

What is the Anglo-Norman Brut?¹

During the 13th and 14th centuries in England, a number of texts were written in the insular dialect of French, commonly referred to as Anglo-Norman or Anglo-French, which purported to recount the history of the kings of the island. These histories, known in the vernacular as *Bruts* both then and in our times², after the eponymous founder of Britain, are defined by Diana Tyson in her list of *Brut* manuscripts as, “factual historical narratives, or genuine attempts thereat, of the era from the Heptarchy into the Plantagenet period, or a section thereof.”³ These manuscripts are a heterogeneous group, differing significantly in character and in content though in all cases their narrative is based, in varying degrees, upon the *Historia regum Britanniae* and claim to tell the history of the country from Brutus up to mostly contemporary times. A number of texts fall under the heading of ‘Anglo-Norman Brut’, in verse and in prose and the following survey will help clarify how these texts are interrelated.

The history of the Anglo-Norman Brut begins with a lost text. Completed in 1139, Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis*⁴ is a history of the English kings, the earliest Anglo-Norman chronicle as well as the first French history of the Saxon kings, beginning with the arrival of the Saxons and ending in 1100. Written at a similar time as Geoffrey of Monmouth *Historia*, it is clear that Gaimar’s work as it is now known is incomplete. The opening lines of the work suggest that the extant text was once preceded by a history of the pre-Saxon times, including the reign of Arthur. Gaimar would likely not have known of Geoffrey’s *Historia* and one can only guess as to his sources for this portion of his chronicle. It is surmised that due to the enormous popularity of Wace’s later translation or Monmouth, Gaimar’s account of this period was rejected, and indeed, in all four extant manuscripts of the *Estoire*, Gaimar’s text is preceded by Wace’s, providing together a history of the island from Brutus to 1100. Gaimar’s work remains important nevertheless as it is later incorporated into various Anglo-Norman *Bruts*.

Wace’s *Roman de Brut*⁵ is probably the most well-known of the Anglo-Norman *Bruts*, and after the *Prose Brut*, is extant in the greatest number of manuscripts. It is difficult to decide whether he should technically be considered an Anglo-Norman or a French author – he was born in Jersey, educated in Normandy but wrote works for, and perhaps commissioned by, the Anglo-Norman king Henry II. His translation of the Variant version of Geoffrey’s *Historia*⁶ was completed in 1155, and makes a few alterations from his source material, omitting minor characters and generally having a more courtly tone.

Like his source, Wace begins his chronicle with an account of the flight of Aeneas, and moves quickly to the discovery of the island by Brutus and the division of the land into

¹ A version of the paper was given at the conference *From the Historia Regum Britannae to the European Bruts, part I: Towards a Typology of the vernacular adaptations of Geoffrey of Monmouth* in Aberystwyth, June 2011.

² The *Anglo-Norman Dictionary Online* (AND2; www.anglo-norman.net) sub **bruit2** defines the term as ‘Brute, chronicle of British history, beginning with the mythical Brutus’. The term was equally used in Middle English; see the *Middle English Dictionary* sub **Brut** (‘Any of the chronicles of British history beginning with Brutus, the mythical founder of Britain’) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* sub **brut** (‘A chronicle of British history from the mythical Brutus downward.’)

³ Diana B Tyson. “Handlist of Manuscripts Containing the French Prose *Brut* Chronicle.” *Scriptorium*. 48 (1994): 333-44, p. 334.

⁴ A. Bell, ed. *L’Estoire des Engleis by Geoffrei Gaimar*, ANTS 13, London, 1960. This text had been recently re-edited and translated by I. Short *Geoffrei Gaimar: Estoire des Engleis, History of the English*, Oxford, 2009.

⁵ The standard edition of Wace’s work is that by I.D.O. Arnold, *Le Roman de Brut de Wace*. SATF. 2 vols. Paris, 1928 / 1940. J. Weiss has recently edited and translated the work, *Wace’s Roman de Brut: A History of the British*, Exeter, 2002.

