THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 93:
THE TWO ARTHURS

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 93: The Two Arthurs. In this episode, we're going to turn our attention to developments during the early reign of King John. As we know, John became King of England when his brother Richard died in 1199. But it didn't happen automatically. John actually had a nephew named Arthur who had a competing claim. And that struggle between John and Arthur ultimately led to a split within the Angevin Empire, and that split led to the loss of Normandy and most of the other territories in northern France. The loss of Normandy meant that England was no longer an outpost in a larger French Empire. For the first time since the Norman Conquest, England was severed from France. And that led to renewed sense of Englishness and an increase in the production of documents composed in English. One of the first documents to be composed in the wake of these events was the story of another Arthur – the legendary King Arthur. It was the first time that the story of Arthur had been composed in English. So this time, we'll also take a closer look at that text.

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So this time, we're going to explore the early part of King John's reign. And let's begin by noting that John was the youngest of the five legitimate sons born to Henry II, so he was never really destined for kingship. His nickname was John Lackland because, early on, his father had not even bothered to set aside any territory for him.

John had two older brothers who died many years earlier. There was a brother named William who died as a small child. The next oldest brother was Henry who died of dysentery. And neither of them had any children.

And there was also Richard, who became Richard the Lionheart. And we saw last time, he died from a crossbow shot in the year 1199. And he didn't have any children either.

That leaves the last remaining brother, Geoffrey. But Geoffrey had also passed away by this point. But unlike the other brothers, Geoffrey did have a young son. So Geoffrey's young son and John were the two potential claimants to the throne when Richard died.

So I want to begin this episode by providing some historical context for this rivalry because these competing claims ultimate tore apart the Angevin Empire, and it led to the permanent loss of Normandy and most of northern France. And as we'll see, those developments actually gave the English language a boost in England.

This story really begins with John's older brother Geoffrey – the fourth son on Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. He was born after Richard and before John, so he would have been next in line for the throne after Richard if he had survived.

I've mentioned Geoffrey in passing in earlier episodes because he was made the Duke of Brittany during his father's lifetime, and that's very important to this part of the story. His father, Henry II, had invaded Brittany and forced the noble who was serving as the Duke of Brittany to step down. The duke's daughter then became the heiress to the Breton throne. Her name was Constance, and Henry demanded that she marry Geoffrey. And by virtue of that marriage, Geoffrey then became the new Duke of Brittany. This was the way politics was played in Medieval France. Military invasions and forced marriages were not unusual. And this arrangement brought Brittany into the Angevin orbit. And Geoffrey was supposed to inherit Brittany when his father eventually died.

But in 1186, all of those plans went up in smoke. While participating in a tournament in France, Geoffrey fell off his horse in the middle of a melee, and he was trampled to death. Now at that moment, Geoffrey had a daughter, but he didn't have a son. However, his wife Constance was pregnant. And a few months later, she gave birth to a son.

Now we have to keep in mind that Brittany was a very unique region in northern France. It was a region that had a heavy Celtic influence, and a Celtic language called ***Breton*** was widely spoken there – as it still is today. You might also remember that the name ***Brittany*** is related to ***Britain*** because many British refugees had fled there during the Anglo-Saxon conquest about seven centuries earlier. And throughout this Celtic fringe – in places like Brittany, and Wales and Cornwall – there were legendary stories about a Celtic king named Arthur who had fought against the Anglo-Saxons many centuries earlier.

In many respects, Arthur was seen as a resistence figure. He was the great Celtic hero who stood up to foreign invaders. And in Brittany, at the current point in our story, the Angevins kings were widely viewed as modern-day invaders – carrying on the tradition of the Anglo-Saxons. Even though they were French, they were also the Kings of England. So they had inherited the legacy of the Anglo-Saxons. And the Bretons didn't care for Angevin meddling in Brittany. And they probably didn't care too much for the fact that young Geoffrey had been forced upon them as Duke. And it's possible that Geoffrey's wife Constance also resented the interference that had toppled her father. One clue that she may have harbored some resentment is the name she gave her newborn son after Geoffrey died.

It was traditional for French nobility to give their sons French names – like William, or Henry, or Richard, or John. But Constance chose a different name – "Arthur." We don't know for certain why she chose that name. It could have simply been because it was a popular name at the time – associated with the legends of King Arthur. But many historians have speculated that she chose that name as a symbol of resistence. Whatever the reason, young Arthur grew up in Brittany while the rest of the Plantagents fought each other for control of the Angevin Empire.

When Henry died three years later, Richard the Lionheart was the eldest living child. So Richard went to England to be crowned as king and to raise money for the Third Crusade. While he was in England, he was presented with an unusual gift. It was a sword that supposedly belonged to the legendary King Arthur. It was a sword known as Caliburn, but over time, that name evolved into Excalibur.

So where did this sword come from? Well, a few episodes back, I told you about an excavation at an abbey in Glastonbury in southwestern England. The monks had heard rumors that Arthur was buried there. And when they excavated part of the cemetery, they found the bodies of a man and woman who they presumed to be Arthur and Guinevere. And they also found an old sword which they presumed to be Excalibur. This excavation was completed around the time that Richard arrived in England for his coronation, so he was given the sword, and he took it with him when he left for the Crusade.

