**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPT**

EPISODE 94:
FROM BRITISH LEGEND
TO ENGLISH KING

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 94: From British Legend to English King. In this episode, we're going to complete our look at Layamon's early Middle English text called 'Brut.' We'll examine the second half of the poem which is the story of King Arthur, and it's the first version of the Arthurian legend composed in the English language. As we go through the poem, we'll take a closer look at the language used by Layamon, and we'll see how it reflects certain changes that were taking place in the early 1200s.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast at Patreon.com/historyofenglish. And as always, you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com

One other quick note before we begin. Many of you may be familiar with Zack Twamley's podcast called "When Diplomacy Fails." Well, Zack is celebrating the fifth anniversary of the podcast – and he has put together a remarkable series of episodes to celebrate that achievement. He is releasing at least two new episodes each day for five weeks. And one of the first episodes in this series is a discussion that he and I had a few weeks ago about podcasting – and about certain English terms associated with diplomacy. The first part of that interview has been posted for everyone to listen to at the "When Diplomacy Fails Podcast." That part focuses on podcasting and some behind the scenes stuff associated with this particular podcast. So check that out if you're interested – and check out Zack's podcast if you haven't listened before.

So with that, let's turn to this episode. And this time, we're going to complete our look at Layamon's Brut. As we saw last time, this particular text was probably composed in the early 1200s, perhaps around the year 1205 or 1206, but nobody really knows for sure. The text is an English translation of an earlier French text called Roman de Brut, which itself was a translation of a Latin text composed by Geoffrey of Monmouth called "The History of the Kings of Britain."

I also noted last time that Layamon's manuscript survives in two copies. The older version contains Layamon's original text, but a few decades later, another scribe copied the text and made certain changes in the process. These changes tend to show certain developments in the language in the early 1200s.

So this manuscript is important to our story for two reasons. It shows how the English language was changing in early Middle English, and it also provides us with the first verison of the King Arthur legend in English. So let's pick up the text where we left off last time.

We left the story with Britain under attack by barbarian tribes and the arrival of Constantine from Brittany. In the story, Constantine is accompanied by two thousand knights. Together, they march into London, and call upon brave men throughout the country to join their cause. The men

of Britain respond and travel to join Constantine's army. Layamon writes, "The came out of the mountain many thousand men" – "þa comen ut of munten moni þusend monne."

Now, I noted last time, that Layamon was the first known English writer to use the word *mountain*, but the second scribe preferred to use other words. In earlier passages, he replaced the word *mountain* with words like *country* and *hills*. And here, he replaced *mountain* with the word *wilderne*. He says that many thousand people came out of the *wilderne*, which is an early form of the word *wildnerness*. And *wilderness* was a brand new word in the English language at this point. The word is actually based on an Old English phrase – *wild deor* – literally 'wild deer.' As we know, *deer* was an Old English term, and it had a much broader meaning back then than it has today. It referred to any animal that lived in the forest. So *wild deor* – or 'wild deer' – meant 'wild animal.' And here, we have *wilderne* which is the place where 'wild deer' live. So *wilderness* is literally 'wild deer ness.' And the second scribe tells us that many thousands of men came from the 'wilderness' to join Constantine's forces.

Now with his hastily assembled army, Constantine is able to defeat the various peoples who had invaded the island. And following the victory, a great meeting is held and Constantine is made the King of Britain.

Twelve years pass under Constantine's leadership. But one of his knights turns out to be a traitor, and the knight murders Constantine by stabbing him in the heart with a knife.

With Constantine's death, a new king has to be chosen. Constantine has three living children, but none of them are a good candidate. The eldest child is named Constance, and he was placed in a monastery as a small child to be raised as a monk. So he has never been trained for kingship. The two youngest children are named Aurelie and Uther, and they are barely more than infants.

So all the landed nobility come to London to decide what to do. Initially, they choose one of the younger children, but a prominent earl named Vortiger steps forward and disagrees with the choice. He convinces the nobles to delay their final decision for a few days. He then rides to the monastery where the eldest child Constance is living as a monk.

Constance hates being a monk, but he is bound to the monastery. Vortiger offers him a deal. He will help to free Constance from the monastery and support him as king if Constance will agree to let Vortiger be the real power behind the throne. Constance eagerly agrees to the deal.