⁶ N. Wright. *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth. 2, The First Variant Version: A Critical Edition*, Cambridge, 1985.

three kingdoms on his death. He devotes much of his chronicle, nearly a third of the verses, to Arthur's reign, developing at length his foreign conquests and mentioning, for the first time, the Round Table. The importance of this translation cannot be overstated – it is a monument to the precociousness of Anglo-Norman historical writing – Wace would write a history of the Dukes of Normandy to complete his vision of Henry II's ancestry. It would be enormously popular during the Middle Ages; it is attested in nearly 20 manuscripts plus a number of fragments, though its main influence would be as a source for an enormous number of translations throughout the following 200 years.

Though Wace's work was the main vernacular translation of Geoffrey's *Historia* circulating in the 12th and early 13th century, a number of writers were inspired to make their own translations. Another early adaptation, dating from the early thirteenth century can be found interpolated into a manuscript of Wace's *Brut*. Published under the unhelpful title of *An Anglo-Norman Brut*⁷, the text is a reworking of the history of Britain from Aeneas to Arthur based on the *Historia* though not the Variant version which it is generally believed Wace used.

Other fragmentary verse *Bruts* are extant, often passages are found in genealogical rolls, as well as other fragments located in a number of manuscripts. Recently, in an edition of the Merlin Prophecies later interpolated into Wace, Jean Blacker lists a number of octosyllabic and decasyllabic *Bruts* that have now been located, dating mostly from the late thirteenth century, and many other short fragments are listed by Dean and Boulton.⁸

The *Harley Brut*⁹ is extant in five fragments, composed in alexandrine laisses, but nothing is known of its author. Again, the work is a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's text, and only the portion corresponding to Chapters 5-10 of the *Historia* survive.

At the end of the thirteenth century, a new era began for vernacular historiography, and prose works began to appear. One last verse adaptation was written in Anglo-Norman in the middle of the century, however, and is known as the *Metrical Brut* (though Dean gives it an alternate title of §50 *Verse Epitome of Wace's Brut*)¹⁰. This text is a translation of the *Roman de Brut*, rather than of the *Historia*, and is much abridged.

The remainder of the adaptations of the *Historia* written in Anglo-Norman are prose translations and their evolution is quite difficult to disentangle. They frequently use multiple sources for their histories and appear to have borrowed heavily from one another.

One of the earliest edited prose *Bruts* is likely also one of the earliest composed. The work, given the title *Le Livre de reis de Brittanie*, by its editor, who readily acknowledges that the title in the base manuscript used actually likely reads, *Le livre de reis de Brut*.¹¹ This

⁷ A. Bell, *An Anglo-Norman Brut*, ANTS 21-22, London, 1969.

⁸ J. Blacker, *Anglo-Norman Verse Prophecies of Merlin*, Dallas, 2005 includes a list of Anglo-Norman verse *Bruts* on pp. 97-98. R.J. Dean and M. Boulton have compiled the most exhaustive list of Anglo-Norman Texts in *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*. ANTS Occasional Publication Series 3, London, 1999.

⁹ The fragment, found in Harley 1605, was first edited by B. Blakely, "The Harley *Brut*: an early French translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannae*", *Romania*, 82 (1961), 44-70, who only prints the text corresponding to chapter 5. The text of the other four chapters is found in an appendix to P. Damian-Grint, *Vernacular History in the Making: Anglo-Norman Verse Historiography in the XIIIc.*, dissert. University of London, 1994. This should not be confused with another fragment in Harley 4733, in octosyllabic couplets, corresponding to chapters 1-4 of the *Historia*, edited by P. Damian-Grint, "A 12th Century Anglo-Norman Brut Fragment", *Anglo-Norman Anniversary Essays*, ANTS Occasional Publication Series 2, London, 1993, pp. 96-103.