Now Richard knew that the Crusade was dangerous, and he might not return alive. And he didn't have any children. So if he died, the throne was either going to pass to his younger brother John or his nephew Arthur in Brittany who was about three years old at the time. We have to keep in mind that there were no clear rules of succession at this point in history. John was the only remaining brother, but Geoffrey had been an older brother. So did the line pass through Geoffrey's descendants first before it got to John? If so, then Arthur in Brittany was next in line. And there were many nobles who supported that view. Before Richard left England for the Crusade, he also accepted this view. He indicated that he wanted Arthur to succeed him if he died while on Crusade.

Now, as you may recall, Richard's forces got into a fight with traders and townspeople in Sicily on his way to the Holy Land. And his forces ended up conquering Sicily in the process. But having conquered the island, Richard couldn't head out for Jerusalem until he figured out what to do with it. So in exchange for a large payment from the King of Sicily, Richard agreed to let him remain as the king. The agreement was sealed with a marriage alliance. Richard agreed that his young nephew Arthur would marry one of the king's daughters. But that meant that Richard had to formally recognize Arthur as his heir. So in Sicily – in the year 1190 – Arthur was formally recognized as Richard's heir as part of this treaty. That meant that England was destined to one-day have a real life King Arthur.

As a sign of friendship, Richard gave the Sicilian king that sword that was widely thought to be Excalibur. By the way, if it seems surprising that Richard was so easily part with Arthur's famous sword, it was probably because Richard didn't really believe the story either. He was probably one of many sceptics.

All of this takes us to Richard's return from the Crusade, and his eventual death from a crossbow shot. According to the chronicler Roger of Howden, Richard reconsidered the succession while lying on his deathbed. Supposedly, before he died, he changed his mind and stated that he wanted John to be his heir.

We have to keep in mind that Richard and John's mother – Eleanor of Aquitaine – was there when Richard died. She was still a very influential figure, and she favored John over Arthur. So she may have influenced that decision. Whatever the motivation, Richard's last wishes mattered, and that gave a John's claim a boost.

But Arthur actually won the first political battle for the crown. The Angevin Empire encompassed most of western France. And in the middle of that landscape were the territories of Anjou, Maine and Touraine. That region was also adjacent to Brittany. And the barons in all of those regions threw

their support to Arthur and proclaimed him the new ruler. Then the French king Philip stepped in and recognized Arthur. So at first, it looked like Arthur was on his way to becoming King Arthur.

But John didn't give up. He had supporters to the north in Normandy. In fact, Norman tradition tended to give preference to a younger brother over the child of an older brother. So that meant that the Norman barons were inclined to favor John's claims. So John quickly headed to Normandy where he was installed as the new Duke of Normandy.

John also had support down in Aquitaine where his mother Eleanor was still the dominant political figure. So the net result of all of this is that the Angevin Empire was now split. John ruled over Normandy in the far north and Aquitaine in the far south, but Arthur was recognized in the regions in between. The great empire pieced together by Henry and Eleanor was starting to break apart.

Of course, England was the big prize here because England offered the title of king, and it also offered a lot of wealth and manpower. The English barons were inclined to support John because he was now the Duke of Normandy. Remember that many of the English barons held lands in both England and Normandy. So they always preferred a common ruler who could secure their interests on both sides of the Channel.

A month after being declared the Duke of Normandy, John headed to England to be crowned as the new King of England on May 27, 1199. So John now held Normandy, Aquitaine and England, and he also held the title of king. He had effectively outflanked Arthur.

The French king Philip saw the writing on the wall, and by the end of the year, he started to switch his loyalty from Arthur to John. In January of the following year, a formal agreement was made between Philip and John which effectively recognized John as the proper heir to all of Richard's lands in France. Young Arthur remained in the picture. It was agreed that he would hold Brittany as John's vassal.

At this point, John had put himself in a winning position. But throughout his life, he had a tendency to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. And that's exactly what he did at this point.

A few months later, John headed south for a tour of Aquitaine. In July, he attended a gathering where he met with the leading nobles from the two most prominent families of northern Aquitaine. And he met the 12-year daughter of one of the nobles named Isabella. Young Isabella was betrothed to a prominent noble from the other family as part of a larger peace agreement between the two prominent families. Even though the marriage had been agreed to, Isabella was still considered a bit too young to get married given her age.

But none of that really mattered to John. He didn't care about her age, or the marriage agreement, or the fragile peace that had been negotiated in northern Aquitaine. He just wanted the young girl. So John whisked her away, and a few weeks later, he married her. He then took her to England, where she was crowned as Queen in Westminster Abbey.

Now as you might imagine, all of this infuriated the nobles in northern Aquitaine – especially Isabella's former fiancé. The fiance's family, who were the leading nobles of a region called Lusignan, decided to get revenge on John. So they agreed to support any claims that Arthur still had to the throne. And more importantly, they appealed to the French king Philip. Philip was their feudal lord, and technically, he was also John's feudal lord. So John should have gotten Phillip's consent before stepping in and taking another vassals' daughter and marrying her. Of course, John had never consulted Philip about the marriage.

So Philip demanded that John come to his court at Paris to address the issue, but John refused to appear. When John ignored the summons, Philip responded by declaring John in violation of his feudal oath, and he formally deprived John of his French territories. Philip then switched his loyalty back to Arthur. Philip agreed to let Arthur have all of John's lands in France, except Normandy which Philip intended to keep for himself. Of course, Arthur would hold those lands Philip's vassal. So once again, Arthur was back in the picture.