In order to free Constance from the monastery, Vortiger devises a plan. He decides that Constance should switch clothes with one of Vortiger's knights. He grabs the knight's cape and places it on Constance. And that enables to Constance to sneak out of the monastery disguised as Vortiger's knight.

Now in this particular passage, Layamon uses the word *cape* – a Latin word that had been introduced during the Anglo-Saxon period. But the later scribe changed that word from *cape* to *cloak*, and that is the first known use of the work *cloak* in an English document. *Cloak* is a French word and, believe it or not, it is actually cognate with the word *clock*. Both words come

from the Latin word *clocca* – which meant 'bell.' Since many early clocks had bells, the word *clocca* came to be associated with time keeping devices, and that produced the word *clock*. And since a long, loose-fitting cape was sometimes shaped like a bell, it was also called a *clocca*. And that produced the word *cloak* which passed into English around this point in the early 1200s.

So disguised as a knight, Constance escapes from the monastery. Vortiger and his knights soon follow, and they all head to London. A few days later, the nobles have a second meeting to discuss the succession, and Vortiger presents Constance to the gathered nobles and convinces them that he is the best choice since he is the eldest son – even though he was raised in a monastery – and even though he has little knowledge of government affairs. The nobles agree, and Constance becomes king – but Vortiger is the real power behind the throne. Layamon writes: "Vortiger was very strong, the highest man in Britian" – "Vortiger wes swiðe strong, þe hæhste mon of Brutlod."

Time passes, and Vortiger hatches a plan to usurp the throne. He brings in foreign knights who owe the primary loyalty to him. The knights end up killing the young king Constance, but Vortiger plays naive and accuses the knights of treachery. He then has the foreign knights executed and he claims the throne for himself.

Vortiger becomes the new king, but several of the wise men of Britain see behind Voritger's plot, and they usher Constance's younger brothers out of Britain to spare them from Vortiger's wrath. They are sent to Brittany to be raised with their relatives there.

With Vortiger now in charge, he forms an alliance with the Saxons and even marries a Saxon princess. The Saxons are also given land in Britain. All of this enrages the native Britons. Eventually, the Saxons turn on Vortiger and force him into exile in Wales.

Vortiger makes his way to the Welsh lands, and there he builds a refuge and lives in fear awaiting the arrival of the Saxon forces. He builds a castle and tries to surround it with a great wall for protection. Each day his workers construct part of the wall, but each night it falls down. This happens over and over. So Vortiger call upon sages and prophets to advise him what to do. One of them advises Vortiger that if he can find a boy who has no father, the boy's blood can be mixed with the lime and laid in the wall, and the wall will then stand forever.

So Vortiger's knights search the countryside for such a boy, but none can be found. Two of the knights engaging in the search finally decide to take a rest, and they sit down to watch several children playing. Layamon says that they were engaged in 'childrene plæʒe' – or 'child's play.' This is the first use of the phrase 'child's play' in an English document. Here the phrase is used literally to mean children at play. A couple of centuries later, Geoffrey Chaucer will use the same phrase figuratively to mean an easy task, and that will be the first known use of the phrase in that figurative sense. In the sense that we often use it today. But here we have the first literal use of that phrase – 'child's play.'

While the young boys are playing, one child strikes the other. The child who receives the blow yells at the boy who hit him. He says, "Merlin, why did you hit me? Your mother is a whore. She doesn't even know who your father is. You embarrass us and make all of us ashamed." The knights sitting nearby overhear this. So they approach the young boy who started the fight and ask him to take them to his mother. The boy does as they ask, and the knights take the boy and his mother to Vortiger's castle.

There, Vortiger questions the mother about the boy's father. She replies that she does not know the boy's father. She tells how she was visited in her sleep by a vision in the form of a beautiful young knight. She says that she later discovered that she was pregnant with the young boy – who she named Merlin.

Vortiger is informed by one of his advisors that there is race of supernatural beings called Incubi that appear to men and women while sleeping, and that is what the woman is describing. This is actually the first use of the word **Incubi** – or **incubus** – in the English language.

At this point, Merlin speaks up and asks why he has been brought to Vortiger's castle. Vortiger explains what the sages have told him – that the blood of a fatherless child will secure the stones in the castle wall.

So having been told why he was being detained, young Merlin angrily responds that Vortiger's sages are lying. His blood is useless. He then confronts the sages, and he asks them if they know why the walls won't stand. But the sages are silent.