¹⁰ This text was edited by V.P. Underwood in her 1937 University of London thesis, *An Anglo-Norman Metrical 'Brut' of the Fourteenth Century*.

¹¹ J. Glover, *Le Livre de Reis de Brittanie*, Rolls Series, London, 1865. This text has been re-edited by C. Foltys, *Kritische Ausgabe der anglonormannische Chroniken 'Brutus', 'Li Rei de Engleterre', 'Le Livre de Reis de Engleterre'*, dissert. Berlin, 1962.

short chronicle begins with the arrival of Brutus in England and rapidly summarizes the history of England to the overthrow of the Britons, followed by the division of England into the Heptarchy and then a brief mention of the succession of reigns, normally ending some time around the reign of Edward I. The translation is based on the *Historia*, not the *Roman de Brut* and was once attributed to Peter of Ickham, though this attribution is no longer accepted. Twenty-seven manuscripts of the text are extant but there is considerable variation between them, most dating from the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century.

The *Le Livre de reis de Britannie* is often associated with another text, the *Livre de reis de Engleterre*, mainly because the text were editing together in the same Rolls Series volume. The texts are not in fact related and were merely published together due to their similar subject matter. As the name suggests, the history contained in the *Le Livre de reis de Engleterre* is an account of the history of the island from the arrival of Brutus to 1274 and the text is generally assumed to have been written shortly after the coronation of Edward I. Only three manuscripts of this text are known, two of which have unique continuations which continue the chronicle into the reign of Edward II. The text begins with a very short summary of the history of Britain drawn from both Geoffrey and Bede – the remainder of the text is drawn from well known Latin histories – Malmesbury, Huntingdon, etc.

While the original text of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* ended in 1272, several revisions and additions were made to the work over the following 50 years. The family of 50 manuscripts is normally divided into four main groups - those manuscripts that contain the narrative up to 1272, those that include only the first continuation to 1307, those containing the ‘short version’ of the continuation to 1333 and finally, those manuscripts that include the “long version” of the continuation to 1333.

The development of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* has been summarized thus by Matheson¹²:

Stage 1 (5 manuscripts): the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut to 1272* (the original form of the text, also known as the Common Text)

Stage 2 (3 manuscripts): the Common Text, stage 1, with a continuation to 1307 (First Continuation).

Stage 3: Revisions and continuations made (Second Continuation, Short and Long Versions):

Short Version (including the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut to 1332*) (27 manuscripts)

Stage 1: the common text to 1307 plus the Short Continuation to 1333 (ending with an English raid on Haddington Fair in Scotland).

Stage 2: addition of the verse prologue

Long Version (14 manuscripts): The common text to 1307, much revised (including the addition of Merlin’s prophecies and many factual details), addition of the prose prologue and the Long Continuation to 1333 (ending with the battle of Halidon Hill).

Beginning “*En la noble cite de graunt Troie il i avoit un noble chivaler fort et puisaunt de cors qe avoit a noun Eneas*,” the Common Text chronologically narrates the reigns of the kings of England, beginning with Brutus, and ending with the death of Henry III in 1272. This is considered the original part of the narrative, contained in all manuscripts, with little variation between them. The phrasing of the text at the end of the reign of king Henry III supports the hypothesis that the text originally ended at this point, that is “*de qi alme dieux en eait merci*”, though this formula also appears at the closing of the chapter on

¹² L. Matheson, *The Prose Brut: the Development of a Middle English Chronicle*, Tempe, Ariz., 1998, p.4.

Aurilambros and Alfred. This text has recently been the subject of an edition and translation.¹³

It has been hypothesized that shortly after the death of Edward I, a continuation was added to the work to bring it up to date. Only one of the extant manuscripts ends at this point (which is more likely a truncated text of the Long Version) and another ends shortly thereafter. A third manuscript contains the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut to 1307* followed by a unique continuation to 1398. Nothing in the wording of the text suggests another terminal point in 1307.