Philip has seized John's lands by proclamation, but now he needed to enforce that proclamation. And the only way to do that was to take the lands by force. So Philip attacked Normandy, and he gave Arthur 200 knights to help him take control of Aquitaine in the south.

As I noted, Eleanor of Aquitaine was still the dominant political figure in Aquitaine, despite her advanced age. And she had been a strong supporter of John. So Arthur needed to deal with Eleanor first. Of course, Eleanor was Arthur's grandmother, but that didn't really matter. He heard that Eleanor was staying in a castle in Mirebeau in northern Aquitaine. So he headed there with the intention of capturing the castle and taking Eleanor prisoner. His forces joined with the rebellious nobles from Lusignan, and together they quickly captured the city. And then they started to besiege the castle.

But during the siege, Eleanor was able to send a messenger to John who was located about 80 miles to the north in Le Mans. John gathered his forces and made the 80 mile trek to Mirebeau in two days. And he caught Arthur's forces completely by surprise. In the ensuing battle, many of Arthur's troops were killed, and Arthur himself was taken prisoner, together with about 200 barons and knights who were supporting him. The nobles from Lusignan were also captured.

In light of John's victory, the French king Philip withdrew from the Norman border and returned to Paris. And given all of this, John should have been able to re-secure his control over the various French territories. But once again, John snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

John had taken lots of prisoners after that siege at Mirebeau. But he treated them horribly. Twenty-two of the prisoners were starved to death. And even for this period of history, that was considered unacceptable. But John wasn't done. He had his nephew Arthur imprisoned in Normandy. And Arthur was never seen in public again.

So what happened to Arthur? Well, there is no definitive answer, but it is almost certain that he was murdered. Years later, a monk who maintained an annual chronicle at an abbey in Wales recorded a specific account of what happened. The monk was given information from a source close to John's

court, but isn't entirely clear who that source was. It is widely believed that the source was a man named William de Braose. He had access to John's inner court during the time when Arthur was imprisoned, and his family were also patrons of this particular abbey.

Anyway, the monk recorded that John himself murdered Arthur. He wrote that on the day before Good Friday, John was drunk from wine and "filled with the devil." After dinner, John killed Arthur with his own hands, and he then had a heavy stone tied to Arthur's body, and the body was thrown in the River Seine. Now, there is no way to confirm this version of events, but this is the most widely accepted version of what happened. And even if John didn't commit the murder himself, he almost certainly had Arthur killed after he was thrown in prison. And that's because rumors soon spread throughout England and France that Arthur was dead. And one noble after another started to abandon John due to his mistreatment of the prisoners and his presumed murder of Arthur. All he had to do to stop the hemorrhaging was produce Arthur and show that he was still alive. But John never did that.

This was the year 1203. And by this point, many of John's nobles had concluded that he was simply too brutal and treacherous. If he could kill nobles that easily – even his own nephew – then what might he do to them? They abandoned John, and threw their support to the French king Philip. Once again, the tide turned against John and in favor of Philip.

Philip was able to take advantage of the situation. He and his allies regrouped their forces and again took aim at Normandy. In fact, Philip had such strong support that two of the great Norman castles surrendered to him without a fight. As the weeks passed, more prominent nobles went over to the French king.

The middle territories soon fell into Philip's hands, once again cutting the Angevin Empire in half. So John no longer had direct access to Aquitaine in the south. John also failed to put up an effective resistance in the north. In November of 1203, John slipped away across the Channel to England – never to return to Normandy. With John's absence, the loss of Normandy was just a matter of time. One Norman town after another fell to Philip's forces – many without a fight.

On April 1 of 1204, as Philip marched across Normandy, Eleanor of Aquitaine reached the end of her life. Some later historians claimed that the fall of Normandy hastened her death. But Eleanor was 82 years old, which made her a very old woman for the 13th century. And some contemporary chronicles suggest that she was already incapacitated at the time. So no one knows if these events really had an impact on her death. But either way, these events marked the end of an era. Arthur was dead, Eleanor was dead, and Normandy and most of northern France was lost – never to be fully recovered.

By midsummer, Philip strolled into the Norman capital of Rouen, and Normandy officially fell to the French king. This was actually a very important event in the overall history of England.

John had lost all the lands in northern France that he had inherited from William the Conqueror and Geoffrey of Anjou. He still retained Aquitaine in the south of France. But it was so far from England

that is essentially functioned as an independent duchy going forward. For all practical purposes, the English king's domain was now restricted to the British Isles.

These events are often referred to as the "loss of Normandy." But that is the perspective from England. From France, it is often viewed that "winning of Normandy." And it was the first step in a long, gradual process leading to a unified French state. The year after Normandy fell, the last castles in Anjou fell to Philip. And the following year, Brittany came into Philip's hands.

I've noted before that John is often referred to as "Bad King John." And we can start to see why. And I've only covered the first five years of his reign. I should also note that John didn't simply give up on his former French territories. Throughout the remainder of his reign, he tried to recover them. And those attempts created their own problems in England which I'll explore in future episodes. In fact, the lost regions weren't formally conceded for another half century. And English kings continued to find themselves at war in France for several more centuries.

But the events of 1204 are important to our story because they marked the beginning of a fundamental break between England and France. For nearly a century and half, England had been part of a French-speaking empire, and most its nobles spoke French and encouraged the use of French. But after 1204, that gradually started to change.