Merlin then tells Vortiger that if his men dig seven feet under the wall, they will find a stone. And if they remove the stone, they will find a pond. And if the water is drained, they will find two dragons. At midnight each night, the dragons fight each other, and that's what causes the wall to fall down.

Vortiger directs his men to dig beneath the wall to see what they find. They dig, and they find a stone, and beneath the stone they find a pond. And when they drain the pond, they find two dragons fighting just as Merlin had said. Realizing that Merlin is a true wizard, Vortiger beheads all of his other sages.

Vortiger then meets with Merlin in private, and he asks Merlin to tell him what is to come in the future, but Merlin warns him that it is a sorrowful story. Vortiger will be challenged by Constantine's two younger sons who have been in exile in Brittany. Merlin says that the two brothers are on their way to Britain as he speaks. They will arrive the next day, and they will defeat Vortiger. The two brothers will have the kingdom in succession. And Uther – the younger brother – will give birth to a child who will destroy all of the traitors in Britain including those who have supported Vortiger. This was Merlin's prophesy.

Now one quick comment about this passage before we proceed. Merlin says of Constantine's two sons, "Nu beoð of Brutaine beornes ariued" – literally "Now be of Britain men arrived," but it

means that the two brothers have now arrived in Britain. And this is the first known use of the word *arrive* in the English language. Merlin then says, "heo cumeð to-mærʒen fuliwis i þis lond" – literally "they come tomorrow full truly in this land." So which is it? Have they now arrived? Or are they coming tomorrow? Well, this is only confusing in Modern English because the word *arrive* had a slightly different meaning at the time.

When Layamon says that the two brothers have "arrived," he is saying that they've reached the British shore by boat today, and they will proceed across land tomorrow. And that makes more sense if we look a little closer at that word *arrive*. If you focus on the last part – R-I-V-E – you might notice a similarity to the word *river*. Both words came in from French in the 1200s, and both words are derived from the same Latin root meaning a 'river bank or shore.' A *river* is a current of water that flows between the banks, and to *arrive* is literally to cross a body of water and reach the bank or shore on the other side. So during this period, if someone *arrived*, they literally docked their boat on the short having crossed a river or other body of water. Of course, the word has acquired a much broader meaning over time.

So back to the story. Constantine's two younger sons have indeed arrived in Britain, and the native Britons come by the thousands to join their cause. The British nobles have a great meeting and choose the elder brother Aurelie as their king. The newly selected king tracks down Vortiger to a castle where he has taken refuge. And the besiegers set fire to the castle. The castle burns to the ground, killing all inside, including Vortiger. Layamon writes: "Thus ended there with much harm Vortiger" – "þus ændede þer mid muchele ærme Vortiger."

The Britons then defeat the Saxon army and re-secure the country. There are still occasional invaders and outside threats which Layamon refers to as *feonden* – the original Old English version of the word *fiends*. But the later scribe changed that word to *onfreonds* – literally 'unfriends.' Now even though the scribe uses this term as a noun and not a verb, this is the first recorded instance of the word *unfriend*. So if you 'unfriend' someone on social media, you're actually using a word that can be traced back to Layamon's manuscript.

The youngest brother Uther is away fighting against these invaders in a different part of the island when a plot is hatched by the king's enemies to kill him. The king is sick, and an assassin pretends to be a doctor and poisons him.

Meanwhile, Uther is still at war with the invaders in the countryside. Uther lies awake at night and looks to the sky as the moon begins to shine 'as bright as sunlight' – 'swa brihte swa þe sune-lihte.' Now the words *sun* and *light* are both Old English words, but this is the oldest recorded instance of the compound word *sunlight*. Uther then sees a comet cross the sky. Light gleams from the comet, and the image of a dragon appears at the end of one of the gleams. Uther summons Merlin and asks what omen the comet represents.

Merlin says that much sorrow has come to this land. He says that the comet is a sign that Uther's brother – the king – has been murdered. Uther will soon become the new king. And the various gleams of light represent a son who will be born to Uther who will conquer many nations.

The next morning, Uther's forces defeat the invaders, and he returns to Winchester where he learns that his brother has indeed been murdered, and he has been chosen as the new King of Britain.

Uther recalls the comet and the image of the dragon in the sky. So he decides to use a dragon on his standard, and his people began to call him Uther Pendragon. We are told that Uther is a good king, but he hears nothing from Merlin.