The *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* was updated again, probably at the beginning of the reign of Edward III, continuing the chronicle to 1333 and the English raid on Haddington Fair. A prologue was also added to the text, a verse version of the Anglo-Norman poem *Des Grantz Geantz*,¹⁴ which tells of the arrival of Albina and her sisters in Britain, who give birth to giants later slain by Brutus. The prologue was joined to the text of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* with a short linking passage in Latin, although two manuscripts do not contain the linking passage.

The Short Version of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* does not form a homogeneous group of texts. In addition to the three manuscripts which end in 1332, the other 22 manuscripts of the group, most, though not all, containing the verse prologue, the Common Text, and the First Continuation, offer varying lengths of the continuation for which they are named, ending at points between 1324 and 1333.

Shortly after the completion of this Short Version of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*, the text to 1307 was revised and a longer continuation was added to the text. Several additions were made to the text, including the prophecies of Merlin on the kings to follow John and a prose version of *Des Grantz Geantz* added as prologue.

The Long Version of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* has attracted somewhat more scholarly attention, primarily as it was the source for the Middle English *Brut*. The Long Version was likely written independently of the Short one and also at a later date as it gives a fuller account of the reigns of Edward II and III.

The dates of composition of both the Short and Long Versions of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* have not been firmly established. It seems likely that both versions were written shortly after the events they record, with the Short Version written slightly before the Long Version. The Long Version of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* must have been completed before the end of the 14th century as it is at that time the chronicle was translated into English and Latin.

One of the most interesting aspects of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* is the author's use of his sources. Recent scholarship has shown that the history contained in the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* was derived from multiple sources, mainly Anglo-Norman. The discussion of sources texts tends to divide the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* into four main sections: from the discovery of the island to the arrival of the English; from the English conquest to the Norman conquest; from 1066 to the death of Henry III; and the reigns of the first three Edwards post-conquest.

For the initial part of the work, the author relied on Wace's *Roman de Brut*, though my recent work has shown that the author must also have been using a copy of the *Historia regum Britanniae* as well.¹⁵ The story of Cadwalader, the last king of the Britons, which forms the final episode of the *Roman de Brut*, is not found in the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*, perhaps because it was lacking in the author's source, or, as some have speculated, the

¹³ J. Marvin, *The Oldest Anglo-Norman Prose Brut Chronicle: An Edition and Translation*, Woodbridge, 2006.

¹⁴ G. Brereton, *Des Grantz Geantz*, Medium Aevum Monographs 2, Oxford, 1937.

¹⁵ H. Pagan, *The Prose Brut to 1332*. ANTS 69, London, 2011.

omission “was a politically motivated decision”¹⁶ for, in the *Roman de Brut*, Cadwalader’s reign ends with a promise of a British return to power. A comparison of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* to the *Roman de Brut* has shown that the author likely had at hand the Durham Cathedral C.IV manuscript as the two works share many of the same omissions and variant readings. Interestingly, in the manuscript, the work is followed by Gaimar’s *Estoire*, which is the second source used by the author of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*. Complicating the matter however, is the fact that at a number of instances, the history presented in the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* agrees with neither the *Roman de Brut* nor the *Historia*, or any other known source, leading to the hypothesis that there was a third, unrecognized source, perhaps related to Gaimar’s work, as frequently the verbal parallels between the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* and Gaimar are striking.

The compilation of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* was not, however, a straightforward translation - the author seemed to have both Wace’s and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s works at hand, thus incorporating both versions of the *Historia regum Britanniae* (the *Roman de Brut* being a translation of the Variant Version of the *HRB*) in the one text. The author’s reasons for choosing one text over the other at various points are difficult to decipher though he shows a marked preference for proper names found in the *Historia* over those in the *Roman de Brut*. After the death of Arthur, there seems to be little reliance on the *Historia* by the author.

Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis* was the source text for the years 689 to 1066, though the Havelok story found in the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* differs from that in Gaimar’s work, who is inserted into the Wace translation where he would chronologically be found in Gaimar, during the reign of Constantine, Arthur’s nephew, suggesting there was some forethought in weaving these two texts together, though the actual transition between the two texts is a bit awkward. The Havelok episode is particularly interesting as there is a joining together of the known Anglo-Norman and English traditions of the tale. There are also some additions to Gaimar’s text in this part of the narrative that seem to be drawn from Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

The provenance of the history used after the Conquest to 1100 has not been established, though the author seems to have drawn on a number of well known chronicles. It is difficult to know if the author was consulting the works of Malmesbury, Huntingdon, Worcester, Diceto and others directly, or through the intermediary of a translation, such as the *Li Livere de reis de Engleterre*.

Both monastic chronicles and Langtoft’s chronicle seem to have been used by the author for the final parts of the Common Text and the First Continuation. The continuation from 1307-1332/3 does not seem to have been based on any known accounts of that time period and may in fact be the creation of its author, though other chronicles of the reign of Edward II may have been used.

At the turn of the century, a number of abridged, short prose *Bruts* began to appear. The text known as the *Brut Summary*¹⁷ is just that – a two folio summary based on the *Historia* of the history from Brutus to Arthur. The *Petit Bruit*¹⁸ is another short adaptation and calls itself an abridgement of the *Grant Bruit* – one presumes this is the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*. Written by Rauf de Boun for Henry de Lacy, earl of Lincoln, in 1310, it shares content in common with the *Li Livere de reis de Brittanie*, *Li Livere de reis de Engleterre* as

¹⁶ C.W. Marx, “Middle English Manuscripts of the *Brut* in the National Library of Wales”, *The National Library of Wales Journal*, 27 (1991): 377-80.

¹⁷ There is currently no edition of this text found in BL Cotton Domitian A.II, ff. 142a-144a.

¹⁸ D. Tyson, *Rauf de Boun, ‘Le Petit Bruit’*, ANTS Plain Texts Series 4, London, 1987. Tyson also edited the earliest known prose history in “An Early French Prose History of the Kings of England”, *Romania* 96 (1975) 1-26, likely composed shortly after 1192.

well as the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*. Another short *Brut*, known as the *Brut abrégé*¹⁹, runs from Brutus to 1307 in only 5 folios. Its source is debated but it is likely based on verse (either English or French) *Brut*.

Though most of the 50 manuscripts of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* have been identified, there are a number of related manuscripts whose relation to the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* has not been firmly established. One manuscript, CUL Ee.1.20 contains what Dean calls the Intermediate Version (§ 44) of the *Prose Brut*: ‘This redaction runs to the death of Edward I, without prologue. Many chapters are abridged by comparison with the Long Version, [...] John’s death is attributed to venom from a toad given him by a monk during a rest top at Swindeshead. The accounts of Henry III and Edward I are followed by the respective prophecies of Merlin.’ This work is then a hybrid of the Short and Long Versions, presenting the Short Version with interpolating prophecies.

It is likely that a number of other manuscripts will continue to come to light that have a closer relationship with the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* than previously known. One of these is CUL Dd.10.32, whose incipit, as listed by Dean, who calls the work simply (§25) *Prose Chronicle of Early British Kings*, reminded me of material from my edition. Upon transcribing the text, it became evident that the work was in fact a manuscript of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*. It is copied after a text of the *Historia*, and begins where the *Historia* finishes, with the reign of Osbrith, King of Northumbria. It is interesting to see the text being used in a truncated form as a continuation of the *Historia*.²⁰