In the following year, Philip demanded that the barons with divided loyalties choose between England and France. He demanded that all Norman knights living in England should return to Normandy by a given date. If they chose to remain in England, they would forfeit all their lands in Normandy. John then retaliated with a similar order whereby he claimed the English lands of all knights who chose to remain in Normandy. All of this meant that most barons and knights had to make a choice. They could either be an English noble or a Norman noble, but they couldn't be both. A few exceptions were made, but not many. And to be fair, this process played itself out over the next four of five decades. But the upshot is that most of the nobles who remained in England forfeited their lands in France. They were no longer 'Anglo-Norman' – with divided loyalties. The were just English. The traditional links to Normandy were severed, and a sense of English identity re-emerged.

As 'Englishness' increased, 'Frenchness' decreased. And over the long run, the use of French itself decreased. But let's not get the cart before the horse. These were all long-term trends. French was still a very prominent and important language. It was a language of scholarship and romantic literature – even in England. And French was increasingly used in place of Latin as a language of administration. Government documents that had been composed in Latin were increasingly written in French. French was also the language of the law courts. Business scribes routinely made accountings in French. So French would continue to play an important role in English society. In fact, the next two centuries were the period when French words really flowed into English. And of course, Latin also maintained an elevated status in certain formal documents, and especially in the Church. So French and Latin didn't just disappear from England.

But there was a major change after the fall of Normandy. And that was an increase in the use of English. For the past century and half, English had been relegated to the bottom of the totem pole

– well below Latin and French. It was looked down upon as peasant language – just a local vernacular – one of many spoken by common people throughout Europe. But now, with a renewed sense of Englishness, English started to get a boost. It didn't overtake Latin or French, but it started to take an acceptable place beside those languages in England.

It once again became acceptable to compose documents in English, presumably because the nobility wanted English books and manuscripts. Over the next few decades, there was a renaissance of English literature. That included histories, romances, and poetry. English was no longer relegated to the background. It started to come forward.

As I've noted, King John is generally regarded as a bad king. But in many ways, his reign gave English the boost that it needed. His poor decisions led to the loss of Normandy, and that created an environment where English could once again flourish. So the irony is that Bad King John was actually 'good' for the English language.

But that language had undergone a lot of changes, and it was still evolving during this period. With the loss of formal education in English, there were very few standards to keep the language in tact. Grammar varied – word order varied – pronunciations varied. And the vocabulary itself continued to change as old words were dropped and new French and Latin words were borrowed.

Those new English documents reveal a language that was still in flux, but it was starting to make a comeback. And one of the documents that spearheaded that comeback was a version of the King Arthur legend – the first version composed in English. The exact date of the text is unknown, but as we'll see, many scholars think it was composed shortly after the loss of Normandy.

This particular text is called 'Brut,' and it's really a translation and re-working of the text called "Roman de Brut" which I mentioned in an earlier episode. As you may recall, Geoffrey of Monmouth had composed the first known verison of the Arthurian legend in Latin. And it was extremely popular throughout Europe. Then a Norman poet named Wace re-worked the story in French as "Roman de Brut." And now, a few decades later, Wace's version was translated into English, and it was expanded with lots of new details.

This English version of the story was composed by a priest who lived in the West Midlands. His name was Layamon – probably pronounced more like 'Laʒamon' at the time based on the way he spelled his name. And nothing is really known about him other than what he tells us in the opening lines of the text. Here are the first three lines – first in Modern English and then in the original text:

(There) was a priest in the land; Layamon was he called.
An preost wes on leoden; Laʒamon wes ihoten.

He was Leovenath's son; gracious to him be the Lord;
he wes Leouenaðes sone; liðe him beo Drihten.

He dwelt at Earnley (Areley), at a noble church,
He wonede at Ernleʒe; at æðelen are chirechen.

Now from these passages, we can discern that the author was named Layamon, he was a priest, his father was named Leovenath, and he lived in a church in Earnley – which is modern-day Areley Kings in Worcestershire. So that tells us that he lived in the West Midlands.

Even though that might not seem like much of a biography, it's actually quite a bit of personal information for a writer of this period. For many of the surviving manuscripts, the author is completely unknown.

The introduction then says that Layamon decided to relate the history of the English people – from where they came and who they dispossessed when they arrived in Britain. So Layamon traveled wide and collected books which he used as the basis for his history. The text then says:

He took that English book that Saint Bede had made;
He nom þa Englisca boc; þa makede Seint Beda.

So that is Bede's famous text called the "Ecclesiastical History of the English People" composed in the early Anglo-Saxon period. Interestingly, Layamon only used one excerpt from Bede's book. And he actually contradicted Bede's history in many places.

The text then says that Layamon used another book which modern scholars haven't been able to identify. It was probably a book that had been lost over time.

The text then says that Layamon relied upon a third book. The intro reads:

A third book he took, and laid it alongside,
Which a French cleric had made, well learned in lore;
Wace was his name, he knew well how to write,
And he gave it to the noble Eleanor,
Who was Henry's queen.

Boc he nom þe þridde; leide þer amidden.
þa makede a Frenchis clerc;
Wace wes ihoten; þe wel couþe writen.
& he hoe ȝef þare æðelen; Ælienor
þe wes Henries quene.

So this is actually a very important passage because it is one of the few passages that provides a clue as to the date of the text.

