact indeed complicates the analysis of the chronicles. Medieval chronicles are quite often the product of more than one author. In addition, even chronicles penned by one individual may contain a multiplicity of styles and modes. As a common practice, medieval historians would borrow from earlier texts. In fact such borrowing was not considered as plagiarism, but rather as a tribute to the authority by the historian. While incorporating the other texts, the historians would also be adding the styles of these texts into the bodies of their own texts.<sup>11</sup> As a result it is normal that we have mixed genres, mixed styles as well as mixed authors in medieval historical writings.

#### **Language:**

At the beginning of the fourteenth century the majority of the chronicles in England were still being written in Latin or Anglo-Norman French. However, political turmoil, on a large scale, and on an international case had brought with it an emerging and evolving sense of national pride and patriotism. Englishmen began to become proud of their land

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<sup>9</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 73, 221-7.

<sup>10</sup> Mary-Rose McLaren, *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Albano, *Middle English Historiography*, p. 20.

and of themselves. Such an emerging identity was reflected in the literature of that century as more and more literary works were being written in vernacular English.<sup>12</sup>

Also there was the growth in the uses of literacy and the development of literacy for practical purposes such as making records and using writing for ordinary business instead of using writing solely for religious or royal purposes. Thus, the culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which were marked with the influence of the Anglo-Norman and Latin culture, was to be replaced by a lay literacy, which grew out of bureaucracy and the accumulation of documents, starting from the fourteenth century in England.<sup>13</sup> When we look at the body of the chronicles brought together by E.D. Kennedy in *A Manual of Writings in Middle English*, we can see that there are 115 texts written in the vernacular between 1050 and 1500: of these texts, few of them were written or appear to have been written before 1400, but most were written after that date.<sup>14</sup>

The writing of the English chronicle, perhaps more than any other type of writing from that time, best exemplifies the emergence and growth of both that pride and the use of vernacular tongue.<sup>15</sup> Although earlier attempts had been made during the high Middle Ages to write chronicles in vernacular, these earlier attempts achieved little or no popularity, squashed by the supremacy of the Norman-speaking court and the Latin speaking church. However, in the fourteenth century, chronicles in English gained

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<sup>12</sup> Derek Pearsall, "Language and Literature", in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval England*, ed. by Nigel Saul (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 262; Albano, *Middle English Historiography*, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307* (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 5-19.

<sup>14</sup> E.D. Kennedy, *A Manual of Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500, XII Chronicles and other Historical Writing*, general director Albert E. Hartung (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967-1989), p. 2598.

<sup>15</sup> Albano, *Middle English Historiography*, pp. 1-5.

popularity, although both French and especially Latin did not disappear for many years, a chronicle tradition written in the vernacular became established.

**Purpose:**

The writing of history in the medieval period served a variety of purposes. Some works, especially royal biographies, were intended to provide rulers with examples of behaviours. Each person was thought to be an exemplum based on a conceptualization of contemporary meaningful ethical behaviour to be imitated in the present. Rulers were also supposed to benefit morally from such examples, but they might also learn political lessons from them. Another purpose of historical works was to record events for the benefit of posterity. However, perhaps the most important purpose was to provide the reader with news; to satisfy his curiosity about current affairs. The reader might find the information useful, and he would certainly find it interesting and enjoyable. Nor should it be forgotten that the desire to entertain was itself often in the mind of the historian. A historian's intention to entertain might find expression in the use of elegant Latin.<sup>16</sup>

Chroniclers wrote to edify, to entertain, and to inspire. The traditional exemplarist use of history is much in evidence: villainy is to be punished and virtue rewarded.<sup>17</sup> History could convey a dreadful warning; maybe the chronicler could show how the sins of the people had led to disaster. An element of sheer curiosity also entered into the search for news items and more rarely into the scholarly investigation of antiquities. An example of a chronicler, who wished his text to serve for edification, teaching or for

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<sup>16</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 459; Janet Coleman, "Late Scholastic Memoria et Reminiscentia: its Uses and Abuses", in *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Piero Boitani and Anno Torti (Tubingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1986), p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Conkin and Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge*, p. 23.



preaching, was William of Malmesbury. Through his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* he both tried to edify people and also included entertaining stories in his text.<sup>18</sup>

Among the purposes of the monasteries while writing history was their desire to gain prestige. Such prestige would depend on a prestigious past, which might even be better proved by the existence of relics or holy materials within the monasteries. Therefore, the monks wrote about the glorious past of their monasteries or included relevant information in order to prove the holy past of their monasteries.<sup>19</sup> For example, *The Westminster Chronicle*, while narrating the events around or in the abbey, makes a few references to the Edward's shrine in the abbey, possibly to gain prestige through it.

Kings and nobles were increasingly interested in history during this period, and two members of the aristocracy, Sir Thomas Gray of Heton and John Tiptoft Earl of Worcester actually wrote histories themselves.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, both royalty and noblemen liked to read or listen to history in the chivalric style, particularly if it was amusing. Moreover, history was useful as it could be used to persuade. So, it was of service to the kings and to their opponents alike as propaganda. The past itself constituted an ideological structure of argument for legitimacy, and history writing was used in legitimising propagandistic and political goals as it reported and recorded past.<sup>21</sup> Rulers and corporate bodies, such as town councils and religious houses, needed to have records kept for purposes of reference and to substantiate their political and legal

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<sup>18</sup> Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, pp. 115, 147; Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages*, p. 185; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum, History of the English Kings*, 2 vols, ed and trans. By R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, II*, 462-3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text*, p. xiii.

claims.<sup>22</sup> So, chronicles served as record books for those. Pleasure and pride in the past added to the desire to have events recorded. So, the history writings played important roles as records of past as they were used for what they reported.

#### **Audience:**

In general, the chroniclers seem to have felt free to express their opinions without fear of retributive action from those in power. This was no doubt partly because they usually wrote for a limited audience. Monks wrote for their own communities and perhaps for others of their order. If the author had a patron, whether an ecclesiastic or a layman, he wrote primarily for that patron and his household. However, government censorship and also government propaganda had influences on the accounts in the chronicles as in the case of Richard II's deposition. For instance, three important chroniclers including Thomas Walsingham gave the Lancastrian version of Richard II's deposition and copied extracts from the official account on the rolls of parliament.<sup>23</sup> The historian of a family, episcopal see, abbey, town or "people" expected to find interested readers or hearers. As a member of a group himself, he would identify with his theme and his audience. It was his honour and his duty to satisfy their demands.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the concern for finding and preserving an audience were important in determining the content and style of chronicles.

#### **Sources:**

In the pre-conquest period, the chronicles were poor in their documentary sources. After the conquest, however, there appeared an increase of explicit and calculated documentation. The reason for this shift was the rapid proliferation of charters, genuine or forged, of land ownership and rights. In the post-conquest culture, record keeping was

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<sup>22</sup> Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages*, p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 458-60.

<sup>24</sup> Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages*, p. 184.

both an immediately practical and a more broadly significant new feature of historical narration, important for establishing new rights, statuses and incomes or uncovering putative old ones.<sup>25</sup> Thus, commonly used sources were monographs, histories and chronicles along with increasingly supply of letters, charters, treaties and laws. Some historians had a propagandist reason for inserting them; others saw documents as an integral part of the story they had to tell.<sup>26</sup>

According to Antonia Gransden:

The strength of the tradition of English medieval historiography lay not in the cultivation of abstract ideas about history, not in the composition of works unified by a literary structure or consistent theme. It lay in the contemporary reportage; eyewitness accounts based on oral evidence and on documents put together piecemeal in chronological order to create a serial episodic narrative.<sup>27</sup>

The medieval chronicler believed in the value of eyewitness accounts. For example, Jean Froissart informed his readers what he saw or precisely who told him various events, thus citing his authorities, in order to lend authenticity and authority to his reconstructed account of events. Just as theologians and lawyers supported themselves with cited authorities, so too historians cited authentic testimonies to weigh and compare them. Thus, an omnipresent witness to the declarative knowledge, which corresponds to perfect memory, is actualized and revealed. So, the most important function of the medieval eyewitnesses and memory were adding authenticity to the text.<sup>28</sup>

### Structure and Style:

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Galloway, "Writing History in England", in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 257; Clanchy, pp. 1-4.

<sup>26</sup> Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages*, pp. 190-1.

<sup>27</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 458-9.

<sup>28</sup> Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages*, p. 186; Coleman, "Late Scholastic Memoria et Reminiscentia", pp. 41-4.

Although the personnel and then the language of the chronicles changed during the late medieval period, generally speaking the structure of the chronicles and their content did not. The vernacular London chronicles of the fifteenth century were annalistic in form and local in orientation in much the same way as the earlier Latin chronicles had been.<sup>29</sup> Medieval chroniclers had a rudimentary structure; the norm was a record of events in chronological order, with only yearly divisions. There were, of course, exceptions to this generalization, such as William of Malmesbury who had largely regnal chronology instead of an annual one (and who sometimes did not have strict chronology at all), or Ranulf Higden who adopted an elaborate structure in order to fit all seven books of his *Polychronicon* into a biblical framework.<sup>30</sup> The clerical historians seldom rose above the level of a series of chronological events. Most often the sequence of years alone guided their narrative, within each year events and states of affairs were simply lined up. Sentences were connected by the noncommittal “and” or not at all.<sup>31</sup>

Medieval writers did not necessarily think of their texts as being genre-specific or genre-bound too, and the terms used today for classifying such literary works are merely modern inventions. So, one may reasonably expect the combination of elements of a number of genres and styles from the texts of the Middle Ages. Among other stylistic devices used in historical texts was the use of symbolism and exemplification. The usage of such devices and the choice of styles were closely related to the purpose of the text because both were used to edify the reader.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, xii; Galloway, “Writing History in England”, p. 256. For these chronicles see McLaren, *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century*.

<sup>30</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 455. For more on this framework see this chapter, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Conkin and Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge*, p. 24; Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, p. 127.

<sup>32</sup> Albano, *Middle English Historiography*, pp. 20-7.

Some authors, whose main aim was to amuse, adopted for their contemporary history the chivalric values characteristic of romance literature. Although romance historiography never took root in England it should not be regarded as wholly separate from the English chronicles. Many of the chroniclers in England were influenced by chivalric tastes: for example, they included graphic battle scenes in their narrations.<sup>33</sup> Jean Froissart, a fourteenth-century Frenchman chronicling the events of the Hundred Years' War, gave us a good example of such battlefield information.<sup>34</sup> In his chronicle, Froissart was concerned with the nobility of actions, with the degree to which they met chivalric standards rather than the cause itself. He was an admirer of chivalry and he respected high rank, praised knights and wrote at length on warfare.<sup>35</sup>

Every history in part reflects the intellectual outlook of its time. The aristocratic and chivalric elements in Froissart's chronicle revealed an interest that was dominant in his time and one that commanded his enthusiasm. When he looked at the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, Froissart disapproved of it mainly because it was led by rather low and rude types.<sup>36</sup> Concluding from that, it is obvious that there were chroniclers of glorious action, and the splendour and miseries of chivalry and war. Such chroniclers become popular and widely read since they addressed the literary taste as well.<sup>37</sup>

Another stylistic feature of the medieval chronicles is the inclusion of autobiographical details such as the first person pronouns in the text. In fact, personal memoirs were the specialty of medieval historiography. That means the author also

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<sup>33</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 459-60.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, ed. and trans. by Geoffrey Brereton (London: New York: Penguin Books, 1968).

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Brereton, *Introduction to Chronicles*, pp. 9-10, 18; Peter F. Ainsworth, *Jean Froissart and the Fabric of History: Truth, Myth and Fiction in the Chroniques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 77-85.

<sup>36</sup> Conkin and Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge*, pp. 26-7; Brereton, pp. 20-1; Froissart, pp. 211-230.

<sup>37</sup> Trevor-Roper, *Age of Chivalry*, p. 16.

included details about himself while recounting events. However, the memoir writer described his experiences as a member of a group instead of focusing on himself: he observed and participated, but did not put himself forward in his own right.<sup>38</sup> So, as A.J. Minnis argues, the medieval period witnessed the emergence of the human author in his text.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, this was reflected in the autobiographical style of such chroniclers as Adam Usk and Jean Froissart.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Characteristics of Contents of the Late Medieval Chronicle in England:**

Medieval chronicles bewilder the casual reader with their range of subject matter and variations according to circumstances more than any other medieval texts. Reports on eclipses, weather, harvests, disease, military and political maneuvers, birth of malformed children, obituaries and omens as well as moral and spiritual lessons were all included in these chronicles. As a result, their texts appear like encyclopedias, which is why they are good as primary sources.<sup>41</sup> The monastic chroniclers recorded remarkable events, struggles to found, preserve and extend monasteries, conflicts with kings, and such news as they reached their ears from the outer world and many other things.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, their chronicles included almost every kind of information from political issues to weather conditions.

Among the factors influencing the political content of the chronicles were royal or ecclesiastical authorities. The expansion of political class was reflected by an increase in their influence on historiography. Traces of government propaganda are found in an

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<sup>38</sup> Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages*, pp. 188-9.

<sup>39</sup> On Minnis and human author, see Introduction of this thesis, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> For Usk and autobiographical information, see Chapter II, pp. 45-8. For Froissart and personal experience, see Brereton, *Chronicles*, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, pp. 121-6, 147.

<sup>42</sup> Conkin and Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge*, p. 23.

increasingly large number of chronicles, especially in the fifteenth century. Such propaganda might be introduced because the author was persuaded, probably by his patrons that the official point of view was right or because he wanted to flatter his audience; or, it might have been included as a result of a direct command from the center of power. Whatever the reason, the propaganda motive dominated medieval historiography and bias is often built into the narrative.<sup>43</sup>

Changing politics and patronage affected medieval chroniclers of all centuries.<sup>44</sup> The growing importance of the nobility and other magnates in the kingdom found expression in the chronicles. Every monastery had its patron and its benefactors who often had a place and were praised in the house's chronicle. Every secular clerk and most laymen had at least one patron. A chronicle by such an author was intended to satisfy the patron and was slanted with that end in view.<sup>45</sup> Brian Stock claims that any consideration of the uses of literacy immediately raises the issues of power relations in society, and so, when we see a means of communication, we should ask about its patrons, who controls it and why. That means patronage is of crucial importance to medieval writings.<sup>46</sup> The major patrons were the royal family, the aristocracy, the universities and the archbishops. It was hard to obtain one of these as a patron especially in medieval times, yet patronage was omnipresent and nothing worked without it. Consequently, while patronage was necessary for the intellectuals to continue their works comfortably, it was hard to find one and harder to please the obtained one.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, xii; Trevor-Roper, *Age of Chivalry*, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Trevor-Roper, *Wars of the Roses*, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> According to Gransden, the authors wrote to please their patrons. *Historical Writing in England*, II, xii.

<sup>46</sup> Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text*, p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> R. N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 64-72.

The crown exercised a vast amount of ecclesiastical patronage (appointment to offices and benefices) which was made up in various ways, such as the advowson of Crown Livings and of the appointment to mastership of certain hospitals. For example, during the thirty-five years of the reign of Edward I, the Crown presented about 600 persons to about 1000 benefices. The magnates also had a good many benefices and offices in their gift. The lords rewarded their servants, and bishops and abbots had even more benefices to give away. When the colleges came to be founded at the universities, they had to have patronage to dispense to their alumni or friends, hence the acquisition of college livings. There was also indirect patronage which means that a bishop or an abbot might often be pressed by the king or a magnate to give a living to one of the latter's protégés. For example, Edward II, when Prince of Wales, during a single year (1304-5) sent 64 letters to abbots and priors asking for benefices or pensions for his clerks.<sup>48</sup>

In most medieval writings, one of the basic themes was the church and the questions related to church. According to Robert A. Albano, medieval history was written to present the lessons of faith. The religious interpretation of a chronicle can tell us a lot because the chroniclers were often interested in the role of religion on earth. Since most of the chroniclers under discussion were clerics, it is not surprising that they would often include the role and the purpose of the church and of ecclesiastical officials within their historiography.<sup>49</sup> Apart from that, many of the texts concentrated on the Church and they asked what the holy Church was, that is, they questioned the existing Church and its practices. For example, William Langland in *Piers Plowman* questioned the role of Church; or Geoffrey Chaucer (in *Canterbury Tales*), John Wyclif and again

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<sup>48</sup> W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 30-5.

<sup>49</sup> Albano, *Middle English Historiography*, pp. 3, 31.



Langland asked for Church reform; or John Gower asked about the forms of Christian ethics.<sup>50</sup>

Church reform was a recurrent theme in most of the medieval historical writings which means that the church members were often criticized and blamed for being corrupt in the texts.<sup>51</sup> These notions were often voiced in chronicles. The crux of the problem lies in the interpretation of the complaints made against the clergy, which appear regularly during the medieval period, and actions taken against them. There were strong objections to some clerical activities, their sinfulness, their embroilment in secular enterprise, their pride, absenteeism and sexual faults. Such complaints were common in every age. As a result, almost every major writer at some point complained about the state of the church and its ministers. Such written complaints reflected a search for a scapegoat at one level. At another level, they worked as a safety valve to ensure equilibrium in a society where interaction between the clergy and laity, between the ecclesiastical and the secular, was unavoidable. Such narrations functioned to lessen the pressure on laity who felt moral and spiritual inferiority. In particular, the laymen claimed that the church was in need of reform because it was composed of clergy and who, as humans, were subject to failings. Therefore, in fact anti-clericalism had little to do with religion itself.<sup>52</sup>

Travelling, the places visited and the events and the people, which were witnessed during the travels, also found their way into medieval chronicles. Historians, who travelled or had travelled to collect stories, to follow a patron or spend a life in administrative service, were a distinctively new feature of the fourteenth century. This

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<sup>50</sup> David Aers. *Faith, Ethics and Church: Writing in England. 1360-1409* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. 2000), pp. ix-x. 1-23.

<sup>51</sup> Marjorie Reeves, *Prophetic Sense*, p. 97-9.

