

THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

PERIODIZATION

'MIDDLE AGES': C. 5th CENTURY (Anglo-Saxon invasion) → 1475 (introduction of the printing press)

3 AGES:

1. ANGLO-SAXON (5th century-1066)
 - Old English (oral, transition to written culture);
2. ANGLO-NORMAN (1066 Battle of Hastings-c. 1200)
 - Linguistic apartheid: French (governance, literature), Latin (religion, scholarship), English (vernacular, oral), Gaelic (marginalized);
3. MIDDLE ENGLISH (1200-1475)
 - Rising status of vernacular as language of literature

DR. DICKSON'S MEDIEVAL TOP 5

1. ENGLISH IDENTITY is a HYBRID;
2. HYBRID and TRANSITIONAL CULTURE is visible in the LITERARY FORMS;
3. SOCIAL CHANGE drives LINGUISTIC and LITERARY CHANGE;
4. RELIGION FACILITATES and SHAPES LITERARY CULTURE;
5. TECHNOLOGY DRIVES SOCIAL CHANGE.

CHRONOLOGICAL VIEW

- 5th: ROMANS retreat → ANGLO-SAXONS enter
 - Oral culture, displacement of Gaelic to the margins
- 7th: 2nd CHRISTIAN MISSION
 - Introduction of WRITTEN culture, monastic system
 - Melding of Germanic and Christian sensibilities
- 9th: King Alfred creates and AS/OE written culture via translation of Latin texts, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
- 11th: Battle of Hastings (1066), Norman Invasion
 - French/Latin as languages of government and culture; English becomes a strictly oral, "low" language
- 13th-14th: conflict with France (100 Years War)
 - Rise of English as written language of literature, government, English nationalism
- 15th: Rise of the "middling sort"
 - Capitalism, social mobility, expansion of government, the printing press create demand for a literate class of English-speakers

ENGLISH IDENTITY IS A HYBRID

- Each invasion prompted an adaptation of linguistic and literary forms:
 - New vocabulary (Anglo-Christian terminology, Norman language of leisure and governance);
 - New genres (Christian Heroic, Anglo-Norman Romance);
 - New concepts (Christian Heroic, Anglicized Classical forms);
 - New power relationships between linguistic groups (rise and fall of vernacular English relative to imposed elite languages)
- = "English" is an identity that encapsulates multitudes and emerges only as its own "thing" in the 14th century.



Lindisfarne Gospel with OE gloss

HYBRID and TRANSITIONAL CULTURE is visible in the LITERARY FORMS:

- ANGLO-SAXON: Oral → Written, translation: AS Chronicles, Beowulf (King Alfred)
- ANGLO-NORMAN: Oral → Written: Romance combines French chivalric values with traditional British oral adventure tales (Marie de France)
- CHRISTIAN: Oral → Written: written culture favours the privileged elite while vernacular religious drama (Mystery and Morality plays) represents a vernacular hybrid of popular orality and learned literacy. (N-Town Plays);
- ANGLO-CLASSICAL: Anglicization of Classical forms (Chaucer)

= literature as a negotiation between cultures and power structures.



One surviving scribal copy of Beowulf

SOCIAL CHANGE drives LINGUISTIC and LITERARY CHANGE:

- INVASION:
 - AS+Christian=Heroic Christian, written culture;
 - Norman Conquest=Linguistic "apartheid"
- SOCIAL MOBILITY:
 - the Black Death;
 - Increased urbanization;
 - rise of the merchant class;
 - secularization of knowledge;
 - rise of Parliament;

= Increased demand for literacy
= increased emphasis on vernacular culture

RELIGION FACILITATES and SHAPES LITERARY CULTURE;

- Christianity (esp. the Christian Mission of St. Augustine, 6th century)
- introduced a WRITTEN CULTURE;
 - Annexed the production of knowledge to the MONASTERIES;
 - Participated in the development of English nationalist identity (e.g. translation of Latin religious texts into West Saxon);
 - Connected England to a European culture via Latin as *lingua franca*;
 - Aroused resentment that feeds into the early stirrings of the REFORMATION, which was largely grounded in the demand for a VERNACULAR BIBLE.

TECHNOLOGY DRIVES SOCIAL CHANGE

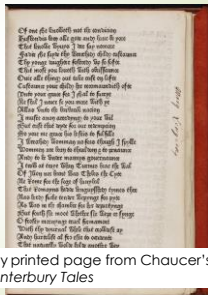
- influences WHO can make literature and WHO can access it:
 - ORALITY (vernacular OE) → WRITTEN CULTURE;
 - MANUSCRIPT BOOK PRODUCTION → COMMERCIAL BOOK PRODUCTION

=interplay between the vernacular and the elite culture
 =increased commercialization of book-making (the printing press) facilitates the spread of literacy and the rise of vernacular English as a legitimate language of literature

Technological transition



MS copy of Chaucer's "Prologue"



Early printed page from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*