Of course, the referenced text is Wace's "Roman de Brut" which was the French translation of Geoffrey's of Monmouth's classic Latin text. And it was clearly the main inspiration for Layamon's work. In an earlier episode, I mentioned Wace's manuscript, and I noted that he dedicated it to Eleanor of Aquitaine. And this passage from Layamon's text also mentions that dedication. But notice, that it says that Eleanor "was" Henry's queen – not "is" Henry's queen. So the past tense is used. Now Eleanor was married to Henry until he died in 1189. So at the very least, this means that

the text was composed after Henry died in 1189. But many scholars have interpreted this passage as meaning that Eleanor was also deceased. And I noted that she died in 1204 as Normandy was in the process of falling. So based on this later view, the text was probably composed sometime shortly after 1204.

There's another portion of the text where a reference is made to certain payments that were required to be made directly to the Roman Catholic Church is Rome rather than to local parishes. This was called the "Rome fee" or "Peter's Pence." And the text says that it is doubtful that that payment will continue. Well, there were a few occasions when English kings objected to that payment, but there was a specific occasion in the year 1206 when John wrote a letter to the English clergy forbidding them from taking any measures to collect the payment. So that's another big clue that the text was written around this period in 1205 or 1206.

The third big clue is based on the circumstantial evidence. As I noted earlier, the loss of Normandy created a situation where it was once again acceptable to compose manuscripts in English. So scholars feel that it is unlikely that Layamon would have bothered to compose a history of England in English while England was still part of the Angevin Empire. But when Normandy and northern France were lost, and England once again existed as an independent nation, there was a renewed interest in Englishness – and English history – and English literature. So it makes sense that Layamon would have decided to compose his history in the wake of those events shortly after the loss of Normandy in 1204.

Now I should mention something very important about Layamon's manuscript that makes it a goldmine for scholars of the language. The manuscript actually survives in two copies. One version appears to date from the early 1200s and represents the original language of Layamon. The second version is a copy that was apparently made in the mid to late 1200s – so about a half century later. Now here's the thing. That later scribe generally copied the original text word for word. But there were times when he decided to update the language. Layamon used very few loanwords. Most of his words were from Old English. And the later scribe apparently thought some of those words were too old-fashioned or too antiquated. So he replaced them with new French words. He also changed some of Layamon's original grammar and syntax. In a few places, he didn't copy any of the original text, perhaps because he couldn't understand what the passages meant.

The reason why that is so important is because those changes made by the second scribe show how the language was changing in the 1200s – within just a few decades from the early 1200s to the middle 1200s. It shows how certain words were falling out of use, and how new words were replacing them. And it also provides a time frame for some of those new loanwords. And it shows how the grammar was evolving. So the two manuscripts make for some interesting comparisons.

For example, Layamon includes a passage where an angry duke gets into an argument with a knight and says "Knight, you are a fool." Layamon renders the passage as "Cniht þu aert muchel fol." A short time later, the second scribe renders the same line as "Cnipt þou art mochel fol." It's a subtle difference, but it's the difference between Old English "þu aert" and the much more familiar Middle English "þou art." Again, this is the same line – only a few years apart. I should also note that this is the oldest surviving use of the word ***fool*** in the English language.

Another example of the subtle difference between the two scribes can be seen at the beginning of the poem. Layamon begins his story with the legendary Trojan hero Aeneas. In one passage, he introduces Aeneas's grandson named Silvius. And he writes that Silvius fell in love with a maiden. Layamon writes:

Then loved he a maid
þa luuede he a maide.

Notice that the woman is described as a ***maide*** and not a ***maiden***. A ***maiden*** was a young girl, and this is the first known instance of the word ***maiden*** being shortened to ***maid***. Both words could refer to a young girl. And we still have that original sense of ***maid*** in a term like ***maid of honor*** – and also ***Maid Marion*** from the Robin Hood tales. And since many young maidens or maids worked as household servants, the word ***maid*** eventually came to refer to a female household servant. But again, the first use of the shortened form ***maid*** was in this particular passage from Layamon's Brut.

Layamon preferred to call the girl in this passage a ***woman***. But the later scribe preferred that word ***maid***.

Layamon writes that it was discovered that the young woman was with child. In his original text, "þat þeo wimon was mid childe." But the later scribe copied that line as "þat þe mayde was wið childe." Notice the subtle changes in just a few decades. The Old English word ***þeo*** is changed to the modern article ***the***. ***Wimon*** becomes ***mayde***. And the Old English preposition ***mid*** becomes the modern word ***with***. These subtle changes show the evolution of the language. Again, here are the two versions. The original – "þat þeo wimon was mid childe." And the later – "þat þe mayde was wið childe." We can see that the second scribe preferred to update the text and write in a slightly more modern style.

Whereas Layamon stuck close to traditional Old English, I noted earlier that the second scribe was willing to use newer loanwords – especially French words. But it is important to note that both versions of the manuscript actually have very few French words. This is one of the longest poems ever written in the English language. There are over 30,000 lines. And scholars have studied every page of both manuscripts and identified only about 250 French words in both documents combined. But interestingly, two-thirds (2/3) of those words are used in the later version. Layamon only used about a third (1/3) of them. So the second scribe was twice as likely to use a French loanword.

For example, Layamon used the Old English word ***friðe*** to refer to restraint and tranquility. When the second scribe copied the text, he dropped that word and used the new French word ***peace*** in its place. So apparently he thought that ***friðe*** sounded old fashioned. So he replaced it with ***peace***.