<sup>52</sup> R. N. Swanson. *Religion and Devotion in Europe c. 1215 c. 1515* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 249-53.

was connected with the change of the authorship of chronicles because of the passing of history writing from monks, who were expected to stay in their monasteries, to the secular clergymen, who were relatively more independent in the issue of traveling. This meant that the historian would be travelling more. In the hands of such new writers, the criteria of verification began to shift away from documentation alone to personal experience as well. Among the chroniclers who travelled were Jean Froissart and Adam Usk.<sup>53</sup> In Adam Usk's chronicle, for example, we see the traces of travelling and the dominance of eye-witness accounts as a source of historical information.<sup>54</sup>

For medieval people, the supernatural had great importance. They believed in the healing power of relics, the saints and miracles. This was a part of medieval popular culture and, more importantly, this was common belief for medieval people. The interest in what they saw as supernatural was reflected in the content of the medieval texts.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, a predilection for the miraculous became a characteristic of medieval history-writing as well. We can see that the reporting of portents, wonders, and miracles is very common in the chronicles. Such reports certainly document the credulity of the age, but also they show an eagerness for novelty quite like that of present day devourers of sensational stories in the press or on television. The medieval historiographer wrote of a world which included supernatural agents. Therefore it is normal to find miracles, resurrections, saints, myths and visions in medieval chronicles.<sup>56</sup>

An early and exceptional example of this tradition was seen in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie*, especially in Book 7 of this chronicle which is

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<sup>53</sup> Galloway, "Writing History in England", pp. 272-5.

<sup>54</sup> See below, Chapter II, pp. 40, 49, 60.

<sup>55</sup> Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 9-14.

<sup>56</sup> Conkin and Stromberg, *Heritage and Challenge*, pp. 21-4; Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages*, p. 186; Spiegel, *The Past as Text*, p. xii

about the prophecies of Merlin.<sup>57</sup> In this part of the chronicle, other-worldly elements are found about Merlin such as his magic and about the extraordinary events concerning Arthur such as his birth.<sup>58</sup> Two later examples are Jean Froissart and Adam Usk.<sup>59</sup> Froissart who supplies a good deal of colorful incident related to the supernatural in his prose. In his text, Froissart, for instance, often resorts to the device of prophecy.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Tradition of Continuation:**

The contemporary historian of the Middle Ages did not have the research techniques necessary for the inquiries into the more distant past, except for reading the Bible. However, because of theological reasons, he could not ignore the early periods. History was seen as a manifestation of God's will on earth, starting with the Creation of the world. Since most chroniclers concentrated mainly on their own times, they tended to be perfunctory in their treatment of previous ages.<sup>61</sup>

Historians who wanted to follow events from the creation to the latest events basically referred to the texts written before them, because to write pre-contemporary history consisted of copying from earlier sources. For them, there was only one time and the meaning of past lay in the other texts' testimony to the present. Thus, they directly took one main respected old text or brought together a couple of texts. For them writing

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<sup>57</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain (Historia Regum Britannie)*, trans. and ed. by Lewis Thorpe (London: New York: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 170-85.

<sup>58</sup> For further explanation see Michael J. Curley. *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Twayne Publishers; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan, 1994), pp. 48-74 and Lewis Thorpe's Introduction to *The History of the Kings of Britain*, pp. 20-1.

<sup>59</sup> For Usk and the supernatural see Chapter II, p. 59.

<sup>60</sup> For examples and further explanation. see Ainsworth. *Jean Froissart and the Fabric of History*, pp. 276-7, 283.

<sup>61</sup> Gransden. *Historical Writing in England, II*, 460-1.

the far away past was mere compilation.<sup>62</sup> Presumably, because of this attitude towards history, many chroniclers wrote continuations to already established texts.

Among the chronicles, often continued by early chroniclers, was the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury followed the Anglo-Saxon chronicle tradition for the pre-1066 period. For them, the form and the matter of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle became the standard.<sup>63</sup> Another chronicle which was widely read and continued by other chroniclers in the fourteenth-century was Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*. This chronicle is very important because almost all the chroniclers in the late medieval England tried to write a continuation for the *Polychronicon*.

#### **Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*:**

The most ambitious work in the field of general history in the fourteenth-century and by far the most popular was the *Polychronicon* by Ranulf Higden, who became a monk of the Benedictine abbey of St Werburgh's, Chester, in 1299 and remained there until his death some time in the 1360s. He wrote late in Edward II's reign and early in Edward III's reign. His was the first truly universal history to be written in England because, starting at the Creation, it embraced all aspects of human activity, social customs, technology, culture, learning and the like besides geography and zoological knowledge.<sup>64</sup>

Higden tried to show the divine design and to assert the moral purpose of historical works. He borrowed freely from earlier chronicles and put some accent on the distant and sacred past, and dealt extensively with the English past. His work became so popular that not only it was continued by others but also the pioneering English printer

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<sup>62</sup> Coleman, "Late Scholastic Memoria et Reminiscentia", p. 40.

<sup>63</sup> R. M. Thomson and W. Winterbottom, Introduction to *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, II, xli-xlii.

<sup>64</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, xiii, 43-4.

William Caxton chose *Polychronicon* as one of the first books he would publish.<sup>65</sup> Except for Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie*, no medieval history book rivaled the *Polychronicon* in popularity. Over 120 manuscripts survive, dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and this shows us how widespread Higden's work was.<sup>66</sup>

Like other contemporary chroniclers, Higden wrote in Latin, and his continuations were also made in this language. Therefore, while the fourteenth century witnessed the rise of English over Anglo-Norman and Latin, Latin was still used as the language of the monastic history as seen in the case of the *Polychronicon* and its continuations. It was only in the second part of the fifteenth century that the vernacular spread to the areas where Latin had a well-preserved dominance. It was only after that time that the *Polychronicon* was translated into the vernacular.<sup>67</sup>

Higden made seven divisions in his text. Each division was meant to correspond to the seven day cosmology of Genesis. This seven-part structure signified that the *Polychronicon* was a universal history from the creation until Higden's own day. Like the earth which was created in seven days, Higden's text had seven parts, each corresponding to the creation and thus the text itself meant to be a microcosm for the world. Therefore, we can see that religious ideology shaped the outer structure of the *Polychronicon*, as it did many other medieval historical writings, and even literary texts, which is normal considering the general use of symbolism in medieval period.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, pp. 148-9; Collins, *Caxton, the Descriptions of Britain*, p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Kennedy, *A Manual of Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500, XII Chronicles and other Historical Writing*, pp. 2656-8.

<sup>67</sup> Pearsall, "Language and Literature", pp. 262-8.

<sup>68</sup> Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, p. 151; Albano, *Middle English Historiography*, p. 23.

Higden used many literary devices in *Polychronicon* such as implying a unifying theme. This theme was the concept of man as a microcosm of the world, which gave a thematic unity to the text as well as a biblical context in which miscellaneous events were placed firmly. Higden's work is in the tradition of the chronological universal history. For this history, he borrowed from ancient and more recent authorities when creating his text, and acknowledged this fact by calling himself a compiler. However, for him, this situation did not weaken the text; on the contrary it is a sign of great strength since it shows that he referred to a wide variety of classical and Christian authorities.<sup>69</sup>

Since Higden wrote partly to satisfy the curiosity of his readers and also to amuse and amaze them with marvels and good stories, the *Polychronicon* is full of fascinating information, some true and some not. For example, there are descriptions of men with dogs' heads and of women who conceived at the age of five. Some of those accounts were fictitious even for the medieval people, although most were real for them. Higden included myths, marvels and miracles in his text and he justified their inclusion by saying that ancient authorities included such too. Higden also related many anecdotes with no apparent moral, some of which are earthy and humorous. This amazing amalgam of fact and fiction appealed to men's taste for the weird and the wonderful rather than to their objective intellectual curiosity.<sup>70</sup> The inclusion of such information can probably be explained by the tradition of the supernatural and by the purpose of providing amusement for the audience. The content of the *Polychronicon*, that is, its richness, suggests that it is like an encyclopedia. In different sections of the text there is information related to every kind of event and person.

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<sup>69</sup> Gransden. *Historical Writing in England. II.* 45-8.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. xiii, 49-55.

The *Polychronicon* is not primarily of value as a repository of facts. It is mainly important for the light it throws on Higden's opinions and tastes which, in their turn, reflect those of his contemporaries.<sup>71</sup> The *Polychronicon* became a part of English literature when John Trevisa translated it into the vernacular in the 1380s.<sup>72</sup> It was translated again the fifteenth century and both William Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde printed from Trevisa's English text.

One of principal contributions of the *Polychronicon* to historiography was its seminal potential. That is, many chroniclers were influenced by it while composing their own works. Copies of the *Polychronicon* were in the possession of numerous institutions and individuals in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and they provided the starting point for continuations and quarries of information.<sup>73</sup> The chronicles on which I will focus in this thesis fall into this category: both of them were written as continuations to Higden's *Polychronicon*. Moreover, these chronicles, the chronicle of Adam Usk and the *Westminster Chronicle*, share some of the common characteristics of the medieval chronicles written in England. Consequently, I propose that, closer analysis of these two chronicles will reveal us their own stylistic characteristics and also the nature of their content. This study, I believe, will enable us to see whether they had all the features mentioned in this chapter or not.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-2.

<sup>72</sup> For information on John Trevisa see for example David C. Fowler, *John Trevisa* (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Brookfield, Vt: Ashgate, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 55-6.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHRONICLE OF ADAM USK: HISTORY FROM A LAWYER'S PERSPECTIVE

The *Chronicon Ade Usk* is one of the most important sources for late fourteenth-century English history. This chronicle covers most of the political, social and economic events that occurred between the years 1377 and 1421. These events are described by the chronicler, Adam Usk, who was personally involved in many of those events either as a witness or as an actual participant. Usk lived during the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV, and he had the opportunity to observe the turbulent events of those years, first in England, then in Rome, and finally again in England. Usk started writing his work in 1401 and finished it in 1421. When he died in 1430, Usk left a will behind, in which he said that he bequeathed a *liber* ("book") called the *Polychronicon* to one of his relatives.<sup>1</sup> This manuscript contained Usk's own chronicle too.

Adam Usk's chronicle has gained the attention of historians in the last two centuries. The chronicle was edited and translated by Edward Maunde Thompson in 1876 and more recently by Christopher Given-Wilson.<sup>2</sup> The work by Given-Wilson, as well as providing us with the text of the chronicle itself, introduces us the chronicler in detail, discusses the manuscript and the dating of the chronicle, and offers an explanation for the existence of dreams, prophecies and miracles in this historical work. However, further analysis should be done into the depths of the chronicle in order to find out Adam

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<sup>1</sup> "The Will of Adam Usk", in C. Given-Wilson's edition of *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> C. Given-Wilson, *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*.



Usk's purpose in history writing, to learn about the way and the style in which he wrote and to understand his handling of the crucial events of his time. All these are best achieved by a close study of the chronicle with those questions in mind.

Given-Wilson argues that the life of a chronicler is crucially related to our interpretation of the chronicle. As a result, Given-Wilson's edition includes a lengthy introduction in which he relates the life of Adam Usk. However, while Given-Wilson states that the chronicler's life deserves much attention, he also puts emphasis on the chronicle itself, such as its medieval perceptions and their reflections in it, and the elements of medieval historiographical tradition which he describes as "what medieval authors thought to be the proper way to write history".<sup>3</sup> Thus, his analysis of the chronicler, Adam Usk, illuminates the figure of a medieval historian using certain stylistic features.

In his preface to *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, Given-Wilson mentions the previous edition of the same chronicle by Thompson. Although he acknowledges that Thompson's text was not significantly different from his own, he argues the necessity of a new edition since many changes occurred during the twentieth century including especially the approach to the study of the chronicles. These new approaches have been mentioned in the introduction to this thesis.<sup>4</sup> One of the basic changes has been the growing interest on the stylistic and contextual aspects of a text in addition to its content. In fact, what Given-Wilson means here is that, with the increasing study of the contextual and formal elements of the text, the content can now be reinterpreted in the light of what this study has discovered. As a result of this new interpretation, while Thompson once

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<sup>3</sup> Given-Wilson. Introduction to *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*. p. viii.

<sup>4</sup> See Introduction of this thesis. pp. 2-4.

called Adam Usk “hardly a wise man” or “of a particularly credulous disposition”<sup>5</sup>, now Given-Wilson calls him a well-educated man who was very much in tune with his times.<sup>6</sup>

According to Given-Wilson, the importance of a medieval chronicle derives not only from what it has to tell about the political world of its time but also what it reveals about the medieval mind. In this respect *The Chronicle of Adam Usk* is a very valuable one because it is very enlightening on the subject of medieval mind, especially of Usk himself. Thus, while Given-Wilson chooses to focus on the life and career of Adam Usk, his patrons, his relation with the English kings and the popes, he also reveals how Usk’s mind was shaped by his personal experiences. An even further investigation into Usk’s account of events will show us that Usk’s history writing was also formed by his personal involvement in the events. Therefore, while keeping Given-Wilson’s contributions to the subject in mind, I propose in this chapter to undertake a careful analysis of Usk’s *Chronicon*, dealing with its style, purpose and characteristics.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Adam Usk was a secular clergyman who lived during the late fourteenth century. He was a member of the non-monastic chroniclers whose contribution to literacy was gradually surpassing that of the monastic chronicler.<sup>7</sup> Adam Usk was born in about 1352 at Usk in Monmouthshire.<sup>8</sup> He was a Welshman who understood well enough that the only sure route to advancement for a Welsh clerk was to secure the patronage of great Englishmen.

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson was quoted by Given-Wilson in *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, p. viii

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>7</sup> G. H. Martin, “Narrative Sources for the Reign of Richard II”, in *The Age of Richard II*, p. 61. For the decline of monastic chronicle see Chapter I of this thesis, pp. 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 160, 175-7.

During the 1370s Usk went to study at Oxford where he read and taught law. In the mid-1390s he entered the service of the archbishop of Canterbury as an advocate in the Court of Arches where he used his knowledge of canon law, and stayed in there until his departure for Rome in 1402. He served three archbishops of Canterbury respectively: William Courtenay, Thomas Arundel, and Roger Walden (Arundel opposed Richard II on many occasions, and he took sides with Henry during the deposition). Since he was a learned scholar and lawyer, he was consulted in legal cases. In Rome, Usk stayed for four years seeking to procure papal provisions for various sees but failed in the end to do so. In 1406, he went to France where he contacted the opponents of king Henry IV, but later on, he was pardoned by the king for these actions. He finally returned to England in 1411 and was reappointed as an advocate in the Court of Arches. From that time onwards, Usk had a peaceful life in the court of Archbishop of Canterbury until his death in 1430.<sup>9</sup>

In his continuation of the *Polychronicon*, Usk included a full account of the reign of Richard II, the aftermath of Richard's deposition, the reign of Henry IV, and the years which Usk himself spent outside England. While recounting these events, Usk scattered his personal memories, his feelings and ideas throughout the chronicle, recording the stages of his career and his reactions to the troubles he endured. Usk's chronicle can be divided into two sections considering the stages of its writing. The first and the most remarkable section for its historical information on England covers the period from the accession of Richard II to the end of Henry IV's second parliament in March 1401. This section was written retrospectively in the spring of 1401, and Usk made no attempt to create an illusion of contemporary composition. After March 1401, no event was predictable, and the following chronology is tight enough to suggest a diary-like

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<sup>9</sup> Given-Wilson, *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, pp. xiii-xxxvi.

writing.<sup>10</sup> So, the first part of the chronicle is written with hindsight and, since Usk was in England until 1402, this part is mainly based on personal experiences. The second part, starting from the time Usk began writing the chronicle, that is 1401, was written contemporaneously. Here Usk still benefits from personal experience, but he also uses second hand information for England since he was not there.

## **STYLISTIC FEATURES**

### **Language**

In his chronicle, Adam Usk used Latin, and all the materials, including the letters, verses and the proverbs are given in Latin. This was normal for the age because as stated in Chapter I, the usual language of historiography in the fourteenth century was still largely Latin.<sup>11</sup> Whenever Usk wanted to quote a source, which was not in Latin originally, he translated it. For example, once Usk included the text of a petition he wrote for a knight of Henry IV, Sir Thomas Dymoke in 1399 as his counselor. The text was given in Latin but Usk explained to the reader that it was a translation. After giving the translated text Usk said, "This translation from French into Latin does no justice to the style of the original, therefore be tolerant reader."<sup>12</sup>

### **Structure**

The basic structural characteristic of the chronicle is that it is in an annalistic form. That means it is a record of events grouped according to chronological order with only year

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pp. xlv-l.

<sup>11</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II. xii. For the use of Latin see Chapter I. pp. 14-16.

<sup>12</sup> "Translatio ex gallico in latinum hic non patitur modum endictandi. ideo lector parcere dignetur": AU, p. 74.

divisions. The chronicle started in the year 1377 and ended in 1421. In the narration, the annual order of events was only disturbed when Usk wanted to refer back to earlier events or when he wanted to make reference to the aftermath of an event. In two cases this becomes apparent. While talking about Wycliffe, his “noxious doctrine”, *doctrina pestifera* and the rebellions, which were interpreted as the results of the quarrel between the old faith and the new in the year of 1382, Usk recalled another rising which had taken place in 1377 against the Duke of Lancaster.<sup>13</sup> Also while reporting the events of 1382, Usk entered the topic of the Lollards under the heading of “Lollardy”, *Lollardria*. He said that Lollards had intended to destroy the clergy at the time of the second parliament of King Henry IV, that is, in 1401.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from such rare exceptions, the chronological order of the chronicle is generally not broken. When it was broken, Usk apologized from the reader by saying that he gave “more thought for the truth of what happened than for the order in which it happened”.<sup>15</sup> This apology and explanation for the destruction of chronological structure shows us that Usk was conscious about keeping the order and form while writing the chronicle. Also this might indicate us that he was aware of the common stylistic features of other chronicles and that he tried to fit his text into these.