Uther soon defeats another Saxon army, and that seemingly brings an end to the forces that have threatened the kingdom. A great celebration is held in London, and there during the feast Uther meets Ygærne – rendered in later versions of the story as Igraine. She's the wife of the Earl of Cornwall. During the feast, they openly flirt with each other, but the Earl sees what's happening, and he becomes angry and leaves the feast. Uther chases after the Earl and apologizes for his behavior. But the Earl refuses the apology and leaves anyway bearing a heavy grudge against Uther. Uther is also enraged that the Earl refused his apology.

The Earl returns to Cornwall and gathers his forces for a showdown with Uther. Uther leads his army to Cornwall to engage the Earl. He not only is offended by the Earl's reaction, he is also in love with Igraine, so he is also blinded by jealously. Uther lays siege to the Earl's castles, but the Earl relies upon his defenses and he refuses to engage Uther. Uther is desperate to defeat the Earl and win the Earl's wife.

One of Uther's knights informs him that he had been approached by a hermit the day before, and the hermit told him that he knew where Merlin slept each night. Uther directs the knight to locate Merlin and bring the wizard to him as soon as possible. By the way, this passage is the first known use of the French word **hermit** in an English document.

The knight locates the hermit, and the hermit leads him to Merlin. But being a wizard, Merlin already knows why the knight has come looking for him. He knows of Uther's love for Igraine, but he says that Uther will never have her because there is no truer woman in the world. However, he says that a child will be born to the Uther and Igraine, and that child will become a great ruler, and that the prophesy must come to pass. So Merlin offers to help make the prophesy come true.

Merlin travels to meet with King Uther. And he tells Uther that he can perform magic that will enable Uther to take on the appearance of the Earl. In his disguise, he can pass through the Earl's guards and into Igraine's chambers. Merlin then works his magic, and he accompanies Uther and Uther's knight. They are all disguised thanks to Merlin's sorcery.

Uther then enters Igraine's bedchamber. And the two spend the night together. Of course, Igraine thinks that she is with her husband, but she is really with Uther. That night a child is conceived. Layamon says of Uther: "he begat her a wonderful man, keenest of all kings, that ever came among men, and he was on earth named Arthur" – "he streonede hire on ænne selcuðne mo, kingen alre kenest: þæ æuere com to monnen. & he wes on ærde Ærður ihaten."

While this is happening, Uther's forces engage the actual Earl at a nearby castle. The Earl is killed in the conflict, and his forces are defeated. Even though rumors spread that the Earl has been killed, Uther is still disguised as the Earl, so he has to act quickly.

While still disguised, Uther addresses the gathered knights and informs them that he is still alive, and he will muster his forces to defeat Uther. He then tells the gathered men, "habbeost alle gode niht" – "Have ye all good night." Now, believe it or not, this is the first recorded instance of the phrase '*good night*.' Both *good* and *night* are Old English words, but the phrase '*good night*' is not attested in any Old English document. It appears for the first time here. So if you a wondering who the first person was to utter the phrase '*good night*,' now you know. It was Uther Pendragon while disguised as the Earl of Cornwall immediately after conceiving Arthur.

Now Uther – still in disguise – returns to his camp and resumes his actual appearance. With the Earl's death and defeat, Uther takes Igraine as his queen, even though she is already pregnant with his child. Arthur is born a few months later.

Several years pass, and Saxon invaders return from across the Channel. Uther is able to defeat the forces, so the Saxons look for a way to kill Uther. Several Saxon spies infiltrate Uther's camp and they poison a well that Uther drinks from every day. A short time later, Uther drinks water from the well, and he dies.

Layamon tells us that the dead king is then buried beside his brother near Stonehenge; He writes: "They buried him there by his brother, side by side, there they both lie" – "hine þer bureden bi leofen his broðer, side bi side, beiene heo þer liggeð." By the way, this is the first recorded use of the phrase '*side by side*' in an English document.

Now with Uther's death, the British nobles reach out to Uther's son, Arthur who is living in Brittany. Arthur is 15 years old, and he is made the new King of Britain. Layamon writes: "Then Arthur was king, harken now a wonderful thing" – "þa þe Arður wes king, hærne nu seollic þing."

Now you'll notice that there is no stone with a sword in it. Arthur didn't have to remove Excalibur from a stone in this version of the story. That feature was added by other writers.