The word ***friðe*** was also sometimes used to describe a royal forest or fenced area of the forest. It was also sometimes called a ***deor friðe***– in other words the place where deer or wild animals live in peace. In the text, a knight is caught hunting in the king's royal forest, and the noble who catches him accuses him of hunting in the "kinges friðe " But the second scribe renders it as the "kinges parc." So he replaces ***friðe*** with the French word ***parc***. And this is one of the first uses of the word ***park*** in the English language. So from all of this, we can see that ***friðe*** was considered a very old-

fashioned word at the time, and many people preferred to use newer words like ***peace*** and ***park*** in its place.

Interestingly, Layamon is the first known English writer to use the French word ***mountain***, but the later scribe didn't like that loanword for some reason. Layamon refers to the "montaine of Azare," but the second scribe wrote the line as the "contre of Assare." So he replaced ***mountain*** with ***country***. Both words come from French. Interestingly, these are the oldest known uses of both of those words in English. Layamon used ***mountain*** for the first time, ad the later scribe used ***country*** for the first time.

Now the title character of the story is named Brutus. He is the great-grandson of Aeneas. And Brutus leads a group of Trojan followers on a journey from Greece. They encounter 20 giants and send them fleeing into the mountains by shooting arrows at them. But later, the giants return for a surprise attack. Layamon says that they descended from "þan munten' – 'the mountain.' But the later scribe says that they descended from "þe hulles" – 'the hills' – which is an Old English term. So again, the later scribe didn't like that new word ***mountain*** for some reason.

So the 20 giants descend from the mountain, but the Trojans attack them and kill all but one. With one remaining alive, the Trojans gather together and link arms to take him down. Layamon writes that they yoked their arms, and 'they thrust out their shanks' – "Heo scuten heora sconke." The later scribe re-worded the sentence as "Hii soté hire legges" – 'they thrust out their legs.' So in this example, we see the Old English word ***shank*** being replaced with the newer Norse word ***leg***. And this is the first known use of the word ***leg*** in English.

Brutus and his Trojans eventually find their way to Britian, and in the legend of the story, the island of Britain is named after Brutus. They eventually encounter the leader of Cornwall. At one point, Layamon describes him as ***un-eðe*** – which literally meant 'uneasy.' The later scribe apparently thought that term was old-fashioned, and he replaced it with the French word ***annoyed*** – which is the oldest known use of the word ***annoy*** in the English language.

Layamon also introduces us to the legendary British king named Lear – the same King Lear that was the subject of Shakespeare's later play. In one passage, Layamon says that Lear grew old and ***wakede*** – or 'weakened' – in strength. The later scribe reworded the sentence to say of King Lear that "failede his mihte" – 'his might failed.' So he replaced 'weakened' with the French term ***fail***, and this is one of the oldest known uses of the word ***fail*** in an English document.

In a later passage, King Lear seeks to divide his kingdom among his three daughters. The two eldest daughters flatter him, but the youngest daughter loves him honestly. However, Lear is deceived by the older daughters' flattery, and he objects to his youngest daughter's honesty. He ends up giving his kingdom to the older daughters, and he disinherits the youngest daughter.

The King of France then asks to marry the youngest daughter. Lear agrees to the marriage but informs the French king that the daughter has no property other than her ***claðen*** – which the later scribe renders as ***cloþing*** – and this is the oldest known use of the word ***clothing*** to refer to a

person's garments. It comes from the Old English word ***claþ*** – or 'cloth.' But here, we have ***clothing*** which is cloth that is used in a very particular way – for a person's attire.

And speaking of ***attire***, we also find the first use of that French word in a following passage. The husbands of the older daughters plot to overthrow King Lear. So Lear travels to confront one of the husbands, and he is accompanied by a large retinue of knights. Layamon says that Lear traveled 'with his 40 knights and their horses and hounds' – "mid feowerti hire cinhdtes mid horsen & mid hundes." But the later scribe changed that line to read "mid his fourti cniptes and hire hors and hire atyr.' So in the later manuscript, the king is accompanied by 40 knights and their horses and their 'attire.' This is the oldest known use of the French word ***attire*** in the English language.

Now, there is actually a lot going on between those two passages I just read. In the later version, Layamon's ***feowerti*** is rendered as modern ***fourti***. And Layamon's ***horsen*** becomes ***horses***. Believe it or not, the plural form of horse was ***hors*** in Old English. You could have several ***hors***. But Layamon gives it a plural suffix – ***horsen***. As I've noted before, the plural suffix 'E-N' was once very common – especially in the south of England. We still have it in words like ***children*** and ***brethren*** and ***oxen***. And here we see that Layamon used it for ***horsen***. But the later scribe apparently thought that seemed strange, so he changed it to ***horses*** which is what we use today. So we can see how plural suffixes were in flux during this period.

Also notice the change in syntax – or word order. Layamon wrote "mid feowerti hire cinhdtes" – literally "with forty his knights." But the second scribe changed it to "mid his fourti cniptes" – just like Modern English. The possessive pronoun is changed from ***hire*** to ***his*** – and its moved from after the word ***forty*** – and it's placed in front of ***forty***. So it becomes "his forty" instead of "forty his." All of those little changes makes the passage sound much more like Modern English. Once again, just for comparison: First, "mid feowerti hire cinhdtes." Then, "mid his fourti cniptes." These passages show the English language in transition.