Thus, Usk did not create a specific thematic order in the structure and lined events up as they happened. One moment he could be mentioning a portent, then a rebellion and the next moment he could be listing the livings that were given to him. The reason for this is the application of annalistic form, which is explained above.<sup>16</sup> However,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter I, p. 20.

this structure was broken to have thematic unity in a few cases, which were significant for Usk, such as religious and economic themes. Accounts of Wycliffe and Lollardy, which form part of a religious theme, are mentioned on the previous page. Taxation was also a recurrent theme of Usk's chronicle, and it becomes apparent to us that Usk strongly disliked the concept of tax and the tax-collectors. Whenever he described an event connected to taxation, he destroyed the yearly order and narrated various events also connected to taxation. Thus, while referring to the death of Sir John Arundel in a shipwreck, Usk related it to the taxes Arundel collected. Usk did not stop the narration here, but instead he recalled other events in which noblemen were destroyed because of the taxes they had collected. The issue of taxation will be discussed in detail later on,<sup>17</sup> so, at this point it is sufficient to say that Usk could destroy chronology in order to create thematic unity on a matter that he found very important.

The structure of Adam Usk's chronicle was also affected by the writing time. For example, Usk gives more space to the events that occurred between 1397 and 1401 than to the earlier events. 130 pages of the 152 pages of the printed edition covering the years between 1377 and 1402 are about those years.<sup>18</sup> This might indicate many things: first of all, this proves that Usk wrote about the earlier years retrospectively; perhaps Usk wanted to go back to 1377 in order to explain the politics. Also, this implies that Usk remembered better or even noted down the events after 1396. The inclusion of letters and writs support the latter notion. Alternatively, it might even be that Usk's main aim in writing the chronicle was to deal with those years as they were politically significant for England, but in order to fit in the tradition of continuation he had to start from 1377.

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<sup>17</sup> See, pp. 55-6.

<sup>18</sup> The pages from 20 to 152 cover the years from 1397 till the end of 1401, while the previous years are recounted in the first 20 pages.

## Style

Although Adam Usk's chronicle covered the period between the years of 1377 and 1421, Usk started writing his text in 1401. However, this does not create a problem in his narration of events because as Given-Wilson suggests Usk had previously kept a journal.<sup>19</sup> This was reflected in the semi-journalistic style, which becomes more evident in the section recounting the period between 1401 and 1402 where Usk wrote as if noting down a diary. Here the events are told in a different way from in the previous part of the chronicle. Up to the year 1401, Usk had already been informed about the events that followed while writing about the events of the 1380s and 1390s. For example, when he criticized Richard II for his actions, he knew that Richard had been deposed in 1399. Therefore, he referred to Richard and his favourite barons in a disapproving manner and criticized them freely without much caution.

Although Usk's *Chronicon* is semi-journalistic and although he wrote in an almost strictly annalistic form, the chronicle shares some characteristics with the romance tradition of the older chronicles. As mentioned before, there were not many examples of this chivalric tradition in England.<sup>20</sup> But, of course English chroniclers did not fail to be affected by this tradition and, it is clear that Usk tried to depict the people he liked or supported by making use of this style. While mentioning his patrons, this becomes apparent, especially in the case of Earl of March, Roger Mortimer. Usk referred to Mortimer in his account of the Revenge Parliament and described him as a "noble knight, a young man of highest character, quite innocent of any evil,"<sup>21</sup> and claimed that the king and his supporters envied the earl. This noble knight, as it follows, was killed in

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<sup>19</sup> Given-Wilson, *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, p. xlvii.

<sup>20</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England. II*, xiii. On this tradition see also Chapter I, pp. 20-1.

<sup>21</sup> "nobilis miles. iuvenis probitatis. expers erat et immunis": AU, p. 38.

1398 in battle “through an excess of military ardour which led him rashly to advance in front of his own troops.”<sup>22</sup>

As mentioned in the biographical part above, after 1402, Usk was no longer in England; he became a traveller,<sup>23</sup> and went to Rome, where he probably took notes, and he continued writing his chronicle when he came back in 1411 retrospectively again.<sup>24</sup> For the events between those years, Usk started using what he heard from his correspondents or from the people around him. This is also reflected in the language and the style too, since Usk used phrases like *auditum habui* or *habui quod* (meaning “I was told that”, “I have it that”). However, in the first part of the chronicle, it is evident that he was personally active and involved in the events since he says “as I saw”, *vidi* or “I heard”, *audiui* within his narration. During his travels Usk adopted the style of a traveller and described the places he saw and the people he met. As a result of this, Usk’s being a traveller has become a part of his style.

### Sources

The basic source for Usk was his own experiences. This is very obvious especially in the final part of the chronicle where Usk is completely focusing on his own sufferings and adventures. Here it is hard to call the text a chronicle because it rather looks like an autobiography.<sup>25</sup> That is, Usk takes his own experiences and eyewitness accounts as his sources. Apart from his own experiences, he also used other sources such as the letters which he had copied, the rumours he had heard, prophecies and poems. Although the rumours and prophecies seem fantastical and unrealistic to the modern reader, Given-

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<sup>22</sup> “nimia ipsius bellicose animositate exercitum proprium in caute precedens”: *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 175

<sup>24</sup> Given-Wilson, *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, pp. xlvii-xlviii

<sup>25</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 163.



Wilson argues that these were the crucial elements of history writing in the medieval times and they were acknowledged as the true sources of knowledge by all. Therefore, it is normal, according to him, that Usk included references to God, various saints, prophecies, portents, miracles and dreams. Moreover, Given-Wilson argues that the task of the medieval historian was to decipher all these, to read the signs and to make proper connection between all these elements in his historical text. Therefore, by including all these Usk was acting as a historian should have done in the medieval age.<sup>26</sup>

## CONTENT

When we look at Usk's chronicle, we see that he included a wide variety of subjects. The scope of his content was wide, and he built in almost all kinds of events that happened during his lifetime in the chronicle. However, whatever Usk might have thought of as a historical subject, the choice of what deserved to be written as history and what was omitted, have in fact a specific definition for the reader of the chronicle. Although Usk did not acknowledge this, it becomes clear for us that the subjects (the events that were narrated or the people commented on) were not randomly chosen. In a close analysis we can see that all the material included in the chronicle had something to do with Usk himself. In other words, Usk wrote what he saw and heard, or what was important for him personally, except for a few parts. The fact that he took his own experiences and the events connected to him had a limiting influence on the content of the chronicle.

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<sup>26</sup> Given-Wilson. *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*. p. lxi. Although Given-Wilson claims that this was the way history was written, this can be criticized.

Therefore, as the text became selective of the events around Adam Usk, this was reflected in how he wrote the chronicle and what he wrote in it.

### **Patronage**

In the content of Adam Usk's chronicle, we see politics, warfare, the church, justice, cultural elements, various interesting anecdotes, references to God, fortune, prophecies and dreams. While Usk dealt with such a wide range of subjects, he rejected the idea that he was writing for a specific audience. When Usk referred to his will in the chronicle, while talking about the church of Usk, he said that he left his books and vestments to that church. However, he did not want to be praised for this, stating "I do not say this in order to win praise for myself, for I should hate this account of my present follies to be seen during my lifetime."<sup>27</sup> Here, Usk humbly called his works *fatuitatis mee scriptura* ("accounts of my follies") and claimed that he did not want his text to be read during his lifetime. However, it is hard to believe that he was sincere in saying this because of what his chronicle reveals. He had personal interests in various positions and took one side in many events; he was writing during the time of the king Henry IV who deposed Richard II, and he had patrons whom he had to praise and please.

In a time when "the patrons were important as they provided the writers with their living, and expected to be pleased by their works in return",<sup>28</sup> Usk was influenced by more than one patron, who supported him during his education and career. His patrons included Archbishop Thomas Arundel, from whom he received a number of livings, and the earls of March, who held the lordship of Usk from 1368 to 1425. In fact it was his relations with the Mortimers that generated Usk's ties with other patrons. The fourth earl

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<sup>27</sup> "Hoc ad mei laudem non reputando. quia presentis fatuitatis mee scripturam in uita mea uideri detestor.": *177*, p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 460. On patronage see also Gransden, pp. 181-2.

of March, Roger Mortimer, Philippa (countess of March, widow of Edmund and later wife to Richard earl of Arundel) and the third earl of March, were among the patrons of Usk who provided him with his living from the beginning of his youth. Whether out of gratitude or because his living depended on their support, Usk mentioned his patrons in his chronicle and gave more space to their praise than to the actual event.

Thus, the fact that Usk had various patrons affected the writing of the chronicle because Usk, directly or indirectly, wrote about the issues related to his patrons, although these were not patrons for his writing. While describing the Revenge Parliament of Richard in 1397, he wrote about the trial of Richard earl of Arundel in great detail by apparently giving him more space than the other earls who were also tried. Usk reported the conversations, made direct quotations from the people involved, and gave Richard earl of Arundel the chance to speak longer than his executioners.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the style of their conversations, that is, the bold speeches of Arundel and the voicing of his serious accusations against the king and his supporters, creates the image that it was as if king and the barons were on trial.<sup>30</sup> Arundel's trial, which formed a part of political history, was thus recounted in detail and in the way favouring the earl since the Arundel brothers were patrons of Adam Usk during his law career. Again as a result of this patronage relationship, Usk reported the death of the countess of Arundel on September 1400. This account, like other references to Usk's patrons, was marked with a long praise of the person, and also Usk did not neglect to voice how this person had supported him, or was

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<sup>29</sup> AU, pp. 28-30.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth, Literature and Law in Richardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 222-4.

related to him. He said that she died “before having even reached her twenty-four year, and shortly after having granted me the church of West Hanningfield in Essex.”<sup>31</sup>

The earl of March, Roger Mortimer, was also a secular patron for Adam Usk during his education. Usk described the earl’s genealogy and showed his connections with various royal lines of Europe. Then he asked “Besides this glorious descent from the noble kings of Britain, Italy, Troy, England, France and Spain, what more can be said? Harken to the way that the royal line of the earls of March has prospered.”<sup>32</sup> Usk included the earl in his history because he saw him as an exemplary figure, who should be praised. The fact that he narrated the earl’s genealogy in several pages showed that Usk tried to thank the family of his patron by showing their distinguished past.

Edmund Mortimer was another nobleman, related to the Mortimer family, who supported Adam Usk financially during his education of law at Oxford. Usk’s narration of the death of this patron reveals his close connection to his patrons and how this connection defined what he wrote. In the chronicle Usk told the reader about the support of Edmund Mortimer, and then lamented his death as it “deprived” the world of Edmund Mortimer’s nobility. He stated that Mortimer “presented the compiler of this present work with the means wherewith to sustain himself honourably while studying the two laws at Oxford.”<sup>33</sup> As a result it is clear here that it was in fact Usk who was affected badly by this death as Mortimer supported his legal training. Apart from that, Usk also wrote verses to commemorate not only Edmund but also his wife Philippa, which demonstrates that Usk was ready to devote many pages of his history to his patrons.

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<sup>31</sup> “...modicum postquam michi ecclesiam de Westhanfeld in Essexia donauerat. nondum uicesimum quartum etatis sue annum attingens ...”: AU, p. 114.

<sup>32</sup> “Vltra distorum Brytanie, Ytalie, Troge, Anglie, Francie et Hispanie nobelium regum nobilissimum exortum, ut quid mora? Ecce quanta comitum March’ florens regalis prosapia.”: *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> “... presencium compilatorem ad utriusque iuris stadium Oxon’ exhibuit honeste sustentatum.”: *ibid.*, p. 46.

Adam Usk also had patrons from the clergy. His loyalty to the archbishop Thomas Arundel was reflected in his chronicle: for example, in 1399, Usk was with the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, who had been exiled but now came back to England following the deposition of Richard II. When the archbishop returned, he tried to get his properties back, and Usk, who joined him recently, witnessed this. He saw and related how the archbishop's castle, its halls and decorations had been changed by the archbishop who had replaced Arundel during his exile.<sup>34</sup> This information, again related in detail, owes its existence in the chronicle to the fact that Usk was patronized as a lawyer by the archbishop and that Usk was traveling with him in England. In his description, Usk's style was respectful of Arundel whom he represented as the lawful archbishop, who deserved his position. When the archbishop died, Usk commemorated his death with a panegyric and wrote a number of details, which are not found elsewhere, relating to the archbishop's career, such as the full account of Archbishop Arundel's part in Richard II's deposition.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, this account of Archbishop Arundel reveals how Usk's personal interests and involvement in events shaped his chronicle.

When we examine the section on Richard II, we see that he mentions his patrons very frequently. In the eighty-six printed pages reporting the events until 1400, he refers to them at least thirty times in forty-eight pages.<sup>36</sup> Considering the fact that each reference takes at least a third of the printed page, one can say that almost one third of the whole text in this section is concerned with Adam Usk's patrons. This is a clearly a large amount and it has important implications for our historiographical valuing of the text. The number of references to the patrons shows us the extent of their influence on

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-86.

the chronicler, and consequently how the existence of patrons contributed to the chronicle's content. As a result it indicates how this influence plays an important role in defining the subject of history writing at the time.

### **Personal involvement**

One of the most important subjects of Adam Usk's *Chronicon* was Usk himself. The chronicle, as its semi-journalistic style implies, includes information about Usk's life such as his birthplace, experiences, character and political involvements. It is from this chronicle that we learn where and how Usk lived and in what he was involved.<sup>37</sup> From the beginning of his chronicle, Usk told how he was connected to the events he reported. He directly referred to himself twenty times until 1400, and after that date he increasingly talked about himself by focusing on his impressions, narrating us his disappointments in Rome, his dreams and troubles before and after returning England.

Usk mentioned himself from the very beginning of his text. First, in the second page of Given-Wilson's edition of the chronicle, we learn that he was in London in 1381 and met Cardinal Pilius. Usk says that the cardinal, who visited England, had "among other things granted me a notary in the house of the friars preachers in London."<sup>38</sup> Usk said that this appointment failed, and then he talked negatively about the cardinal whom he assessed to be doing wrong things, which makes us skeptical about his motives in making this description.<sup>39</sup> As seen here and in similar cases, Usk seems to have seized almost every possible chance to speak about himself, and thus he reported the events in which he was directly involved. As a result the chronicle is full of phrases like

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<sup>37</sup> Gransden. *Historical Writing in England*. II. 175.

<sup>38</sup> "... me inter cetera notarium tunc in domo fratrum predicationis London' creavit": AU, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 6

presencium compiler, presencium notator, (“the compiler of the present work” and “writer of the present work”) or uidi, audiui (“I saw” and “I heard”).

One of the most important cases, which show us that Usk was inclined to give accounts of the events of his own life in his chronicle, is the riots of the scholars in Oxford in 1389.<sup>40</sup> Usk personally took part in these riots and described what happened in detail by including his own role in the events, thus informing us about his own life. Usk joined the rioting scholars and even became their leader and chief instigator. As a result of this he was brought in front a jury, but he was set free. About this he stated: “... it was only with great difficulty that we were set free by a jury, in the presence of the king’s justices. Before this I had lived in ignorance of the power of the king, but henceforth I feared him and his laws, and I placed a bit between my jaws.”<sup>41</sup> From this account we understand that Usk’s adventure ended fortunately for him this time, and that he had learned his lesson, probably out of the fear which he felt in front of the jury. Thus, he learned to be more careful of what he did and said; also this experience may provide an explanation of about why Usk always favoured peace and order in social issues.

One of the most important events of Richard’s reign was the Last Parliament and Usk reported this in detail because he attended the Parliament presumably as a clerk of the archbishop of Canterbury. As he was there and witnessed what happened, Usk wrote about the proceedings of the Parliament at length, by reporting conversations, giving quotations, and providing every detail possible.<sup>42</sup> So again, his personal experience conditioned his reports, and the Parliament, became a major part of the chronicle.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-16.

<sup>41</sup> “... uix per duodenam nos obtinuumus coram Regis iusticiario liberari. Regem de cetero michi prius in ipsius potencia ignotum et eius leges timui ipsum, per maxillis meis frenum imponendo.”: *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-60.

When Duke Henry of Lancaster arrived in England from exile and reached Bristol, Usk was there because he was with the archbishop of Canterbury, who had also recently returned, as mentioned above. Usk said "... in the company of the aforesaid newly-returned archbishop of Canterbury, was the compiler of this present work."<sup>43</sup> Then he took an active part in the events that followed; he provided a peace between Duke Henry and the lordship of Usk, and then got a release for a monk from the duke and the archbishop. Usk also narrated the events in Chester, and he explained how and why Duke Henry ravaged the country. It seems that Usk was persuaded about the rightfulness of this ravaging, because he gave a lengthy explanation of Henry's reasons thus justifying this action.<sup>44</sup> The reason for such an account was that he probably discussed its reasons with the duke, or that he just wanted to support the duke because his patron, the archbishop, had sided with him.

Usk was a personal witness of the deposition of Richard II, which he reported in his chronicle. He was personally involved in the matter because he was one of the doctors who were given the task of deciding whether the deposition was right or not. In the light of this task, Usk's reference to the "many unsavoury things" concerning the birth of Richard, and his criticism of the king's doings, that is to say, "the debasement of the noble and exaltation of the ignoble", become meaningful for the reader.<sup>45</sup> Usk explained his task by saying; "... the question of deposing King Richard and replacing him as king with Henry duke of Lancaster, and of how and for what reasons this might be lawfully done, was committed for debate to a number of doctors, bishops and others,

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<sup>43</sup> "... presencium compilator. cum dicto domino Cant' reuerso. interfuit."; *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-4.