One other *Brut* text dates from the early fourteenth century, and unlike the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*, its author is known. Peter Langtoft, canon of Bridlington (Yorkshire), composed his *Chronicle of England*²¹ in the late thirteenth century, beginning with the arrival of Brutus and continuing his chronicle until 1272. The early part of his work is based on a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth – he mentions Wace, but does not appear to make great use of his work. Despite this, later copies and translations of his chronicle contain material added in from Wace. There is also a later continuation of his work, which covers the period of Edward I’s reign, and it is this portion that is heavily used by the author of the continuations of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*. Two interesting notes – one of the manuscripts of Wace and Gaimar also contain s Langtoft’s continuation, and it may have been this manuscript that gave inspiration to the composition of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*. Secondly, what little is known about the author of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* suggests that he was writing in or around York, interesting due to Langtoft’s close links with York.

Mid-fourteenth century, two other related chronicles were written, though from this point, chroniclers generally relied more heavily on the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* than the *Historia* itself. The *Chronicles of London* are a prose chronicle of England with emphasis on events in London from 1259-1343.²² The earlier portion of the chronicle is based on the Short Version of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*. Written around the same era, Nicholas Trivet, dominican friar, compiled a a history of the world from creation to the death of Pope John XXII.²³ It is based heavily on a version of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* as well as other

¹⁹ E. Zettl, *An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*. EETS o.s. 196, London, 1935, pp. 92-105.

²⁰ My edition of this text is forthcoming.

²¹ This text has been the subject of two editions, first by T. Wright, *Chronicle of Peter of Langtoft*, Rolls Series, London, 1866; secondly by J.C. Thiolier, *Pierre de Langtoft: Le Règne d’Edouard Ier*, Créteil, 1989.

²² G.J. Aungier, *Chronique de London depuis l’an 44 Henry III jusqu’à l’an 17 Edward III*, Camden Society 28, London, 1844.

²³ The only edition of this work is in the doctoral thesis of A. Rutherford, *The Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Nicholas Trivet*, dissert. London, 1932.

Latin chroniclers and biblical scholars. The chronicle was later heavily used by both Chaucer and Gower.

A generation later came the *Scalacronica*, a history of England from Adam to 1364, written after 1365 by Sir Thomas Gray of Heton.²⁴ Like Trivet's chronicle, it is based heavily on the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*, though it also relies on a number of other well-known Latin chronicles.

The *Anonimalle Chronicle*²⁵ is closely related to the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* as well. The text is nearly identical to the *Prose Brut* until 1307, though it includes a summary of Brutus' descent from Noah. It has a first continuation to 1333, which is nearly indistinguishable from the Short Continuation of the *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*. This continuation is then followed by one to 1369 and another to 1381. Throughout the text, there is a strong emphasis on northern interests and an especial interest in York.

By the end of the fourteenth century, Anglo-Norman was declining as a language of literature. The *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut* was subject at this point to a translation into English, among other languages, and though repeatedly copied into the early fifteenth century, there were no other *Brut* chronicles composed in Anglo-Norman.

As I hope has been shown, the term 'Anglo-Norman Brut' is an extremely vague expression which encompasses a wide variety of texts, verse and prose, composed between, roughly 1150 and 1350. The texts vary in content and in scope, but nearly all are indebted to Geoffrey's *Historia*, whether translating him directly as a source text or through the early vernacular translations of his work. In total, these works encompass nearly 200 manuscripts, making the history of Britain, as envisaged by Geoffrey, the most popular vernacular literary work of the island.

²⁴ J. Stevenson, *Scalacronica: by Sir Thomas Gray of Heton, Knight. A Chronicle of England and Scotland from A.D. MLXVI to A.D. MCCCLXI*, Edinburgh, 1836 and A. King, *Sir Thomas Gray: Scalacronica (172-1363)*, Surtees Society 209, Woodbridge, 2005.

²⁵ V.H. Galbraith, *Anonimalle Chronicle 1333-81*, Publications of the University of Manchester History Series 45, Manchester, 1927 and W.R. Childs and J. Taylor, *The Anonimalle Chronicle 1307-1334*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 147, Leeds, 1991.