By the way, since I mentioned the first use of the word ***attire***, I should note that the word is ***attire*** is generally considered to be the source of the word ***tire*** as well. The tire on your car is just a shortened version of the word ***attire***. And that's because wooden wheels were sometimes covered with curved iron plates to make them more durable. In that sense, the wheels were covered or dressed with iron plates. And thus, the wheel's ***attire*** became known as a ***tire***.

So back to the story of King Lear. He is eventually overthrown by the two husbands of his eldest daughters, and he is forced into exile in France. There his youngest daughter embraces him. She is now married to the French king, so the French king helps Lear recover his kingdom in Britain. Lear dies a short time later, as does his youngest daughter, and the kingdom passes to two grandsons from his eldest daughters.

The two cousins agree to divide the kingdom, and they live in friendship for a while. But then they start to argue and quarrel. Layamon says that they ***twinedè*** their thoughts, using an Old English word related to the word ***twine***. The second scribe didn't like that word, so he wrote that the two cousins ***changede*** their thoughts. Of course, that's the word ***changed*** – a loanword from French. So the

second scribe 'changed' the line to add the word ***changed***. Again, this is one of the first instances of the word ***change*** in an English document.

The two cousins soon go to war, and the one who started the conflict is killed in battle. Layamon writes that 'his fate was the worse' – "his hap wes þa wurse." This is the oldest known use of the word ***hap*** – H-A-P – in an English document. It meant 'chance or fortune.' It actually came from Old Norse, so it had probably been in the language for a while, but Layamon finally used it in an English document.

Now you may not recognize that word ***hap***, but it soon evolved and produced other words like ***happy*** and ***happen*** and ***hapless*** – and ***happenstance***. We'll come across those words in future episodes, but they all have their origins here with the Norse word ***hap***.

Layamon then takes us though the various legendary kings of Britain. Along the way, introduces the French word ***legion*** for the first time in a surviving English document. He also gives us the first known uses of the word ***aghast*** – and the verb ***pitch*** – which are both derived from Old English words but attested for the first time here. The same is true for the word ***talk***. Layamon uses it for the first time in an English document, but it appears to be derived from the Old English word ***tale*** – T-A-L-E.

In one passage, Layamon mentions several musical instruments – including a ***fiðele*** – or fiddle – and a ***lire*** – or lyre. These are the oldest known uses of ***fiddle*** and ***lyre*** in English.

Layamon continues to follow along with the general narrative used by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his Latin history, and Wace in his French version. He then introduces us to Julius Caesar. He says that Caesar invaded and conquered France. He uses the word ***France***, but as we know, it wasn't called ***France*** at the time. It was ***Gaul***. Layamon writes that Caesar desired to conquer and obtain 'all Middle-Earth's land' – "al middel-eaerðes lond." This is the first known use of the phrase 'Middle Earth' in an English document. So for fans of J.R.R. Tolkien, we can trace that common phrase back to Layamon.

He then makes another interesting comment about Caesar. Layamon says that 'he made the calendar that denotes the months of the year' – "he makede þane kalend þe dihteð þane moneð & þe ȝer." So Layamon uses the word ***kalend***, but the later scribe changed that word to ***kalender***. And this is the oldest known use of the word ***calendar*** in an English document. The Old English word for a calendar was a ***ge-rim*** or a ***gerim-boc***.

I actually discussed the word ***calendar*** back in Episode 69. You might remember that the first day of each month was called the ***calends*** – or ***calendae*** in Latin. That was the day monthly interest payments on loans were usually due. From there, a lender's account book came to be called a ***calendarium*** in Latin. And that word passed through French, and now it came into English as ***calendar*** to refer to a document that lists the various days and months of the year.

And way back in Episode 16, we saw that Julius Caesar had implemented certain reforms to the traditional Roman calendar – getting rid of the lunar cycles and using a fixed period of 365 days and

a leap day added every four years. That was the so-called Julian Calendar, and that's the calendar that Layamon is referring to when he says that Caesar made the calendar.

Now in the story, Caesar completes his conquest of France, and then looks across the Channel and sees Britain. Caesar invades Britain, but is repelled on two different occasions. After the second defeat, the Britons rejoice and have a celebration, but during the celebration, a fight breaks out between the British king's nephew and a duke's nephew. This leads to a division among the Britons, and when the king threatens the duke, the duke appeals to Caesar to once again send his forces to Britain.

Caesar accepts the invitation and leads his forces into Britain for a third time. He joins the duke and confronts the British king. Layamom proclaims: "Julius wes al raedi" – 'Julius was all ready.' This is the oldest known use of the phrase 'all ready' – in this case rendered as two distinct words and meaning literally that he was ready or prepared for battle. Within a couple of centuries, this phrase will appear as one word – ***already*** – and the meaning will have evolved to indicate that something has happened previously as in "it has already occurred." The connection appears to be based on the fact that someone who is ready – or 'all ready' – has taken precautions and made plans and is therefore prepared. So ***ready*** implies that some particular action has taken place previously. And that sense of a prior action led to the modern sense of the word ***already*** meaning 'beforehand.'

So Caesar is 'all ready,' and he lays siege to the British king's castle. The king is eventually forced to offer peace terms to Caesar. He offers to make an annual payment to Rome as tribute. At first, Caesar refuses the offer. But the duke who initiated the conflict informs Caesar that he should accept the offer, expressing sympathy for the king who is a kinsmen. Layamon says that Caesar then agreed to the offer for fear that the duke would deceive him. Layamon uses an Old English word to express the act of deceiving. The word was ***swiken***. But the later scribe changed that word. He changed it to ***bi-traie***. This is the oldest known use of the word ***betray*** in an English document.