<sup>45</sup> "multi sinistri". "nobiles deprimere ac ignobiles exaltare"; *ibid.*, p. 62.



one of whom was the writer of this present work.”<sup>46</sup> So, Usk was among those chosen people whose mission was actually not to debate the deposition but to justify it. This is understood from the fact that he included the rumours and criticism about Richard in his chronicle at this crucial point in order to defame the king.<sup>47</sup> Thus, here, the purpose of Usk’s history becomes doubtful since it was conditioned by his mission concerning the deposition, which was attributed to him by King Henry himself.<sup>48</sup> As a result on this occasion, we can see how and where Usk personally stood through his chronicle.

In the years that Usk spent out of England, his focus is on the places to which he travels and what he sees there. This case strengthens the notion that the chronicle was conditioned by Usk’s personal involvements. While he traveled through Europe, Usk described what he saw and, as a result of this his personal experiences became his own sources for such information. Also, the reason why he included these was his travels, which indicates that the content of the *Chronicon* was shaped by Usk’s individual participation in the travels.

### **Social events**

Apart from the events concerning Usk himself, he reported the social events which he found important or in which he sometimes participated. Therefore, again the choice of social subjects were connected to Usk’s personal testimony or his personal interest in those events. Moreover, Usk’s narrations of the social events were mainly conditioned by his contempt for disorder which became a recurring theme throughout the chronicle. This means that, Usk interpreted events from his own point of view and according to his own

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<sup>46</sup> “... per sertos doctores. episcopos et alios. quorum presencium notator unus extiterat. deponendi regem Ricardum et Henricum Lancastrie ducem subrogandi in regem materia. et qualiter et ex quibus causis iuridice. committebatur disputanda.”; *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>47</sup> Jesse M. Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century: Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics, and Poetry* (Princeton, N. J. : Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 171-2.

<sup>48</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, II*, 177.

likes and dislikes. When he recounts the Peasants Revolt, Usk pointed to the social origins and manifestations of the revolt, such as the tender age of the king, the injustice inflicted upon the kingdom by the people who had charge of the king and the kingdom. However, what he focused on mostly was the disorder which derived from the riots and their destruction. He referred to the time as “a monstrous time” when the common people of the kingdom and especially those of Kent and Essex rose against the lords of the realm and the king’s ministers.<sup>49</sup>

Usk seemed to hate riots and wanted order and peace in society. In the case of Wycliffe and the Lollardy, Usk referred to them as the evils of Wycliffe. Also he saw them as errors and heresies and said that they provoked “numerous massacres, plots, disputes, quarrels and rebellions.”<sup>50</sup> As a result, these events were remarkable for Usk because of their destructive effects. Whenever Usk encountered such an event or a social occasion with a potential of riot, he noted it down and said that he was afraid because of that event. He disliked such situations and reflected his contempt with his usage of the negative terminology while recounting them.

In fact Usk voiced his fears of heresy and rebellion in every possibility. These were his personal bugbears,<sup>51</sup> although he was sometimes involved with conspirators himself. As noted above, Usk learned to fear such disturbances, as he admitted, after the riots in Oxford, in which he played an important role and for which he was about to be punished by the court. He saw what such problems caused for the youth and the nation “numerous misfortunes and the destruction of King Richard himself”.<sup>52</sup> For this reason

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<sup>49</sup> “monstruosum”: AU, p. 2

<sup>50</sup> “... multas clades, insidias, rixas et contenciones et sediciones”: *ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>51</sup> Given-Wilson, *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, p. lxi.

<sup>52</sup> “plurima infortunia et ipsiusque Ricardi destruccio”: AU, p. 6.

Usk approached any possibility of rebellion with caution and criticism. After the deposition of Richard II, when “the common people” started attacking the conspirators against Henry IV, Usk again said that he was fearful. He witnessed the decapitations and the display of the heads at Bristol, and called them “the violence of the common people”, adding that they were “contrary to the natural order”.<sup>53</sup> In a way the actions of the common people were interpreted as unnatural mainly because politics was not seen as their business. As the unlearned part of the society the common people were seen as a danger when they turned into masses protesting against lay and ecclesiastical authority, and many chroniclers who were a part of the learned class, such as Thomas Walsingham and the author of the Westminster chronicle had criticizing tones about the commons.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, Usk was critical in his handling of the common people. So it was natural for Usk, especially after that he personally witnessed the violence with his own eyes, to be frightened about the society.

### **Political events**

Adam Usk’s chronicle is mostly concerned with of political events. For England, it was especially from 1377 to 1402 that politics came under focus, because Usk left England in 1402 for Rome. While the political information in the chronicle dominated the atmosphere, what Usk reported from the politics of the period depended on his personal involvement or his connection to the events. Since he was an important clerk, who had patrons from the higher classes involved in politics, Usk inescapably witnessed the significant political events of his time, and the political changes affected his life. During the first years of Richard II’s reign, Usk saw that the king’s rule was not successful. Usk

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<sup>53</sup> “ferocitas plebeiorum” and “contra ordinis rationem”: *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 152-4. For information on the Westminster Chronicle See Chapter III.

witnessed people's dissatisfaction, their uprisings and the disorder in the realm.<sup>55</sup> However, Usk justified all these in the chronicle by repeating the theme of child king. He said "because he (Richard II) was of tender age, other persons who had charge of him and of the kingdom did not cease to inflict wanton evils, extortions, and other intolerable injustices upon the realm".<sup>56</sup> Then he quoted a saying of Solomon from Bible "Woe to the land whose king is a child,"<sup>57</sup> in order to imply that Richard's minority was a dreadful thing for England. He explicitly stated this: "...the numerous misfortunes of King Richard's time, which were caused by his youth ..."<sup>58</sup> So, as these examples indicate, Usk interpretation of the early years of Richard II's reign was dominated by the idea of the young king. So he repeated this idea various times and reminded the reader. In a way Richard's minority provided Usk with the excuse for his criticism of the king.

When the king grew up, and gathered his Merciless Parliament, Usk was there and saw what the adult king did. According to Usk, this parliament was pointless, and it brought destruction upon the kingdom, as a result "...people silently cursed" the king.<sup>59</sup> Here Usk voiced the criticisms of the people, and probably his own criticism, concerning the king with this idea of silent curses. It was normal for Usk that those who were thus alienated from the king because of his destructive actions left him when he needed help against Duke Henry. Usk said that Richard II sent Lord Despenser to raise his people of Glamorgan for his cause later on, but they refused to follow him.<sup>60</sup> After that, the changes in the political area came quickly and once more Usk's patrons returned to

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<sup>55</sup> AU, p. 2-8.

<sup>56</sup> "... quia tenere etatis existebat, alii ipsius et regni curam habentes lasciuas, extorciones et alias intolerabiles iniurias regno irrogare non desistebant.": *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> "Ve regno cuius rex puer est.": *ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>58</sup> "... plurima inoportuna tempore Regis Ricardi, eius iuuentute causata...": *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> "...interna populi maledixerunt": *ibid.*, p. 38. Eccles. 10:16.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

England, whether at the same time with Henry or after Henry IV's coronation. Usk had his personal role in these events again, because he was a significant clerk and a lawyer whose contributions were needed for the stability of the new king and the kingdom. Usk worked to justify the new regime, moreover he was sent royal writs, and he was asked to give advice to the king on some issues. However, this harmony was broken after 1402 because Usk was thought to be in contact with the Welsh rebel Owen Glendower.<sup>61</sup> This might be true since Usk, in his chronicle, cited Glendower's letters to the kings of Scotland and Ireland.<sup>62</sup> As a result of such politics, Usk had to leave England.

### Religion

From the religious point of view, Usk's chronicle reflects the same inclination of being limited to Usk's personal testimony and interests. As a secular clergyman Usk was intent on talking about religious matters. While talking about Wyclif and his doctrines, Usk called them "noxious/disease-bearing", *pestifera*, and compared him to *Machomdus* ("Mohammed"). Usk's dominant idea about *Wycleff* was the feeling of fear which he had when seeing the problems caused by the followers of Wyclif.<sup>63</sup> Usk also commented on the Lollards, and said that their malice intended to destroy the clergy; however, as he said, "my lord of Canterbury, forewarned of their evil schemes, had prepared suitable counter-measures."<sup>64</sup> Here Usk's reference to his patron revealed that Usk's religious ideas and comments in the chronicle were affected by his connection to his patrons, too.

Usk's ecclesiastical patronage also meant that he included religious debates in his chronicle. Important evidence for this is the section in which Usk related his conversation

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<sup>61</sup> Given-Wilson says that it is impossible to say whether Usk was in active sympathy with the rebels. But many prominent Welsh scholars and clerics supported Owen, so there was growing mistrust and legislation against them. *The Chronicle of Adam Usk*, p. xxiv

<sup>62</sup> AU, pp. 148-52.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> "dominus meus Cant' eorum malicie precautus. remedia parauit oportuna."; ibid., p. 8.

with the archbishop of Canterbury. Usk wrote “My lord of Canterbury summoned his clergy this year and explained to them dejectedly how the temporal powers did not shrink from violating the liberties of the English church.”<sup>65</sup> That meant that in the legal cases the clergy were being treated no differently from the laymen. In response to this Usk approved what his lord had said and he even empowered the argument by giving examples from legal cases. In these cases, Usk defended the liberty of the church and he reported an occasion in which the previous archbishop saved a bishop from trial before a tribunal of royal justices.<sup>66</sup> These accounts provided the support for the Archbishop of Canterbury’s arguments so it would not be unfair to say that Usk employed them in order to back his patron.

In another case, Usk reported the visit of a Greek emperor to England under the subtitle of “The emperor of the Greeks comes to England.”<sup>67</sup> Usk did not give the name of the emperor but this was Manuel II Palaiologos who was the Byzantine emperor between 1391 and 1425.<sup>68</sup> The emperor and his men were very devout in their religious service. When Usk saw them, although they belonged to a different culture and had different customs, he praised them for their devotion. These Greeks were simply dressed, and they disapproved of the fashions and varieties of dress worn by the English. Usk’s account of the habits and views of the Greeks implied that he shared the Greeks’ ideas on these issues. This idea is enforced by the fact that Usk was critical of the priesthood because their corruption.<sup>69</sup> On this issue, for example, he said that *venalitas in sacerdocio* “venality in priesthood” corrupted them. He wanted a simpler and more

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<sup>65</sup> “Isto anno dominus meus Cant’. suo conuocato clero, eis lamentabiliter proposuit qualiter temporales libertates ecclesie Anglicane.”: *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-6.

<sup>67</sup> “Imperator Grecorum uenit in Angl’.”: *ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>68</sup> Given-Wilson gives this information in the footnote, p. 119, f6.

<sup>69</sup> AU, pp. 116-8.

devoted clergy and he made this clear throughout his chronicle. The fact that he did not mention his ecclesiastical patron here shows us that Usk had his independent ideas about ecclesiastical issues and that he voiced them when he liked. The fact that Usk praises simplicity in the clergy and voices criticism directly or indirectly through the chronicle is actually very normal because such clerical criticism was a common idea in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as explained in Chapter I of this thesis.<sup>70</sup>

### **Economy**

In his chronicle, Adam Usk gave space to economic issues. For example, he mentioned the apprentice boys of London and how they came together to choose their kings.<sup>71</sup> However, the basic phenomena, which Usk focused on, was taxation. Usk was so concerned with this issue that taxation became one of the recurrent themes of the chronicle as I noted down in the section on Stylistic Features. Usk was not happy with the practice of taxation (especially that of clerical taxation considering the fact that he was critical of Lollards who supported state control and taxation over church), and he could not help criticizing the taxes and the tax-collectors at every opportunity. Interestingly enough, he even criticized Sir John Arundel, who was related to his patrons. While mentioning the death of John Arundel, he said “the reason for his accident, not unreasonably, was the money exacted (called taxes) from the clergy and the people”.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, it was reasonable for Usk that Arundel was shipwrecked in a terrible storm at sea because of the money he exacted from the people and the clergy as tax. After that Usk developed his antagonistic approach to taxation by saying “Indeed, I recall that ever since exactions of this sort, called taxes, were imposed, the realm has suffered a series of

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<sup>70</sup> See Chapter I of this thesis, p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> AU, pp. 94-6.

<sup>72</sup> “causa infortuni sui pecuniis a clero et populo exactis non inmerito imponabatur”: *ibid.*, p. 16.

misfortunes, either from internal dissensions or from external attacks.”<sup>73</sup> Usk concluded his report by recalling a verse prophecy against tax showing the degree of his dislike of tax:

“While tax does reign, good fortune shall be gone

Thus work begun will soon be quite undone.”<sup>74</sup>

Usk was not satisfied with simply voicing prophecies and omens against taxation. He was praiseful of men like William Courtenay, archbishop of Canterbury who opposed taxation and were forced to flee into exile as a result. He also reported cases when people attacked tax-collectors and he tried to justify such actions. In one case he first reported that the drapers killed one of the king’s servants demanding a tax, and secondly that the people of Dartmouth attacked a tax-collector who hardly escaped with his life.<sup>75</sup> So this repeated issue of attacking or killing the tax-collectors creates the impression that such actions were frequent. Interestingly enough, Usk did not fear these attacks, and this is the best proof for us that he was really critical of taxes.

#### **Law:**

One of the most important characteristics of Usk’s chronicle which deserves analysis is the amount of references to legal suits. In fact this is not surprising because Adam Usk was himself a lawyer by profession. We learn that he had studied canon law in Oxford. As a result of his studies, he not only knew law, but also claimed to be an expert in legal matters. He proudly announced this in the chronicle by saying “the compiler of this

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<sup>73</sup> “Semper a tempore huiusmodi exactionis, taxe uocate, regnum memini, aut intentinis cladibus atque transmarinisinsidiis, nonnulla infortunia sustinere.”: *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> “Dum regnat taxa non erit gracia laxa. | Sic opus inceptum lapsum pascietur ineptum.”: *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.



present work was at that time an extraordinary in canon law living in Oxford.”<sup>76</sup> As a result, Usk considered himself to be an authority in legal cases and, thus he justified the inclusion of accounts of legal issues in his chronicle. Thus, he reported legal suits and their results, so his personal occupation, again conditioned the chronicle’s content.

The fact that Usk was a lawyer made him focus on the legal aspects of the events he wanted to report. In the case of Richard II’s Revenge Parliament, Usk chose to focus on the trials of various earls. Almost the whole account of this Parliament was composed of the trials, how they were carried on and how they ended.<sup>77</sup> The subheadings that Usk gave in this part provide us with a clear view of this: Proctor for the prelates in criminal cases; Earl of Derby against the Earl of Arundel; Sentence against the Earl of Arundel; Lord of Canterbury exiled; Exile of the Duke of Norfolk... etc. Under each one of these headings Usk explained how the case was carried on and he gave the speeches of the earls and their accusers by providing direct quotations from them. Thus, whether consciously or not, he created the atmosphere of the court in the chronicle.

In the case of Richard II’s deposition, Usk again chose to adopt the legal approach and he justified Henry’s accession from the legal point of view. He said that the deposition was decided and approved by a number of doctors and bishops, plus himself:

“... they decided that perjuries, sacrileges, sodomitical acts, dispossession of his subjects, the reduction of his people to servitude, lack of reason, and incapacity to rule, to all of which King Richard was notoriously prone, were sufficient reasons – according to the chapter ‘Ad Apostolice’ taken from ‘Re Iudicata’ in the Sextus, and the other things noted there - for deposing him.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> “Tunc presencium compiler Oxon’ in iure canonico extraordinarius existens.”: *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-50.

<sup>78</sup> “Determinatum fuit quod periuria, sacrilegia, sodomica, subditorum exinnanatio, populi in seruitutem redaction, uecordia, et ad regendum inutilitas quibus rex Ricardus notorie fuit infectus, per capitalum Ad apostolice, extractus de Re iudicata in Sexto, cum ibi notatis, deponendi Ricardum cause fuerant sifficientes.”: *ibid.*, p. 62. Here Usk referred to the sentence of deposition of Pope Innocent IV on the emperor Frederick II at the council of Lyons in 1245.

Here it is clear that, for Usk, it was important that the decision stood on a legal basis.

The fact that Usk was a lawyer not only led him to handle the events from a legal perspective, but also caused him to choose events from amongst the legal ones. He was increasingly inclined to include such accounts in the chronicle, which started to look like a book on legal issues as years passed. For example, he mentioned a petition in 1399 by the Commons just because he liked how law was employed there. The commons petitioned King Henry IV that he would not grant anything to any person undeservedly, and in response to that, the bishop of St. Albans claimed that the petition was rude and unjust and he explained that granting was an important part of kingship. Here Usk's comment on the bishop's speech is interesting because he said "I liked this response, for it accords with the Codex 'concerning petitions, the granting away of goods' the second law."<sup>79</sup> This shows us that Usk took pleasure in studying and analyzing canon law and Codex, which was followed by ecclesiastical cases, and that he wanted to share this personal pleasure with his reader. As a result of this, his chronicle includes numerous instances which were reported just because of Usk's personal interest in justice, such as the case for which he was awarded,<sup>80</sup> the case in which a nun became pregnant,<sup>81</sup> or the case of the chaplain who was convicted of heresy and burned.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from such instances, Usk also reported the cases in which he played an important role as a professional lawyer. The first example of this is his involvement in Richard II's deposition by taking place amongst the doctors who made the decision of deposition. Another example of Usk's employment by the government as a lawyer was

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<sup>79</sup> "Hec responsio placuit michi propter le Codex. 'De petitionibus. bonorum sublati' lex duo.": *ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

about the questions between the kingdoms of France and England. Usk was sent a royal writ on behalf of King Henry IV, about the problematic issues between the two kingdoms. The writ presented the legal questions, and Usk was asked to propose solutions or to give advices concerning these questions to the king.<sup>83</sup> As a result it is clear that the chronicle included various legal accounts because Usk was a lawyer. His profession probably caused Usk to adopt a legal approach. Moreover he took pleasure in this profession and narrated the law suits he found interesting. Also as a remarkable lawyer of his time, he was given legal tasks by the government, and he reported these in detail in his chronicle.

