Filologia del testo inglese medievale

CdL in Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane

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PROF. OMAR KHALAF

A.D. 1066

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England is now a part of the Duchy of Normandy. The new élite did not speak English, but a nothern variety of French – the Anglo-Norman.

English disappeared from written records for 200 years (1100-1300). The new official business and literary languages were French and Latin.
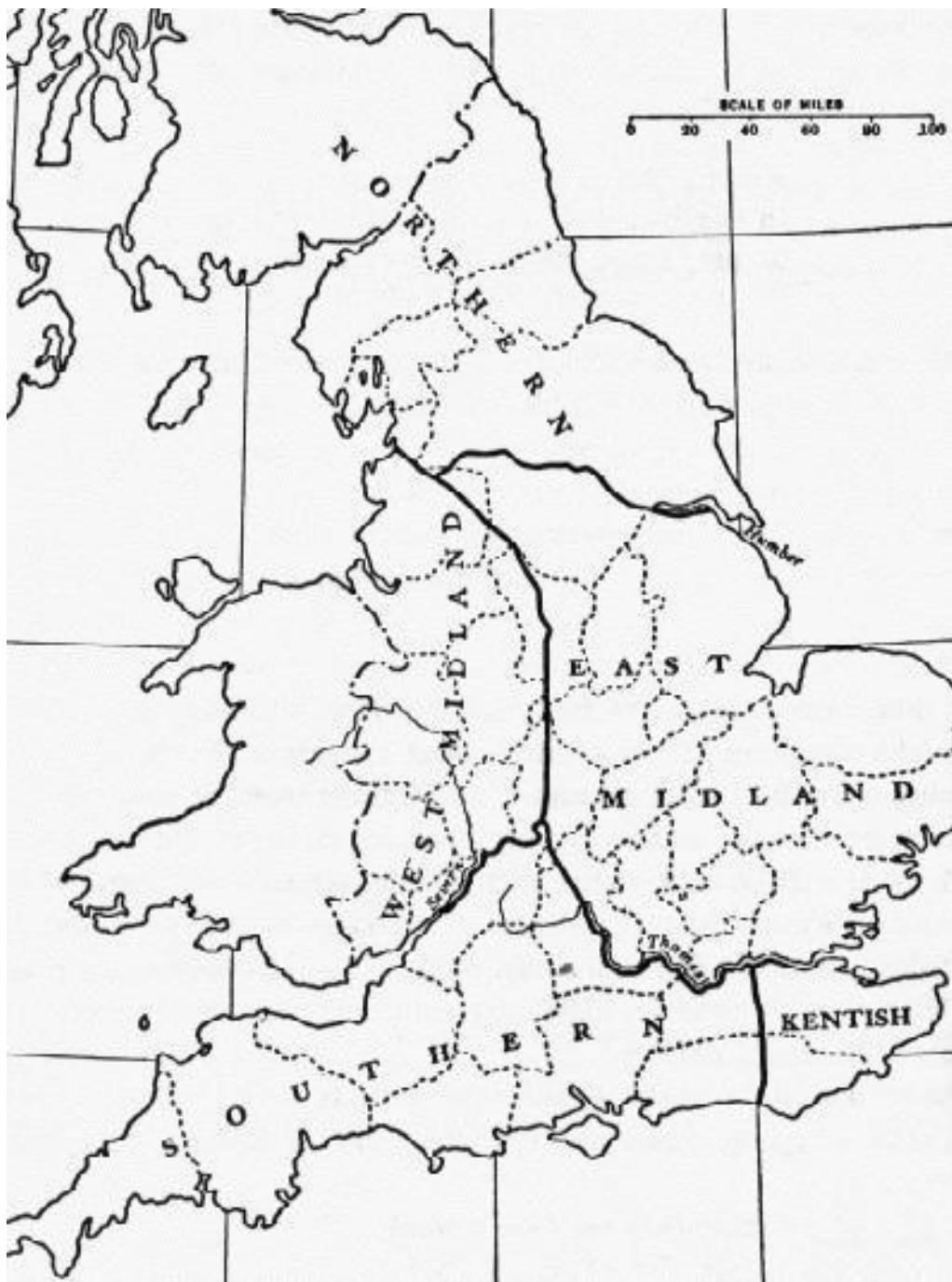
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Middle English

Map of the Middle English dialects

From Caxton's preface to the *Eneydos* (1490)

[The] common English that is spoken in one shire varies from another. Insomuch that in my days happened that certain merchants were on a ship in the Thames, for to have sailed over the sea into Zeeland, and for lack of wind they tarried at foreland and went to land for to refresh themselves. And one of them named Sheffelde, a mercer, came into a house and asked for food; and especially he asked for eggs. And the good wife answered that she could speak no French.

And the merchant was angry, for he also could speak no French, but wanted to have had eggs, and she understood him not. And then at last another said that he would have "eyren." Then the good wife understood him well.

Lo, what should a man in these days now write, "eggs" or "eyren"?

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Major literary works

➢ **Northern**: *Northern Legend* (1275); Richard Rolle's *Cursor Mundi* (1300); *York Mystery Plays* (1378); John Barbour's *Bruce* (1375)

➢ **West Midlands**: Layamon's *Brut* (1190); *Ancrene Wisse* (1225); *Morte Arthure* (1360); *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1375), with some Northern features

➢ **East Midlands**: *Peterborough Chronicle* (1122-54); *Orrmulum* (1200); *Havelok the Dane* (1300)

➢ **Southern and Kent**: *The Owl and the Nightingale* (1200); *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (1340)

Towards a standard

Since it became the capital with Edward the Confessor (1002-1066), London started attracting intellectuals from all over England, especially from the west and the north.

This is why at the time of Chaucer (1343-1400) we find *they* as pron. and *cometh* as verb.

Basically, Middle English is characterised by a strong simplification of the language, which turns from **synthetic** into **analytic**.

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➤ Syntax: it changes gradually, but constantly, from SOV to SVO.

Borrowings

From Scandinavian:

husband, *take*, *call*, *scare*, *scream*, *fellow*, *egg*, [*they*, *their*, *them*]

All words with unpalatalised -*sk*-: *skin*, *sky* (scand. 'cloud'), *skirt* (vs. *shirt*)

Borrowings

From French:

- **government & business**: *government, court, crown, peace, country, power, authority, parliament, money, rich, poor*
- **justice**: *justice, judge, debt, prison, traitor, jury, case, prove, crime, family, marriage, heir, age*
- **feudalism**: *baron, count, prince, honour, glory, noble, sir, madam, servant, order, obey*
- **leisure, cooking, fashion**: *sport, music, melody, flower, company, chess, cards, comfort, dress, taylor, boil, fry, roast, pork, mutton, beef, dinner*
- **literature, art, science, culture**: *art, verse, poem, adventure, poetry, beauty, colour, image, season, nature, riverù, quality, quantity, doubt, reason*
- **military**: *war, army, standard, tower, soldier, navy, enemy, danger, force*

The *Orrmulum*

[Oxofrd, Bodleian Library, MS Junius I](#)