So peace was made between the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar and the king of Britain – at least for the time being. The next few kings continue to pay tribute to Rome, but then a later king of Britons refuses to pay tribute, and that leads to another Roman invasion – this time by the Emperor Claudius. This invasion results in the complete conquest of Britain which becomes part of the Roman Empire.

Layamon eventually introduces us to Maximian – his name for the Roman Emperor Magnus Maximus. Maximian had usurped the Roman throne, and he proceeds to conquer the northwestern part of France – called Amorica at the time. Meanwhile, in Britain, the king's nephew is named Conan, and he is a potential heir to the British throne, but he can't claim the throne there because Britain is under the authority of Maximian. So Maximian offers to make Conan the king of this conquered region of northern France. He shows Conan the 'rich lands' – "wunliche londes" – the 'wild deer' – "wilde deores" – the 'peaceful land to live in' – "liðe londe on to libbenne." Maximiam then offers this land to Conan as king.

Maximian says that he will send a message to his Earl in Britain, and he will direct the British earl to send to this region 'men and women of well many crafts (or skills)' – "wapmen and wifmen of wel feole craeften." He will send 'knights and thegns – "cnihtes & þeines" – seven thousand

servants – "seoue þusend sweines" – seven thousand burgers or townspeople – "seoue þusend burh-me" – and thirty thousand women – "þritti þusend wifmen."

Since these new British migrants will be given this land in France, Maximiam says that the region will be thereafter known as Lesser Britain – "Brutlond þat lasse" – 'Britain the Lesser." 'Now and ever more the name will stand there' – "Nu and auere mare þe nom stondeð þere." Of course, this name "Lesser Britain" is an old name for Brittany. And since Britain was supposedly named after the title character Brutus, that means that Brittany is also named after him. But the primary purpose of this passage is to describe the legendary founding of Brittany under its first king Conan. And it's also intended to establish the historical cultural links between Brittany and Britain.

A short time later, Britain is invaded by a variety of barbarians. These were men from Gothland – so Germanic tribes. They were also men from Norway and Denmark, which is obviously an allusion to the Vikings even though the Vikings were later invaders. There were also men from Ireland and Scotland, so these are allusions to the Picts among others.

The people of Britain are now under constant assault by these invaders, so they appeal to Rome, and Rome sends 2,500 knights to help defend the island. The invaders are repelled, but afterwards, Rome informs the Britons it has lost too many men defending the island. Going forward, the Britons will have to defend themselves. In Layamon's words – 'for we will never more again come here' – "for nulle we nauere mare aʒan comen here." The Britons are told to make their castles strong and defend their country against the 'foreign folk.'

As soon as the Roman forces leave, the barbarian invasions resume. There is much killing and bloodshed. The Archbishop holds a great meeting to discuss the predicament and how the people of Britain might defend themselves and preserve Christianity from the pagans. He informs the gathering that he will travel across the sea and find a king who will help them defend the island from the invaders.

Layamon then says that the Archbishop traveled across the sea, and 'over the sea he came into Brittany' – "ou sæ comen in to Bruttaine." Conan, the original King of Brittany has died. So Brittany is now ruled by his son. And the Archbishop throws himself as the young king's feet and pleads for help. He asks for the king's assistance since the king and his father were both descended from the Britons. Layamon says that the Breton king began to cry, and he assures the Archbishop that he will help. He agrees to send two thousand knights, as well as his brother Constantine who is the best knight in his realm. Constantine will help defend the island and will become the new King of Britain.

Constantine and the Archbishop return to Britain, together with the contingent of knights. And this really begins the legend of Arthur because Constantine is the grandfather of Arthur. And from this point forward, we hear about the intrigue and events leading to the birth of Arthur – the role of Merlin – the intrigue of Vortiger – and eventually the rise of Arthur as the once and future king of Britain.

But it is important to note the context of King Arthur's rise. He is a British king, but in this legendary story, he is directly descended from the kings of Brittany. So he is ultimately of Breton descent.

And this takes us full circle back to where we began – with King John's nephew known as 'Arthur of Brittany.' He was also a Breton, and he was destined to be a real life King Arthur in Britain. But unlike the legendary story told by Geoffrey of Monmouth in Latin – and then by Wace in French – and then by Layamon in English – the real-life Arthur of Brittany never became king. His uncle John made sure that didn't happen when he had Arthur murdered.

But now we can see how the actual events took place against this background and against this legendary story that had been around for nearly a century. We can start to understand why so many people were intrigued by the prospect of his future kingship – and why so many people in France put their hopes in him. We can see how he was tied to this legendary story. And we can also see why his murder at the hands of John outraged so many people, including the nobles of France who were most familiar with these legends. And we can also see why Arthur's murder caused so many of those nobles to abandon John and side with his rival Philip. So John's loss of northern France, and the new sense of Englishness that followed, are directly tied to the story of the two Arthurs.

Unfortunately, I didn't have time to get to the actual story of King Arthur in Layamon's manuscript. It is a fascinating tale that follows the later legend in some respects, but also veers off into other directions at times. So next time, I want to complete our look at Layamon's text. We'll look specifically at the story of King Arthur, and we'll also take a closer look at what the text reveals about the evolution the English language.

So until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.