### **The Supernatural**

Features of contemporary historical writing, interest in miracles, marvels, prophecies, dreams, were also found in Usk's chronicle.<sup>84</sup> Usk had a ready affinity with the mystical and the supernatural.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, we occasionally find references to miracles and prodigies in his chronicle.<sup>86</sup> For example, Usk refers to the numerous miracles worked by St Columba and the intervention of the Holy Spirit to end the schism.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, he mentions five eggs which resembled faces, a two-headed calf, a one eyed boy, and children who conceived children.<sup>88</sup> As we can see from these examples, it is understood that Adam Usk, like Ranulf Higden before him, gave accounts of the supernatural in his chronicle as he thought that these are worthy of recounting.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-14.

<sup>84</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 26-7.

<sup>85</sup> G. H. Martin, review on *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421*. Ed and trans. C. Given-Wilson, p. 153.

<sup>86</sup> Given-Wilson, *The Chronicle of Adam Usk 1377-1421*, p. lxxvi.

<sup>87</sup> AU, pp. 172, 266.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 78, 86, 244.

*The Chronicon Ade Usk* is in the tradition of English medieval historiography because first of all it is written in the tradition of continuation since Usk wanted his text to be a continuation for Higden's *Polychronicon* as his will indicates. The chronicler was himself a secular clerk who used Latin, and who translated his sources to Latin from other languages. This shows us that Usk believed in the dominance of Latin as the language of history writing. The information in the chronicle is based on eyewitness accounts, then on accounts based on oral evidence and documents. In addition, it is in chronological order which creates a serial, episodic narrative. Usk's style is apparently affected by the traditions of the chivalry and the supernatural as his references to such things indicate. Thus, Adam Usk's chronicle was typical of his age and brought nothing new to the concept of history writing.<sup>89</sup>

Usk praised his patrons and sided with them in many cases as shown above. Apart from that, government propaganda, in the form of criticism of Richard II, has found its way into this chronicle as Usk was affected by politics because of his profession. He was given missions by the governments as lawyer and these show us his close relation with the government. While determining his content, Usk was inclined to focus on himself mainly because he was the source of the information he gave as an eyewitness. His chronicle also presented an example of the travelling chronicler who included travel stories and information about the places he visited because he spent years out of England. Moreover, he included information about his patrons, their deeds and thoughts mainly because he wanted to please or thank them for their patronage.

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<sup>89</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II. xii. 458; John Taylor, review on *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421*. Ed and trans. C. Given-Wilson, p. 708.

At the end of this analysis certain things stand out about Adam Usk. First one of them is his profession. Although he was a clergymen Usk's profession as a lawyer stood out from the text and this indicates best the secular status of Usk. The second trait is the personal tone of Usk in the chronicle. He was apparently less impersonal than the monastic writers. As he wrote more about himself and about what he personally found interesting (about law or social events), his text become more entertaining also with the help of his personal, elegant style which is hardly found in a monastic chronicler. Thirdly, it is seen that Usk was not bound to a place: he traveled, saw things and wrote about them. So, he was also the basic source for most of the information in the *Chronicon*. All of these features are derived from Usk's lay position, and also they emphasized his secular status.

As a result, Usk was self-conscious as a chronicler who was aware of the tradition of writing history. His text was a chronicle in the sense that it reported the social, political and religious events of the period in a yearly order. But at the same time, the fact that it was a very personal memorial transformed the text into an autobiography. However, in either case, one cannot deny the informative value of the chronicle because of the extent of its content. Usk was aware that his text would be read and used for historical purposes as it is understood from the structure of the text and Usk's addresses to his readers. When we analyze his entertaining style and his use of elegant language, the terminology and the phrases, as well as his selection of the interesting events narrated, we can become aware of Usk's biases and his purpose. Then, this can help us see the text becomes historically valid the reinterpret the text under this light..

### CHAPTER III

#### THE WESTMINSTER CHRONICLE: HISTORY FROM A MONK'S PERSPECTIVE

Barbara F. Harvey claims that the studies of Richard II's reign are usually concerned with the king and his personality because there has been much interest in this famous character, both historically and literally.<sup>1</sup> In these studies the *Chronicon Westmonasteriense* has its own unique place because of the place it was composed, that is to say, Westminster Abbey. Richard II was a frequent visitor of Westminster, and Harvey even argues that Richard was known at Westminster Abbey more than at any other religious house in England.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Westminster Abbey and its *Chronicon* had their own distinctive role in the history and the historiography of the age of Richard II.

Another characteristic of *Westminster Chronicle*, which renders it of high value, is the complexity of the text itself. That means, as a historical source, this text is very comprehensive in its scope: it covers a wide range of events which are narrated in detail and are supported by textual evidence. The chronicle has been used by historians in particular for its political narrative for which it is famous. Thus, it is generally accepted that this chronicle is a trustworthy and well informed historical source.<sup>3</sup>

The *Westminster Chronicle*, covering the years between 1381 and 1394, is a continuation of three other texts which themselves are in fact continuations of Ranulf

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<sup>1</sup> L.C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey. Introduction to *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381- 1394* (Oxford: Clarendon Press). p. xiii

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> G.H. Martin. "Narrative Sources for the Reign of Richard II", in *Age of Richard II*, pp 74-5; R. B. Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381* (London: The Macmillan, 1983), p. 199.

Higden's *Polychronicon*. These three texts are, Higden's own continuation ending on 1327; an anonymous continuation covering the years between 1346 and 1348; and John of Malvern's continuation from 1348 to 1381.<sup>4</sup> It is not known why these texts were chosen as the ones to be continued. Like many other monasteries in England, Westminster Abbey had its own copy of the *Polychronicon*.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it was normal that the monks in Westminster should also write history in the tradition of composing a continuation for Higden's well-accepted and famous work.<sup>6</sup>

One of the first people to work seriously on *Westminster Chronicle* was J. Armitage Robinson, who stated in 1907 that the chronicle was no doubt written in Westminster Abbey.<sup>7</sup> The place of the composition of the chronicle has been of great importance because it helps to explain many things about the text, including the use of various sources within the text, the choice of content and the author's interpretation of royal and religious affairs. Moreover, the fact that the chronicle belongs to a popular abbey which had many visitors helps us to understand its connection with international news.

The composition of *Westminster Chronicle* is thought to be retrospective. That means there were at least two or three years of time between the actual events and the monks' redaction of them. Barbara Harvey claims that the monks started writing the chronicle before the late 1380s. Moreover, the tone of the chronicle (especially while mentioning the king) makes it clear that the composition of the chronicle had ended before Richard II's deposition took place, probably in the summer of 1397. The main

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<sup>4</sup> Hector and Harvey, *The Westminster Chronicle*, p. vx.

<sup>5</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 157.

<sup>6</sup> For the tradition of continuation see Chapter I, pp. 27-8. and for Adam Usk's continuation see Chapter II, p.35, 38, 60.

Hector and Harvey, *The Westminster Chronicle*, p. xxii.

evidence of Harvey's argument for dating is the fact that the usage of material for the years after 1386 increased greatly. Thus, the events after 1386 are narrated in great detail since those years were closer enough in time to the date of composition, and far enough to allow the author to be access the necessary documents. The reports of years after 1392 become shorter, probably because the author had become bored with his task, or maybe he was not able to view enough sources concerning those years.<sup>8</sup>

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

There is great deal of discussion about the identity of the author/s of *Westminster Chronicle* as well as about its dating. By looking at the style of the chronicle and the characteristics of the reportage, Barbara F. Harvey concludes that *Westminster Chronicle* must have been written by two authors.<sup>9</sup> The first author was responsible for the writing of the first three years that is, the years 1381 to the end of 1383, and the second author, whom Harvey distinguishes as the "Monk of Westminster", wrote the rest. There is only one unique manuscript for the chronicle and it is in the hand of the second author, who apparently has introduced alterations and additions into narrative for the years 1381 to 1383. Therefore, although he was not the creator of the narrative for these early years and although he copied what his predecessor wrote, the Monk also felt free to make changes in his draft.

According to Harvey, among the evidence supporting the existence of two authors is the way in which London issues were dealt with. While the first author was not

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. xxix-xxx.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp.xii-xiv.



interested in the Mayors of London, the elections and the actions of the mayors, the Monk, that is, the second author, was very interested in these and he devoted many pages of the chronicle to this issue.<sup>10</sup> The Monk dealt with mayorial elections in length. For example he wrote in detail who the candidates were, how the commons of the city behaved during the elections, and what the first actions of the winner were for the years 1383, 1384, 1385 etc.<sup>11</sup>

Another proof of the existence of two authors was the attitude in the chronicle towards the Duke of Lancaster which differed between the two authors. The first author of the chronicle wrote negatively about the Duke of Lancaster; however, the second author did not share this negative tone. The difference of tone about Lancaster also reveals the place of break in the text because two different portrayals of Lancaster for the same event occur on a specific point which is the loss of the gains in Flanders in 1383.<sup>12</sup> Harvey states that there was a cancelled page in the manuscript about this event. Here the blame for the loss was divided between the king and the Duke of Lancaster. However, the second version, which follows the cancelled page, did not blame the duke nor the king.<sup>13</sup>

After the problem of the two authors for the text, the next question to raise, is the identity of these authors. According to Harvey, there are various possibilities for them. One of the famous contemporary historians of the second half of the fourteenth century was Brother Richard Cirencester who became a monk of Westminster Abbey around 1354 and his name was among those suggested for the authorship of the first part of the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. xxiv.

<sup>11</sup> WC, pp. 60-2, 100-2, 136 etc.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-8.

<sup>13</sup> Hector and Harvey, *The Westminster Chronicle*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

chronicle.<sup>14</sup> Cirencester wrote *Speculum Historiale de Gestis Regum Angliae*, and in this work he dealt with the history of England as well as the history of the Westminster Abbey. One might suspect that it was Cirencester, who wrote the earlier parts of the chronicle, because of similarities between *The Westminster Chronicle*'s narration of years 1381 to 1383 and Cirencester's *Speculum Historiale* such as some stylistic features, including a liking for classical words and the habit of Latinizing place-names. However, this case cannot be proven because other monks of the Westminster Abbey may have modelled their style on Cirencester for these years. Another problem about Cirencester, if he was the author, is the reason why he did not write the rest of *Westminster Chronicle* and stopped his reportage with the year 1383, because we know that he lived until 1400. The answer could be Cirencester's departure from the abbey, and it is in fact known that he left the abbey on pilgrimage to Rome in 1391. As a result, Harvey claims that it is not impossible that Cirencester was the first author of *The Westminster Chronicle*.<sup>15</sup>

When it comes to the identity of the Monk of Westminster, the second author of the chronicle who continued to write the chronicle after Cirencester, things become more complicated because many suggestions have been made about this personality. The most frequently suggested names were Thomas Merks, William Sudbury and John Lakingheath. These men were all monks in the Westminster Abbey in the same period, and their names were considered by Armitage Robinson as possible candidates.<sup>16</sup> However, the characters of all these monks in some way contradicts what stands out from the chronicle about the personality of the author. For example, Richard II was portrayed

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<sup>14</sup> First Armitage and then Harvey suggest Cirencester's name in their works and Harvey refers to Armitage's "quest for the author of the chronicle. *Ibid.*, p. xxxviii.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xxxi- xxxiii.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey referred to Robinson's essay on the Westminster Chronicle several times (Armitage Robinson, in *P. B. A.*, iii (1907), 1 ff.), *Ibid.*, pp. xxii, xxxviii-xxxix, xl.

in a comparatively negative way with his anger in some parts of the chronicle, so it was unlikely that Merks was the writer because Merks was able to win Richard II's confidence, and he was even promoted to a bishopric in 1396 by the king.<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, William Sudbury could not have been the writer of the chronicle, because at the time of the composition of the chronicle he was a very busy man, who was both the conventional treasurer and the treasurer of Queen Eleanor of Castile's manors. John Lakingheath could not also be the author of our chronicle because he was a treasurer, and he was highly involved in the financial issues. This involvement was reflected in the works of Lakingheath, but there are hardly any references to finances in the chronicle.<sup>18</sup> As a result it is clear that none of those monks could be the Monk of Westminster.

While Harvey argues that none of these men was the Monk of Westminster, she does not fail to suggest another name: Brother Richard Exeter, who was overlooked by Robinson. Richard Exeter entered the monastery in 1358 or 1359. There is no information about his family origins. He had studied at Oxford for at least a year and was elected prior in 1377. He resigned from the monastic office in 1382, though the reason for this resignation is unknown. Exeter was an ambitious scholar, and the richness of his library proved his interest in literary studies. He even had a copy of Higden's *Polychronicon* in his library along with various maps, which he could have used for the reports of the international affairs in the chronicle. Also his library suggested that he was

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. xxxvii-xl.

highly interested in astronomy too,<sup>19</sup> which explains the interest in such matters. As a result, it is not impossible that Exeter was the Monk of Westminster.

## STYLISTIC FEATURES

### Language

The language of *Westminster Chronicle* is Latin, which was the common language of history writing in the fourteenth century.<sup>20</sup> However we can see that there are many pages in Anglo-Norman French in the chronicle because many of the sources, which the Monk, that is the second author, cited for his narration of the years after 1386, were in this language.<sup>21</sup> These references were mainly taken from the judicial proceedings of the parliament. Also the parliamentary items were used and referred to as sources in Anglo-Norman French within the chronicle. Therefore, it is understood that many official records of the period were kept in French while the language used by the historians was Latin.

The Monk was conscious of the fact that he was citing sources in another language which is reflected in the variations of the script. Harvey tells us that in the original manuscript, the French parts were smaller in size, that is, in font, than the Latin parts. Moreover the French hand had a more broken appearance than the Latin one because of the failure to join all the strokes in each letter.<sup>22</sup> That means while the Latin parts were written in the normal size script, the parts in French, by being written

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. xl-xlii.

<sup>20</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, xii. For use of Latin see also Chapter I of this thesis, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> On use of Anglo-Norman French see chapter I, p. 15. For examples from *Westminster Chronicle* see pp. 166-74, 174-6, 236-78, 280-306, 356-68, 416-30.

<sup>22</sup> Hector and Harvey, *The Westminster Chronicle*, p. xviii.

differently, were intentionally distinguished from rest. In order to show this to the reader, Harvey, following the Monk's manner, uses the same style of varying script sizes for the parts in Latin and in French in her printed edition of the chronicle.

The inclusion of those official texts in their original language, suggests two facts about the historiography of the period and about the personality of the Monk who cited these sources. Firstly, it is apparent that the Monk took it for granted that his readers would know contemporary French along with Latin. This shows us that French was a common language known at least by the upper classes and in monastic circles, at least in Westminster. Therefore, the Monk did not feel obliged to make translations from French to Latin. This might also show that he did not bother to do translations which covered more than a hundred pages in the chronicle but again, if the French language was not commonly known, he could not have been so idle about making translations.

### **Structure**

When we look at structure of the *Westminster Chronicle*, the first characteristic that stands out is the annalistic form.<sup>23</sup> The events were reported in a year-by-year order in the chronicle. Moreover, the annual divisions were made specifically obvious within the text by continuous references to Christmas and the reports of where the king was and what he was doing during Christmas. There were also constant references to Easter and to the mayorial elections, which were held in September each year. Therefore, the reader is constantly reminded of the current year. Moreover, the Monk was very careful about protecting the chronological order, and since he wrote retrospective accounts in his

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<sup>23</sup> Gransden. *Historical Writing in England*, II. 56.

chronicle, it can be claimed that the insistence on chronological order was due to his wish to follow the tradition of having annalistic style.<sup>24</sup>

The yearly order of the events was not broken even for the sake of thematic unity. As a result, the same issues were handled repeatedly in the course of years, as they did not come to a conclusion in a single year. The most significant example of this situation was the story of John of Northampton, who had been the Mayor of London in 1381 and 1382. He lost the election in 1383, and, next year he was found guilty of plotting against the king. A couple of years later, he was pardoned partially, after 1389 he started to gain favour again in the court, and at last in 1390 he was pardoned totally. There were other minor references to Northampton. However, his story was not told in a unified way. Rather it was given in many single pieces, when their time came in the course of time, which tells us about the importance of protecting the annalistic order.

While the authors of *Westminster Chronicle* were firm about protecting the yearly ordered structure, they sometimes felt obliged to provide thematic unity in a few cases that were important for them. For example, when the Monk talked about the Pope, he felt that he must refer to the past in order to enlighten his readers more about the issues. The Monk might have committed this “exception to the rule” about the chronological order chiefly because, as a part of the religious orders, he felt obliged to speak differently about the Pope and to emphasize his importance. Thus, while reporting the events of 1385, he said “now that mention of Pope Urban VI has cropped up, I will deal here with some facts about him by way of summarizing a few matters omitted above.”<sup>25</sup> After that the

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<sup>24</sup> Hector and Harvey, *The Westminster Chronicle*, pp. xxv, xxviii-xxix. For annalistic tradition see Chapter I, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> “Verumptamen quia de isto papa Urbano vj. hic fit mencio. aliqua de illo tangam hic quasi recapitulando pauca que supra errant omitta”: WC. p. 106.

Monk started explaining what happened before the year of 1385. However, in this explanation the Monk did not give specific dates, and also he did not refer to the future developments concerning this issue. As a result, while he acknowledged the break in chronology he still tried to protect it, and this shows us the Monk's consciousness and determination to maintain the chronological integrity of the chronicle.

Another structural characteristic of *The Westminster Chronicle* was the space given to the developments related to the Merciless Parliament. In fact the chronicle includes the reportage of the years between 1381 and 1394, but almost half of chronicle covers the accounts of the years between 1386 and 1388. That means while the narration of three years had such long accounts, the narration of the ten years was compressed into the other half. This situation suggests that the Monk considered this parliament as being very important. This importance also becomes evident from the fact that the Monk included two narrations of the parliamentary proceedings of these years, which were his own account, and the account of those employed in the king's service. While starting to cite his source the Monk said "now follows the account, composed in French after the manner of those employed in the king's service about the court at Westminster, of the process in this parliament and the execution of its judgments."<sup>26</sup> Then, he gave the account of parliamentary proceedings in French. After that he started his own narration of the events which is in Latin.<sup>27</sup>

### Style

One of the basic stylistic features of the *Westminster Chronicle* is its impersonal tone.

That means there was not a single reference to the personal affairs of the authors in the

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<sup>26</sup> "sequitur modo processus et executio dicti parliamenti secundum modum curialium apud Westmonasterium in obsequio domini Regis famulancium Gallico sermone conscriptus": *ibid.*, pp. 278-80.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

whole chronicle. Moreover, the authors never included their personal comments concerning events and, when they did include what seemed to be their own interpretations of events, this was done in a hidden way. Basically they almost never used first person narration, and they refrained from including anything related to themselves in the text. There were approximately five or six instances where the authors used first person in the five hundred pages of the chronicle. For example, one of the cases where it was used is the explanation given above about Pope's issue. Here the monk says "I will mention" or "I will deal", *mencio*, not to refer to anything about himself but to explain something he does in the course of the chronicle.

A similar usage is seen when the Monk mentioned the king's defence of the rights of the church. He narrated a case when Richard II took sides with the churchmen on a legal issue, and said that the king had done this in other cases but "to avoid prolixity I omit them here."<sup>28</sup> Again the use of first person narration was related to the course of the chronicle. As the chronicler, the Monk felt that he could not break the order or tell too much on this. Or he possibly thought that what he has already told was sufficient.

Another case is when the Monk says "I think", *estimo* while talking about the young king and his over-generousness.<sup>29</sup> Here the Monk voices a soft criticism against the king and says that the king would benefit much from helping the poor who are complaining about their burden. He reflects this idea as his own idea by saying *estimo*. However, he keeps the account very short and the advice becomes almost invisible in the text with its humble tone by not damaging the impersonality of the chronicler. Therefore, in the examples given above, the use of the first person is not meant to give any personal

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<sup>28</sup> "...omnia hic propter prolixitatem omitto": *ibid.*, p. 328.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.



comments. Rather they are used to indicate the way the text was going. In other words they are used to make it clear to the reader what the author was talking about or what he was omitting in the text.

The omission of some information and the inclusion of other sources formed another characteristic of the style of the Monk in the *Westminster Chronicle*. While recording events, the Monk would stop his narration of events and simply leave out the rest whether out of laziness or out of his concern not to bore his audience or maybe just because he had less sources at hand.<sup>30</sup> The first option is more likely to be true taking into consideration that the Monk tended to give lengthy accounts of events in the first two thirds of the chronicle, and that he started skipping things in the last one third. So, after writing about events in detail until the year of 1387, the Monk started to get tired of his work, and instead of trying to compose detailed accounts of events, he used time-saving methods such as the citation of already written sources and the shorter accounts.

As a result, it is understood that after 1388, the chronicle is written more quickly because the details get lesser, also there is an inclination towards inserting the source itself rather than recounting the event, and there are increasingly repetitious entries. For example, when the Monk talks about a papal bull, he just gives the bull itself in the text instead of summarizing it for the reader,<sup>31</sup> or when he must describe the parliament in 1390, he simply recites a statute enacted in the parliament instead of telling what happened in the parliament with his own narration.<sup>32</sup> This situation becomes clearer even more after 1392 because the reports after that date are shorter than those of previous years.

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<sup>30</sup> Hector and Harvey, *The Westminster Chronicle*, pp. xxvi-xxix.

<sup>31</sup> WC, pp. 384-90.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 416-30

## Sources

The basic source that the authors of *Westminster Chronicle* used for their text was their own observations. While in Westminster, they had the chance to witness almost all the political developments because the king and the barons used to spend a lot of time in Westminster. Moreover, the abbey had visitors from all over England, who were able to tell them what was going on in other parts of the kingdom. Apart from that, the monks and the abbots of the abbey traveled to various places including Rome and as a result they were able to gather vast information about the events of their time.<sup>33</sup>

The situation of the abbey also made the monks able to reach secondary sources which were directly or indirectly added into *Westminster Chronicle*. Some of the sources used in this way were the patent letters, statutes, items of parliamentary sessions, papal bulls and articles.<sup>34</sup> The language of these sources defined the language in the chronicle when they were cited directly. Therefore, for example, when the patent letters or the items were used they were given in French as mentioned above.<sup>35</sup> When the papal bulls were introduced into the texts, the language was Latin.<sup>36</sup>

## CONTENT

When we look at the *Westminster Chronicle*, we see that there is a wide range of subjects which were noted down as history. The majority of information available in this chronicle is about Richard II and his affairs. There is also information about the

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<sup>33</sup> Hector and Harvey. *The Westminster Chronicle*. pp. liv-lvii.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. xlv- xlvii

<sup>35</sup> See this chapter. pp. 68-9.

<sup>36</sup> See for example. WC. pp. 386-90, 458-60, 462-74.

diplomatic affairs of England and the city politics of London. Apart from these, there are also references to events concerning Westminster Abbey itself, and this is normal considering the fact that the authors of the chronicle were the monks living in and writing for this abbey. As a result, our knowledge of the abbey helps us to understand the abbey's patronage relationships with the king and with the other noblemen. The location of the abbey made it possible for the chronicle's author/s to be informed about diplomatic issues, parliaments and councils, because the monks of the abbey often had the chance to witness these events as Richard frequently came to Westminster followed by the court.<sup>37</sup>

### **Monastic involvement**

The *Chronicon Westmonasteriense* does not reflect the ideas and the interests of one monk, rather it can be evaluated as representing the whole monastic community,<sup>38</sup> and the fact that the chronicle was composed by at least two different monks is a sign of the collective perspective of the chronicle. In the chronicle, although there is an impersonal tone, the monks reflect the temper of the monastic community as a whole by voicing criticism about the non-monastic community. For example, when in 1381 Thomas Ufford, earl of Suffolk, died unexpectedly at the entrance door of a chapel, the first author of the chronicle comments on this from a religious and even monastic perspective.

He says that the death of such an illustrious figure was:

a warning to the nobles of the day not to set great store by the shadowy glories of earth or to amass for their own ends wealth from the pockets of the people while by coming of death when they least expected it they might, like him, be snatched in a moment from the world.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Hector and Harvey, *The Westminster Chronicle*, p. xxii.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxii. That means the monks chose the accounts which interested themselves in general.

<sup>39</sup> "exemplum enim fuerat extantibus dominis umbratilem mundi non magnipendere gloriam nec ex subditorum loculis in suum commodum coacervare pecuniam dum inopinate mortis accessu, ut is, extemplo possent e mundo auferri."; WC, p. 22.

Here, the author groups the nobles of the day as “they” and attributes certain characteristics to them such as greed, ambition and love of money. This seems to be a normal monastic approach to earthly possessions and to the nobles. Therefore this warning reflects the ideas and attitudes of the monastic community about the world.

Because of this communal aspect, we have the chance to observe what interested the monks most apart from the normal scope of history.<sup>40</sup> That means while we can find information about social, political and religious matters in the chronicle, there are also other kinds of information included in the text as part of history. Therefore, with this information, the chronicle becomes a source for the interests of the monks and the monastic life of the period. For example, as we read the chronicle, it becomes clear that the monks were interested in weather and in natural phenomena such as the earthquakes and floods. The chronicle begins with the description of cold weather which formed ice in vast quantities.<sup>41</sup> It reports a local earthquake in 1382 which was not felt everywhere but violent enough to bring down the pinnacles of temples,<sup>42</sup> a great flood in Devon in 1386,<sup>43</sup> and great rainstorms accompanied by deafening thunder and vivid lightening.<sup>44</sup> Such references to weather conditions, rains, storms and droughts cover a significant part of the chronicle. We frequently find reports of meteorological phenomena to the degree that there are at least two or three references to them in each year.

Apart from meteorological events, the monks were also interested in astronomical matters. The astronomical knowledge of the Monk appears to be non-professional, either because he really was so, or because he wanted his readers, either the other monasteries

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<sup>40</sup> Hector and Harvey. *The Westminster Chronicle*. p. xxii.

<sup>41</sup> WC. p.2

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 444, 508.

or the posterity, to understand what he was talking about. Therefore he wrote in a simple way and compared what he saw in the sky to concrete materials that are well-known. For example, once he recounts a *species ignea ad modum capitonis* ("a fiery shape resembling a bull-head") travelling from the southern sky towards the northern quarter,<sup>45</sup> which is probably a meteor. On another occasion, he describes *mira prodigia* ("amazing marvels"), which might in reality be a meteor shower. There appeared, he says, two stars which began to shine in the southern sky and midway between them "heavens were seen to open and angels carrying lights to flit about in the air for about an hour."<sup>46</sup> These, and examples like these from the text indicate us that astronomy was a source of interest for the monks who probably watched the sky for such events. This should be why the Monk did not refrain from including this information, that is, he must have thought that his readers would like to see such accounts in the chronicle. Also from the second example, we can conclude that they were inclined to interpret the sky phenomena from a religious perspective, which is of course to be expected from them.

The location of the place of where the chronicler lives becomes very important while analyzing the content because in many cases this had a definitive impact on the selection and interpretation of the events since it forms the setting for most of the events. Therefore, Westminster Abbey gains significance for our evaluation of the text.<sup>47</sup> The vast information on King Richard II and his affairs coincides with the information about the abbey in many cases, because the monks reported all the visits of Richard to Westminster. They recounted the cases when Richard held the parliament in Westminster. Moreover, they reported Richard's visits to the abbey's sanctuary. So, one

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>46</sup> "visum est celum aperire ac angelos luciferos quasi per unam horam aere volitare": ibid., p. 344.

<sup>47</sup> Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, p. 199.

can see the word “Westminster”, *Westmonasterium* almost in every page of the chronicle (in the printed version) in this or that context. As a result of this fact, Westminster Abbey stands out in the text as the basic setting of events. Thus, it is clear that Westminster Abbey defined the content of the chronicle by conditioning the choice of subjects.

In many cases, Westminster Abbey itself became the subject of the chronicle with its monks and shrines. Therefore, the history of the abbey can be traced from the chronicle as the monks reported almost everything related to the abbey. Almost all the visitors of the abbey were mentioned in the pages of the chronicle. The religious issues were dealt with whenever they had something to do with the abbey or its monks. Thus, the famous shrine of the abbey, St Edward’s Shrine, formed the setting for many sanctuary matters. For example, during the Peasants’ Revolt, a man called Richard Imworth, steward of the Marshalsea, fled from the crowd for the safety of the church of Westminster and was climbing the columns of the shrine when he was dragged away from there to be beheaded.<sup>48</sup> Imworth was only one of the many people who were beheaded during the revolt, but what makes him a subject of the chronicle is the fact that he tried to get into the sanctuary of Westminster and his event was witnessed by the monks of the abbey.

Another example is the narration of a trial by battle between two felons. These men had no significance but they acquired their place in the chronicle because the subject of their quarrel was related to the sanctuary.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, there is the story of John Paule, a household servant who was accused of homicide. This ordinary man was mentioned because when he was about to be hanged, he confessed his sins; one of them

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<sup>48</sup> WC. p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.. p. 458.

was that he had lured out of the sanctuary of St Peter, Westminster, certain people who were afterwards arrested and hanged.<sup>50</sup> So, despite his being an unimportant man, Paule was included in the content because of his connection to the abbey.

Apart from these, the monks reported the news related to their abbots, such as their change, their death, and their travels into other countries with specific dates. For example, the death of Brother Nicholas Litlington, abbot of Westminster, in 1386 was reported and then the election of the next abbot with the candidates and the king's ideas on them was narrated.<sup>51</sup> Then also pope's confirmation of the abbot-select was reported.<sup>52</sup>

### **Patronage**

Westminster Abbey had patrons such as King Richard II himself, and Thomas of Woodstock, the earl of Gloucester and his wife Eleanor of Bohun, both of whom were buried in the Westminster Abbey. The author/s of the chronicle had interest in these benefactors and reflected knowledge of them throughout the chronicle. So, the inclusion of information about Richard II was not solely because he was the king of England at the time the chronicle was written. Rather it was because of his frequent visits to the abbey, which was the premier royal abbey, that Richard was the continuous subject of the chronicle. Richard held most of his parliaments in Westminster and most of the time he spent some time in the abbey, during which he was observed by the monks. Moreover, the monks had the opportunity to observe the parliaments personally and therefore they were able to account what they witnessed there. They reported who was there, what

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

decisions were made and how the barons acted during these parliaments. Also precise dates were given for each of the parliaments.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from having the parliament there the king had many other reasons to come to the Westminster Abbey. For example, he got married there, and his sister Maud was buried there.<sup>54</sup> Again in those cases the monks witnessed what Richard was like and what he was doing and they reported them accordingly in their chronicle. However, the portrayal of Richard especially by the Monk and the praise of him were conditioned by the fact that Richard was a patron and benefactor of the Westminster Abbey.<sup>55</sup> Richard II was very keen on the protection of the Westminster Abbey. In many cases he defended the rights of the church in general, and this made him a hero in the Westminster Abbey. As a result he was praised as a king in the chronicle.

One of the good examples of this is the case when Richard II explicitly defended the church's liberty. He said "it is our will that the rights of the church shall be preserved entirely unimpaired" and "in truth we neither wish nor intend to detract in any way from the rights of the church."<sup>56</sup> While narrating these, the Monk was extremely complimentary of the king and he said, "how this noble king reveres and loves God's church! How sympathetically and anxiously he exerts himself to champion her liberties and preserve them!"<sup>57</sup> So, here we can see how the relation between the king and the abbey worked. The king, like a good patron, defended his church, and in return he was praised by the Monk.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-4, 34, 48, 102, 234, 410, 480, 516.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 22, 490.

<sup>55</sup> G. H. Martin, "Narrative Sources for the Reign of Richard II", pp. 62-4; Bryan Bevan, *King Richard II* (London: Rubicon Press, 1996), pp. 8-10; Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, II*, 182.

<sup>56</sup> "volumus quod jura ecclesiastica omnino serventur illesa", "revera nolumus nec intendimus in aliquo juri ecclesiastico derogare": WC, pp. 326.

<sup>57</sup> "Ecce quomodo nobilis rex ecclesiam Dei veneratur et diligit! Quam affectuose et sollicite satagit ejus libertates defendere ac eciam conservare": ibid., p. 326.



Richard II not only defended the church in general but he also defended Westminster Abbey itself on many occasions. For example, he protected the abbot of Westminster when there were complaints and accusations against him in 1389 made by the clergy of St Stephen's chapel. There was a trial of the facts before the king's council but when the king heard this and the abbot's offence, "nevertheless remitted all penalty out of his desire to keep his church safe from harm or loss in that respect."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, it is clear that the king backed his own abbot against the clergy of another chapel.

Apart from protection, Richard II served Westminster Abbey by providing them with valuable gifts, and the Monk was careful that none of these gifts passed without mentioning. Therefore, we know what Richard had given to the abbey in each case. In 1388, for example, Richard II visited Westminster and presented to St. Edwards' Shrine a gold ring set with a very costly and valuable ruby.<sup>59</sup> Later on, the king sent to Westminster a pair of red velvet shoes, with fleur-de-lis worked on them in pearls, which had been blessed by Pope Urban VI shortly before his death.<sup>60</sup> When Richard's sister died in 1392, the funeral rites were performed at Westminster and valuable decorations used in the funeral were left there.<sup>61</sup> Apart from those gifts, Richard sometimes directly gave money. For example, the Monk mentions his giving 10 marks to the abbey in 1390 on the feast of St. Edmunds.<sup>62</sup> From all these examples, it can be seen that the king acted as a good patron and gave a lot of things to the abbey. All of these things were

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<sup>58</sup> "... nichilominus totum remisit. volens ecclesiam suam ea parte servare in dempnem": *ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>59</sup> "... unum anulum aureum in quo est rubea gemma inclusa magni precii at valoris": *ibid.*, p. 372.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 488.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.

acknowledged by the monks of his abbey who in a way thanked him by writing down all those in this chronicle.<sup>63</sup>

Richard II was not the only patron of the Westminster Abbey. Another benefactor of the abbey was the Duke of Gloucester, a relative of Richard II. Therefore, he was mentioned in the chronicle frequently and in a favourable way. He was praised as a good man especially when he gave precious gifts to the abbey, and it can be seen that the monks were concerned about the health and the safety of the earl, who gave them such precious gifts.<sup>64</sup> An example of this is seen in 1391. In that year the duke left for Prussia and before his departure, he sent numerous gifts to Westminster, including a vestment of cloth of gold, a jewel of silver and gilt, two silver and gilt basins, two candelabra and a silver and gilt censer.<sup>65</sup>

After all these expensive materials are taken as gifts from the Duke, it is normal that the monastery became very concerned about the duke in his voyage to Prussia very closely.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Monk referred to the hazards and losses that the duke suffered at sea during his voyage in a detailed way. He concluded his narration by saying, "the divine power was exercised in his favour and he was swiftly and miraculously snatched from the sea's greedy maw..."<sup>66</sup> These examples indicate the influence of patrons and benefactors on Westminster Abbey and thus on the chronicle written in this abbey. Therefore, it can be easily claimed that the patronage relations are highly effective on the shaping of the content of the chronicle.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> It would be interesting to look at other sources for Richard's grants and gifts as these can confirm the chronicle.

<sup>64</sup> Again research can be done for other sources for the Duke's grants and gifts to the abbey in order to see the extent of his benefaction.

<sup>65</sup> WC, p. 478.

<sup>66</sup> "Confestim de illa maris ingluvie divina favente virtute fuit miraculose ereptus...": *ibid.*, pp. 482-4.

<sup>67</sup> For more on patronage-content relation see Chapter I, pp. 23-4 and Chapter II, pp. 42-5.

## Social Events

The monks of Westminster Abbey showed interest in the social events of their time too. They included socially significant events in their chronicle such as the Peasants' Revolt. Their narration of the revolt was marked with their disgust at the rebels whom they described as rustics and peasants. The tone used in this description suggests a degrading of the peasants, who were judged as being illiterate and savage.<sup>68</sup> As commons the peasants were seen as inferior to the literate classes. In the chronicle, the events of 1381 are narrated under the subheading *ignobilis turba rusticorum surrexit* ("the ignoble mob of peasants rose").<sup>69</sup> This title in itself indicates the perspective of the monks in the abbey against the rebels. In the record of the Revolt, the recurring theme is the destruction caused by the rebels, and for the four pages of the Latin chronicle (the printed version), which are concerned with the revolt, the chronicle only records the harms caused by the rebels. It is as if the chronicle is a list of the fires they set and the people they killed before they could at last be stopped by the king.<sup>70</sup>

## Political Events

Since Richard was their patron, and the king of England, it was normal that the monks dealt with the issues related to Richard II while looking at the political events. However, it was the fact that Richard was a familiar face in Westminster which made the monks focus on him more than any other chronicles of Richard II's reign. As a result, the chronicle becomes not only a good source for the actions of the king but also a very exceptional source for the growth and personality of the king himself. In the chronicle it is seen that Richard II's lifetime was considered as being divided into two. The first part

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text*, pp. 53-5.

<sup>69</sup> WC, p. 2

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2.4.6.8.

was his minority when he had to cope with the barons and advisors around him, and the second part was the period after his coming of age and gaining full power as the royal authority. This division came in 1389, and it apparently made a difference for the Monk of Westminster because he changed his tone while mentioning the adult king.

Before 1389, namely from 1381 to 1389, the monks, that is the two authors treated the king with a more flexible language than the one that was used after his coming of age. In the early pages of the chronicle, Richard was portrayed as a boy of fourteen who submitted to the wishes of his advisers. He also yielded to the demands of the rebels during the Peasants' Revolt.<sup>71</sup> However, even at this stage, the first author of the chronicle had a praising tone for the young king because he was able to cope with the rebels in the end. Another kind of criticism of Richard, was about his temper as several cases were recited in which the king became irritated very easily and acted out of harshness.<sup>72</sup> The examples for this young and angry king are mostly in 1384, when the Monk was the author. In this year, first Richard II became annoyed at the earl of Arundel, and shouted at him because he implied that there was misgovernment in the kingdom. Then, he became angry again easily when John of Northampton implied that the king needed his uncle, the Duke of Lancaster to give a judgment. Next, we learn that Richard allowed the execution of twenty-five prisoners without trial because his yeoman informed him that these men had robbed him with violence.<sup>73</sup>

Then in 1385, the young Richard became frustrated with the archbishop of Canterbury; this time the reason was archbishop's criticism against the king for failing to follow law and custom. In response to this criticism, "the king drew his sword and would

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 184.

<sup>73</sup> WC, pp. 68, 92, 98.

have run the archbishop through on the spot if he had not been stoutly resisted by the earl of Buckingham, Sir John Devereux and Sir Thomas Trivet.”<sup>74</sup> This account and the others created the image of an adolescent who was very sensitive to the events around him and the treatment against him. This boy was ready to grasp his sword even against an archbishop, which was of course not a favourable thing to do from a monk’s perspective. Thus *furor Regis* (“king’s anger”) becomes a recurrent theme in the chronicle for the first years of Richard’s reign and for the king’s personality.

After the second half of 1385, Richard II seems to be more mature, or at least calmer, because the author of the chronicle no longer narrates any events which depicted the king’s temper. Rather, from that point onwards there was a gradual movement towards a portrayal of the king as a better person. He acted like a more peaceful person, and his anger and mercilessness was replaced by his emotional and caring side. As a result, we see Richard crying at the death of a friend, that is, the son of the Earl of Stafford whom he loved as a *coaeuus et sodalis* (“a contemporary and comrade”); concerned about the *inedia et fames* (“hunger and starvation”) of his soldiers in Scotland; and being *liberalis* (“generous”) to the extent of being over-lavish.<sup>75</sup> In 1387, Richard was represented as an even better king who was concerned about the burdens of war on his people; who tried to act maturely although he was given bad advices; and, who was very understanding and receptive to his people.<sup>76</sup>

From these accounts concerning Richard II, we can follow the development of the portrayal of Richard’s personality. In earlier pages, the authors are comparatively free to

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<sup>74</sup> “Rex extracto ense archiepiscopum ilico perfodisset nisi comes Bukyngham. dominus Johannes Deveroy et dominus Thomas Tryvet eidem fortiter restitissent”: *ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 130, 160.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204, 210, 224.

say whatever they saw about the king as he was considered as a boy. Thus, young Richard was criticized when he acted defectively. The gradual change of tone from this criticism to the praise of the king can be explained in various ways. One possibility might be that the king gradually had better relations with the monks of Westminster and therefore they had higher thoughts of him. This was likely to be true because from 1384 onwards we see that Richard visited the abbey more and started to spend more time in the sanctuary humbly praising there. Another possibility is the change of authors because apparently the Monk of Westminster appreciated the king more than the first author did. It might simply be that the king learned to control himself and got experienced in the matters of dealing with problems in a more peaceful way. On the other hand, the answer might be that all of these had some truth.

In the later pages of the chronicle, that is, after his coming of age, Richard II is dealt with more cautiously by the Monk. There are fewer references to the emotional state of the king, and almost no negative word is uttered against him. In the few cases when Richard was mentioned and evaluated, the Monk depicted him as a very rational man and an exemplary king. Thus, we can say that the Monk was intent on praising the king to the point of becoming a royalist. When the Monk refers to the king's coming of age, he emphasizes his first actions and let the king speak through the chronicle.<sup>77</sup> Here Richard is a completely mature man who is able to give decisions and who wants to work for the prosperity and reform of the kingdom.

Apart from that specific point in Richard II's reign, the mature king is almost always represented as a good king in the chronicle. For example, for the truce he made with the Scots in 1389, which angered many Englishmen since the Scots were

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

continuously attacking the English lands, the Monk offers the explanation that there was a plague and that the king did not want his soldiers to be hit by this plague.<sup>78</sup> On another occasion when the king forgives the Londoners' offences, he is described as *clemens et benignus rex* ("merciful and kind king").<sup>79</sup> As a result, one can follow the praise of the king throughout the chronicle, especially after his coming of age. Before that, he is the young and rash king and in a way this is the excuse for his mistakes if he does one, but after that point, it is very hard to find anything negative about the king and this can be because the Monk does not want the mature king to be seen as a weak man who might make mistakes.

The royalist perspective of *Westminster Chronicle* is in fact made apparent in the second half of the chronicle.<sup>80</sup> During the time of the Merciless Parliament, everybody, including the monks, had to take sides whether with the king or with the Appellant barons who aimed to destroy the king's advisors. In this case, the Monk reflected the royalist tendency of the chronicle by letting the barons criticize themselves for their ideas of deposition. In this occasion:

when they heard that the king was aiming threats in their direction the lords proposed to dethrone him on the double ground that he was failing to keep the agreement to which he was pledged and that he was apparently better pleased to be guided by the falsest of traitors than by those of his nobles and lords who were his most loyal supporters.<sup>81</sup>

However, immediately after the idea of deposition is mentioned, the lords start criticizing themselves for it. For example, the earl of Warwick says *absit* ("heaven forbid"), and explains that it would be a discredit and source of reproach for them, that it would be

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 402

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 502.

<sup>80</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, II, 183.

<sup>81</sup> WC, p. 218.

irrational and that they have no right to do so. After that point, the lords leave the idea of deposition completely aside and start chasing the advisors of the king.

However, the same lords deposed the king twelve years later, which means that they were not so ashamed of the idea of deposing a king. This might indicate that the chronicler's voicing of the criticism of deposition is conditioned by his royalist perspective. In other words, it was the Monk who wanted to avoid this idea because that would mean the loss of a good patron for the abbey. Also, by denigrating the concept of deposition, the chronicler might also be trying to gain the favour of the king by showing his respect and support for him. Here one wonders what would have happened if the chronicle had been written after the deposition. Maybe we would have had a different account of the same event and idea since the new king Henry IV would have deposed the former king Richard.

Another example of the royalist perspective of the chronicle is the justification made for king's actions as seen in the case of the truce with the Scots above. For instance, in 1392 Richard II *animum indignatum versus Londonienses gerebat* ("nursed a grudge against the Londoners") because although they refused to give the king the money he needed, he learned that they had lent money to foreigners, therefore he was seen as fair in his resentment.<sup>82</sup> From these examples, we understand that the royalist bias of the chronicle was in fact caused by the Monk's siding with the king in many matters. Richard II favoured Westminster Abbey, visited and gave presents to the abbey and defended the rights of the church; and in return, he was favoured and supported by the abbey by means of the "royalist" chronicle.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.. p. 496.



## **Diplomatic History**

The *Westminster Chronicle* is also important for diplomatic history because of the inclusion of diplomatic issues in its content. The authors of the chronicle included the international affairs of England in detail mainly because they had visitors from outside of England especially for religious reasons. As a result, the chronicle is a rich source for the relations between England and other European countries such as France, Lithuania, Russia, Armenia, Spain, and Rome. Both of the authors of the chronicle included lengthy accounts of the relations with other countries. Among these, the relations with France cover the most space because of the struggle between the two countries for Calais. In the chronicle, we learn all the developments related to Calais as they were given specifically each year.

The information concerning the diplomatic matters was not solely limited to England's international affairs. The authors also related the events that happened independently from England. One of the basic reasons for such accounts was religious. For example, the affairs of Milan were given because of Milan's proximity to Rome and Milan's intervention in the papal issues.<sup>83</sup> So, here the choice of content seems to be influenced by the fact that the authors of the text were connected to the Pope and Rome. Thus, with such accounts on other European countries, the chronicle becomes a valuable source not only for English history but also for European history and religious history.

## **Religion**

The religious content of *Westminster Chronicle* is naturally affected by the personnel of the chronicle. Most of the issues that are dealt in the chronicle were in one way or another related to religious history either because they were conditioned by the fact that

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

the settings of the events were the abbey or its sanctuaries, or because they were about the people who were connected to the religious orders somehow. Apart from that, the authors of the chronicle noted down significant religious issues, such as the matter of *Johannes Wyclif*. The Monk criticized Wycliffe and said “with the aim of pleasing men rather than God, he had sinfully spread a number of heretical and wrong-headed doctrines in God’s Church.”<sup>84</sup>

One of the recurrent religious issues of the chronicle was that of sanctuary. Apparently, the monks of Westminster Abbey were keen on protecting the sanctity and immunity of their sanctuaries, which is a monkish attitude. This can be understood from the example of the Tresilian issue. In 1388, during the Merciless Parliament, it was decreed that Richard II’s chief justice Robert Tresilian should be executed. However, Tresilian took sanctuary in Westminster, but was then dragged from the sanctuary by a couple of lords. This event raised the question about the degree of the immunity of a sanctuary. The lords who removed Tresilian claimed that the traitors against the king and the realm could not go into sanctuaries. However, Tresilian claimed that he had the right to do so.<sup>85</sup> At last Tresilian was executed, but the discussion about the immunity of the sanctuary continued throughout the chronicle when there was an occasion, and this indicates that the monks resented the attack on their sanctuary and that they wanted to emphasize the value and the imperviousness of the place. Therefore, the Monk first noted the king’s decision to execute the lords who had dragged Tresilian out of the sanctuary,

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<sup>84</sup> “multa heretica et perversa in ecclesia Dei. ut placeret hominibus non Deo. nequiter seminavit”: *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 310-2.

and then the pangs of conscience which these lords felt, and how they came to the abbot of Westminster to make satisfaction with all their power.<sup>86</sup>

Aside from the abbey's being the setting for the most of the events narrated in the chronicle, the fact that it was monks writing the chronicle affected the content in various ways. First of all, the monks tended to be interested in the issues concerning the clergy. The men of religion were criticized if they fell into sin and they were praised as heroes when they defended the rights of the church and demonstrated the strength of their faith. For example, a priest (a member of the secular clergymen) who had an affair with a married woman was persuaded by the woman to kill her husband. This priest is disparaged and described as being *insanus* ("mad") by the chronicler who narrated that the priest was clapped in prison where he died.<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, the clergy who showed their faith were duly applauded. For example, there is a long account of a Carmelite friar who accused the Duke of Lancaster of a treasonable plot against the king but had no proof of it. Some lords took this friar and tortured him to death in order to make him speak about his aims for accusing the duke. Although there was suspicion about of this friar and his aims, the author of the chronicle felt sorry for him and even praised him because he was a *famulus Dei* ("servant of God") and he endured all the tortures with the patience of a servant of Christ and remained undefeated by the lords.<sup>88</sup> As a result, in this account the author is aware of the faults of the friar, but despite them, he created the image of heroic death because of the friar's faith and of the fact that this friar was a member of the regular clergy.<sup>89</sup> This

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 324-6, 332.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-78.

<sup>89</sup> Bryan Bevan, *King Richard II*, p. 41.

attitude is very monkish because it shows us that the monks were inclined to praise people from their own class and to criticize the outsiders.

Not only the clergy but also the laity formed a part of the chronicle's subjects if they were related to religious issues. For example, when noblemen defended the rights of the church or proved to have strong faith in God, they were praised. For example, at the end of the Merciless Parliament several barons were executed for being traitors. In fact, all these were Richard II's advisors and friends. Maybe because of this reason or maybe just because of the way they died, these lords were described as courageous. They all welcomed death with prayers and caused piety among the bystanders as they died.<sup>90</sup>

*The Westminster Chronicle* is in the tradition of medieval monastic historical writing, because, like other monastic chronicles, it was written in a monastery by various monks. Also, it is in the tradition of the continuation of Higden's *Polychronicon* too, as it continued other chronicles. As a monastic chronicle, it follows the line of other monastic chronicles, which are written in a tightly annalistic form. The protection of chronological order is so concrete that this order almost prevents the chronicle from having a thematic structure. This chronicle also exemplifies the multiple authorship problem encountered in many medieval chronicles. While the language is Latin, the inclusion of documents in French shows how commonly French was used then. The sources of the chroniclers were mostly themselves and this is understood from the fact that the monastery is great part of the content. As source, the monks also used various documents which they cited directly in the chronicle.

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<sup>90</sup> WC. pp. 312. 314. 316.

The influence of patronage is also seen through the chronicle because of the insistence to mention the patrons and their benefactions, especially Richard II. This insistence can be seen as a royalist perspective because the main patron of Westminster was the king. Apart from the focus on the patron, we can trace many other traditions of monastic chronicles in this chronicle such as the inclusion of information about weather, about the monastery itself, about religion, the use of the impersonal tone and the flat, annalistic style.

Basically, the *Chronicon Westmonasteriense* was a typical monastic chronicle because it was written by monks in an impersonal tone. The monks were living in Westminster, which was the premier royal abbey and thus frequently visited by important visitors, and the monastic involvement determined the style and the content of the chronicle to a great extent. The monks, who had the mission of writing the chronicle, were stable in one place and they were probably getting tired of their task or lacking sources\* especially composing the later parts of the chronicle. Subsequently, this chronicle can be described as monotonous. The impersonal tone, the limitation of content because of the stableness of the monks and the continuous inclusion of lengthy documents within the text were factors which render dullness to the chronicle.

However, *Westminster Chronicle* has its own historical value as its content provides us with many details found nowhere else as Barbara Harvey claims. It is rich in documentation and details of the events especially those in the first half of the chronicle. Therefore, one can use this chronicle for historical information by being aware of its deficiencies such as its royalist bias.

**CONCLUSION:**

**COMPARISON OF ADAM USK'S *CHRONICON* AND  
*CHRONICON WESTMONASTERIENSE***

In this thesis, I have examined the tradition of English writing history in the medieval period, and in particular, I looked at the late medieval period, the age of Richard II. In order to exemplify the two types of chronicles written in this period I took one secular (written by a secular clergyman) and one monastic chronicle, Adam Usk's *Chronicon* and the *Chronicon Westmonasteriense* respectively. This period was an important one in the historiography of England because it was a transition period when various changes took place in the personnel, language and style of history writing.

Given the period under inspection, two questions become important: first what were the common characteristics of the secular (non-monastic) and monastic chronicles; and secondly, what differed between their stylistic features and content. Although it can be traced from the analysis of the chronicles in Chapter II and Chapter III, here I want to summarize the answers to those questions.

**Similarities**

The great influence of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* can be seen in the late fourteenth-century chronicles, and the chronicle of Adam Usk and the Westminster Chronicle are no exceptions to this. Both Adam Usk and Westminster Abbey had copies of Higden's

work, and they considered their histories as extensions of this famous text.<sup>1</sup> Because of this view, they started their works from their own decades. They both wrote retrospectively, however the differences between the actual times of the events and the date of composition were limited to a few years for both chronicles. Consequently, these two chronicles cover similar years, that is, they both deal with the years between 1381 and 1394. Although Adam Usk's chronicle covers a wider span, which is between the years 1377 and 1421, the narration is concentrated on the reign of Richard II, and therefore his chronicle, like that of Westminster, is an important source book for the events in the reign of Richard II.

These two contemporaneous chronicles are also similar in their language.<sup>2</sup> The main language used in their composition is Latin, although the chroniclers acknowledge by various ways that the sources they use are not all in Latin. This fact shows us that the tradition of writing history in Latin is still alive and effective in England in the late fourteenth century, although there was a tendency towards the usage of the vernacular in many types of writing such as poems and treatises of different sorts. The chroniclers used Latin mainly because this was the proper language to write something respectable. The personnel of the chroniclers had an effective role in this situation because both the monastic and the secular chroniclers were well-trained men who had a good knowledge of Latin. Therefore, the practice of using Latin was a way for the chronicler to show off his linguistic elegance as well as to entertain his audience in many cases. Likewise, the factor of the audience was an important one in the continuation of the use of Latin because the chronicles were mostly written for the upper classes who knew Latin or for

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 28-9; Chapter II, pp. 32, 60; Chapter III, pp. 63, 67, 92.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 14-16; Chapter II, pp. 36, 60; Chapter III, pp. 68-9, 92.

the monastic orders who were again supposed to know Latin well. As a result, the chronicle of Adam Usk and *Westminster Chronicle* were similarly written in Latin, although their respective personnel were different.

When we look at the structures of these two chronicles, we can see that the similarities continue here too. For example, both of them are written in the annalistic form.<sup>3</sup> One can trace the passage of time by the yearly entries. While these annual divisions are more comprehensive in the *Westminster Chronicle*, Adam Usk was also keen on protecting the chronology in his chronicle. Therefore he even refrained from putting some sort of thematic order in his chronicle except in a few cases. However, such exceptions can be balanced by the similar, but fewer exceptions in the *Westminster chronicle*, which also sometimes tries to protect a thematic unity for the sake of an important issue such as the ones related to the Pope.

When we generally look at the exceptions made to the chronological order, we can assume that they are determined by the factors influencing the chroniclers. In the case of Adam Usk, this factor is Usk's own likes and dislikes. Therefore, we see him creating a thematic unity for the issue of taxation and disorder because he disliked both of these things. Likewise, the *Westminster chroniclers* formed a thematic unity when they dealt with the issues which were of crucial importance to him, and naturally these were the religious issues since here the chroniclers were from the regular religious orders.

Adam Usk's *Chronicon* and *Westminster Chronicle* also resemble each other in their sources. First of all, like all other medieval chronicles, eyewitness accounts of the events were the basic source for both of them. Adam Usk was himself the eyewitness to

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter I, p.20; Chapter II, pp. 36-7, 60; Chapter III, pp. 69-71, 92.



many of the events he recounts. If he was not the witness then he attempted to learn the event from an eyewitness. Similarly, the Westminster chronicle uses eyewitness accounts of the monks or the visitors of the abbey while narrating events. Here, the location of the chroniclers play determining factors in both chronicles, because the authors both tell the events that they are close enough to witness themselves, or to listen from the other actual eyewitnesses.

The insistence on the usage of eyewitness accounts in these chronicles derives from the efforts of the chroniclers to make their texts more credible. This case is a common characteristic of almost all medieval texts. Since modern historical methodology and scientific methods of research were unknown concepts to medieval writings, the only way of providing credibility for their texts was to show a witness and thus to add reliability to what is said.<sup>4</sup> So there was apparently a desire to have credibility and for these medieval chroniclers the methodology for this was the use of eye-witness accounts.

Both of these chronicles also used other sources such as government documents, letters, writs and papal bulls. In most cases they cited these documents directly, that is, they said that there was a source and then they included this source either in a translated form into Latin or in its original language, most likely in French. For example, Adam Usk included various letters, petitions and papal bulls in Latin.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, *Westminster Chronicle* included written sources such as letters patent, statutes, texts relating to the parliament and royal writs.<sup>6</sup> These written sources were quoted probably because they

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<sup>4</sup> Coleman, "Late Scholastic Memoria et Reminiscencia", pp. 42-4. See Chapter I. p. 19; Chapter II. pp. 40. 60.

<sup>5</sup> See for example. AU. pp. 74. 136. 148. 150. 162. 176. 192.

<sup>6</sup> See for example. WC. pp. 166. 174. 198. 236. 280. 356. 384. 416. 458.

were seen as the written authority for the texts and because they added to their reliability like the eyewitness accounts. The citation of documents was also a practical method especially for the monks because, being restricted to the monasteries, they were less free than the secular clerks who had the opportunity to witness events. Therefore they had to resort to written documents.

The span of the contents of these chronicles is similar too, since they both cover a wide range of events. Apart from the expected accounts related to social, political, religious and diplomatic affairs, these chronicles also include accounts of weather conditions, miracles, supernatural events and prodigies. Therefore, the supernatural elements, which are commonly found in medieval texts, are also encountered in these chronicles. From that, we can conclude that the chroniclers included such information not only because they were amazed by or attracted to them, but also because they thought that this was the proper way of writing texts, even writing histories. Most of the time such events were real to them. In other cases, when they saw them as supernatural again they included them because of the significance attributed to such issues. As a result the supernatural events had their own historicity for these chroniclers.

When we look at the attitude of these two chronicles towards their content, we can see that they are similar in their treatment of some specific events. The first example of this is the treatment of the Peasants' Revolt. For Adam Usk, the people who took place in the revolt were the *plebes*, that is, the common people or the lower ranks and their leaders and actions were *miseri* ("wretched and distressing").<sup>7</sup> While Usk narrated what these people did during the revolt, he criticized them by saying that they destroyed the country. When he told that they beheaded the chancellor and the treasurer, he

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<sup>7</sup> AU, pp. 2-4. See Chapter II, p. 40

commented that they killed the nobler born of the society. Thus, it can be concluded that Usk was against the rebellion and the rebels since he thought that they created a lawless and disordered society. In the same way, the Westminster chronicler depicted the rebels as *rustici*, (“the peasants”) in a way by looking down on them, and described them as mad dogs who beheaded people arbitrarily.<sup>8</sup> He also recounted that the city resented the lawlessness and the aggression of the peasant mob, presumably because as a lawyer these repelled him. Therefore, in both accounts of the revolt, of which that in the Westminster chronicle is longer, there is a condemnation of the rebels and a disapproval of their behaviour.

Another similarity concerning the treatment of the political content is the approach of these two chronicles to the advisors of Richard II until 1388. In both chronicles, these advisors are labeled as evil, and they are almost being cursed by the chroniclers for inflicting bad things on the king and the country. In Adam Usk’s chronicle, the turbulent years of Richard’s reign are explained by the existence of ill advisors who were responsible for the injustices in the realm.<sup>9</sup> In the *Westminster Chronicle*, there are references to “the bad counsellors” of the king, “the hostile and the wicked” around the king, and “the bad counsel” affecting the king as well.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with this interpretation of Richard II’s advisors, both chronicles explained the Barons’ Revolt in 1387 as a reaction against these men. Adam Usk explains that the reason for the Merciless Parliament was to rescue the king and the realm from the greed and lasciviousness of the king’s advisors.<sup>11</sup> For the *Westminster*

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<sup>8</sup> WC. pp. 2-6. See Chapter III. pp. 78. 82-3.

<sup>9</sup> AU. pp. 2. 8.

<sup>10</sup> “mali consilarii”, “iniqui et pessimi”, “mala gubernatio”. WC, p. 114. 184. 206.

<sup>11</sup> AU. pp. 8-10.

*Chronicle* also, the king's advisors were traitors who could overthrow the kingdom. Therefore, it was the loyalty of the barons to the king and to the realm to react against these advisors.<sup>12</sup> As a result, one can perceive that these two chronicles commented similarly on the young king's advisors and counted the same reasons for the occurrence of the Merciless Parliament, probably with different motives. Usk's motive for this might be his desire to explain the faults and wrong decisions made by the child king whose deposition he would later justify. On the other hand, the monks' purpose was possibly to put the blame on others rather than on the king because he was the patron of their abbey.

Similarities continue in the treatment of the patrons in the chronicles.<sup>13</sup> The influence of patronage can be traced down from the praise and support of the patrons throughout both of these chronicles. In Usk's case, the emphasis on the patrons is indicated by the fact that he gives a great space to them in the content of his chronicle. He does not refrain from including all sorts of information about his lay and ecclesiastical patrons.<sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Westminster chronicle pays tribute to the patrons of Westminster Abbey by mentioning what they did and how they helped the abbey in each case. Therefore, the pages of the chronicle are full of information about Richard II, and one can even conclude that Richard's patronage of the abbey is a more important fact for the monks than his being the king.<sup>15</sup> This can be understood from the emphasis on the personality of the king and representation of his development into a good and mature king through the chronicle.

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<sup>12</sup> WC, p. 210.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 23-4.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 42-5, 53.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter III, pp. 79-82, 92.

One last similarity in the nature of content of these two chronicles is the place given to church and religion.<sup>16</sup> It is not unfair to say that religion is a crucial part of the content for both Adam Usk and the Westminster chronicler. This focus on religion can be explained by the dominance of religion in worldly matters in the medieval period. Not only the chronicles but also almost all kinds of written texts acknowledged the importance of church by including information about it in their content. Thus, while normally chroniclers from the regular religious orders frequently mention religious issues in their texts, the secular clergymen, like Adam Usk, both because of this reason and maybe also because he had patrons from the religious orders, such as the archbishops, also included a lot of religious events and concepts in their chronicles.

### Differences

While there are many similarities between Adam Usk's *Chronicon* and *Chronicon Westmōnasteriense*, as indicated above, there are also various differences between the two. The first of these differences is the professions of the authors of both chronicles. Adam Usk is a secular clergyman and the Westminster chroniclers are monks, that is regular clergymen. Therefore, they had dissimilar work and saw the world differently which means that they doubtless had diverse worldviews. As a secular clergyman, Usk was not connected to one place, and this is best exemplified by his travels. However, most of the monks, especially those with the task of writing the chronicle, hardly left their monasteries because their departure would have meant the interruption of the writing process. It is for this reason, for instance, that Barbara Harvey can make

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter I. pp. 24-5; Chapter II. pp. 53-5; Chapter III. pp. 89-91.

assumptions about the identity of the Monk of the Westminster, by saying that someone travelling cannot be the Monk of Westminster.<sup>17</sup>

Another difference related to the authorships of these chronicles is the identity and number of authors. That is to say, while we know that *Chronicon Ade Usk* was written by a single person called Adam, there is no certain document saying who wrote *Westminster Chronicle*, or how many monks wrote it. As a result, there is the issue of anonymous chronicler here, which is common to monastic chronicles.<sup>18</sup> It is only from some of the stylistic clues that we can reach conclusions about the existence of multiple authors who are in fact anonymous. Therefore, these two chronicles are actually distinct from each other because one of them is precise in its authorship while the other is not.

The difference in the personnel of the chronicles is also accompanied by a difference in their audience. In the medieval period, chronicles had a limited audience, and generally the scope of audience was defined by the patronage or the location of the chronicle. Adam Usk, whose writing was not patronized by any of his patrons, wrote to praise or thank to them whenever possible since he was dependent on his patrons for a living. Usk might have expected to be read by noblemen, by clergy or by the posterity, because he addressed the *lector*, that is an unknown reader, in various places of the chronicle and this might indicate a salutation and a preparation for the possible unknown readers.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the chronicler of Westminster Abbey, being a monk himself, wrote for his own monastery and presumably for the other religious orders, which could read and copy his work. The influence of patronage was also felt in this chronicle by the references to the patrons. However, since there were a fewer patrons for

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<sup>17</sup> For this discussion see Chapter III. pp. 64-8.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter I. pp. 11.

<sup>19</sup> See for example. AU, p. 74

the abbey than for Adam Usk, the information was concentrated on fewer person rather than many noblemen. As a result, these two chronicles address different audiences and this was represented in their structure and content.

One of the basic differences between these chronicles is the tone of the authors. Adam Usk has a very personal tone: he uses first person narration and refers frequently to himself with first person forms of verbs and with the phrase, the “compiler of this present work”.<sup>20</sup> Apart from that stylistic feature, Usk’s personal tone is indicated in his highly critical tone while narrating the events. That means that Usk includes his own comments about the events and says either that he likes the condition, fears it or hates it. He even gives advice to the readers by referring to his own experiences, as in the case of Oxford riots. This situation even enables the reader to gain information about the character of Usk, which means that the chronicle becomes a source of information about Usk himself. The *Westminster Chronicle*, on the other hand, has a very impersonal tone and one cannot find references to the authors. Unlike Usk’s personal narrative, there are almost no references to the thought and feelings of the authors in *Westminster Chronicle*. In addition, the monks usually refrain from criticism; in the few cases where they do this, this is kept very short.<sup>21</sup> As a result, we can say that the Monk was determined to keep his detachment as much as possible, and it is because of this reason that we know less about the authors of *Westminster Chronicle* than we do about Adam Usk.

Although the two chronicles use Latin while narrating events, there is a difference in their citation of the written sources they include in the text. Adam Usk translates his sources into Latin and even acknowledges this fact by saying that it is a translation. His

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<sup>20</sup> For this discussion see Chapter II, pp. 46. 61.

<sup>21</sup> For this, see Chapter III, pp. 71-2, 92-3.

reason in doing so might be to show of his knowledge of languages or his elegant style which would look more learned with the help of these translations. However, the Monk of Westminster includes, that is copies, the sources as they are, that is in their own language. One of the reasons for this difference may be the length of the texts cited. The texts that Usk translates are shorter than the texts of the Monk; they are usually only a couple of pages. However, the sources included by the Monk are very long. In total, while Usk had around twenty pages to translate in total, the Monk had more than a hundred pages, and whether out of an illness or out of the scarcity of time or sources the Monk simply included the texts in their original language. Other possibilities might be that the Monk either thought that his readers would understand French, which might indicate that French was still commonly used in England at the end of the fourteenth-century, or did not care to translate because the chronicle was an internal record which did not have to be elegant or entertaining.

The places of composition are also different for these chronicles. While Usk was continuously on the move, the Westminster chroniclers were always in the abbey. Usk traveled through England and even Europe, therefore his chronicle was shaped by these travels as these added to the information Usk saw or heard. As a result, Usk included vivid details about the places he visited in the content which seem to focus on Usk as he was the basic source of his text. On the other hand, the stable location of the authors in Westminster had its own influences, too. Firstly, this made the chroniclers focus on the issues related to Westminster Abbey.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, it prevented the authors from having first hand information about the places beyond Westminster. So, it was through the visitors from those lands and the documents they brought that they learned what was

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<sup>22</sup> For further information see Chapter III, pp. 75-9.



going on. In this sense, the information provided by Usk can be considered as being more reliable as he was the eye-witness to what he narrates.

The *Chronicon Ade Usk* and the *Westminster Chronicle* had differences in their approach to the events they narrated too. The best example of this case is their approach to the king, Richard II. According to Adam Usk, the king was a source of trouble, and he started saying this from the very first page of the chronicle. For his criticism of Richard, Usk found several reasons such as the youth and the ill-advisors of the king. For him, the king was destined to fail because a child king could never be competent.<sup>23</sup> For the Westminster chronicler, however, the youth of the king was just an excuse for his rashness and faults. Although there were accounts of the king's mistakes in this chronicle, these lessen and at last disappear from the text as Richard reaches the age of maturity.<sup>24</sup> This situation can be explained by the support of the king by Westminster Abbey. As Richard II was a continuous visitor and beneficent patron of the abbey, it was normal that the monks had a royalist approach to the issues concerning the king.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, they reflected the king's behaviour as a part of his development, which was a good and peaceful at the end.

One factor for the different portrayals of Richard in these two chronicles is their terminal years and the date of their composition. Adam Usk's chronicle stops narration well after Richard's deposition, but Westminster one ends in 1394. While Usk started to write his chronicle in 1401, which is after the deposition, the monks ended writing theirs before the deposition. Therefore, they had no idea that one day their champion would be overthrown. As a result, while Usk was careful enough not to offend the new king by

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<sup>23</sup> See for example, AU, pp. 2, 6, 8, 10. Also see Chapter II, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter III, pp. 84-5

<sup>25</sup> Gransden, pp. 182-3.

making useless praise of the older one, the monks had no such concern, and they freely praised Richard II, probably with the hope of pleasing their generous patron.

Another significant difference related to the content of the chronicles is the approach to the appellant barons of 1388. While narrating the events of 1387 and 1388, Usk shares the baronial point of view.<sup>26</sup> He is on the side of the barons who play an active role in the Merciless Parliament. This is mainly caused by the fact that Usk's patrons were amongst the appellants. On the other hand, the Westminster chroniclers were on the king's side and they continued their royalist attitude in this case, too. This can be seen in the representation of the reactions against the idea of deposition of the king, which is discussed in Chapter III.<sup>27</sup> Here, the barons are presented as being against the idea of deposition of the king. However, Usk knows that these barons actually deposed the king and that the new king was amongst these barons once. Consequently, Usk is not against the idea of deposition; on the contrary, as he himself played an active role in this deposition, he justifies the deposition by explaining its reasons, and by adding rumours about the doubtful birth of Richard.<sup>28</sup>

In general, Adam Usk's chronicle seems to reflect his life. Therefore it is possible to say that this chronicle is semi-autobiographical, but this is not true for *Westminster Chronicle*.<sup>29</sup> It is for this reason that many of the differences occur between the two chronicles as shown in this chapter. Being a secular clergyman, Usk was, unlike the monastic chroniclers, free to employ his own tone in his chronicle. Moreover, he probably had to entertain and satisfy his patrons therefore it was necessary to employ an

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<sup>26</sup> Gransden, p. 168.

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter III, p. 87-8.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 48-9, 57-8.

<sup>29</sup> Gransden, p. 163.

interesting and complex style, which stands in contrast with the almost impersonal style of the monastic chronicle. Among the reasons for the differences between the two chronicles, one can also add the location and professions of the chroniclers because, being monks, the Westminster chroniclers were less independent than the traveling lawyer.

When we look at the similarities and differences between these chronicles, *Chronicon Ade Usk* and *Chronicon Westmonasteriense*, in general, we can say that we can trace the change from the monastic chronicles to the non-monastic ones especially with the help of the differences. The long-lived tradition of monastic chronicle writing was being gradually replaced by the secular ones. It is not very difficult to understand why when we compare the styles and content of these two chronicles. The secular chronicle is more entertaining and elegant than the monastic one. In the coming ages where the vernacular became dominant as the language of writing in England, of course there was more space for secular writing than the monastic Latin chronicles.

In this thesis I have examined stylistic and content features of chronicles because as recent historians argue, such an approach is crucial for a complete assessment of the medieval historical texts. The comparative approach applied here intends to render the evaluation and understanding of these texts ever more dimensional and efficient. Apart from that I believe that being aware of the similarities and differences in audience, language, structure, style and content of these chronicles is essential for us to study and use them more effectively.

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