Now we are told that Arthur was a great king, and his people loved him. He always sought to do right and hated to do wrong. Soon after becoming king, the Saxons and the Picts join forces and invade Arthur's kingdom. Arthur eventually defeats them. He besieges the castle where the Saxon leader is hold up. On the verge of starvation, the Saxon leader surrenders and offers to return to Germany. Arthur accepts the surrender. And the Saxons are allowed to set sail back home.

But they only sail part of the way, and they soon return to the coast on a different part of the island. And once again, they ravage the people and the land. Layamon says that they stabbed and murdered and slew men with *clibben* – an early form of the word *clubs*. *Club* is a Norse word,

apparently picked up form the Vikings or their descendants. And this is the first known use of that word in an English document.

The Saxons claim a large portion of southwestern Britain before Arthur is made aware that they have violated their promise to return home. Arthur marches on the Saxons. This time, he intends to destroy them once and for all. He will not agree to a peace. As he approached the Saxons, Arthur puts on his armor. Layamon writes, "Caliburn, his sword, he hung by his side" – "Calibeorne his sweord he sweinde bi his side." Note that Arthur's sword is called Caliburn – not Excalibur. Caliburn is the original name of the Arthur's sword. It is based on the Latin name Caliburnus which Geoffrey of Monmouth had picked up from a Welsh source. Over the next couple of centuries, as portions of this story were re-told and expanded, the name of the sword evolved from Caliburn to Excalibur. Now Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote that the sword was forged on the Isle of Avalon. But Layamon adds a new feature. He says that the sword was forged 'with magical arts' – 'mid wiȝelefulle craften.' So Caliburn – or Excalibur – is a magical sword.

Arthur then leads his troops into battle against the Saxon, and his men slaughter 2000 Saxons without losing a single man. This time, many of the Saxon leaders are killed, several at the hands of Arthur himself. Arthur then decides to deal with certain threats in Scotland. He calls upon his kinsmen – the rulers of Brittany and Cornwall. Together, the three leaders combine their forces, and they invade Scotland. They subdue the Scots, but Arthur ultimately shows mercy on the people because they are Christian like himself and not pagans like the Saxons. So they accept Arthur as their lord.

Arthur then travels to Cornwall. Layamon says, "he found there a maiden extremely fair" – "he furide þer a mæide unimete fæier." Layamon then writes the following passage:

She was of noble race, of Romanish men
was in no land, any maid so fair
of speech and of deeds, and of manners most good
she was named Guinevere, fairest of women
Arthur took her to wife, and loved her very much
this maiden he then wed, and took her to his bed.

Heo wes of heȝe cune, of Romanisce monnen.
næs in nane londe, maide nan swa hende.
of specche & of dede, and of tuhtle swiðe gode.
heo wes ihate Wenhaver, wifmonne hedest.
Arður heo nom to wife, & luvede heo wunder swiðe.
þis maiden he gon wedde, and nom heo to his bedde.

After marrying Guinevere, Arthur defeats the Irish and accepts their submission. The kings of Iceland and the Orkneys also submit to Arthur and accept him as their overlord. Gothland also submits. This is presumably Gothic territory in continental Europe.

We are then told that there was great joy in Britain. Songs and merriment filled the air. "Poets (or scops) sang of Arthur the king" – "Scopes þer sungen of Arðure þan kingen."

"Here was fiddling and song, here was harping among" – "her wes fiðelinge and song, her wes harpinge imong." So minstrels were playing fiddles and harps.

Now there is something very interesting about that passage. It shows a brand new development in the language, specifically in words like *fiðelinge* – or 'fiddling' – and *harpinge* – or 'harping.' It has to do with that ending '-inge.' That ending is used to form what English teachers call a present participle.

In Modern English, we can show present tense with a simple present tense verb, like "I sing." But if we want to show continuous action, we can convert that verb into a present participle. We basically just take the verb and add '-ing' to the end. And when we do that, we can also use that word as an adjective or a noun. So this little ending allows us to use that verb in a lot of different ways.

So we have the verb *sing*. The simple present tense is *sing* or *sings*. But if we add '-ing' to the end, we get the present participle *singing*. And that allows us to show continuous action as in "I am singing.' But we can also use that word as an adjective. We can have a 'singing' minstrel. We can also use that word as a noun as in "Singing is fun." And when we use it as a noun, it is technically called a gerund. Anyway, you're probably saying, "So what? Why the grammar lesson?" Well, it's because that modern ending '-ing' was a brand new development in the language when Layamon composed this manuscript.

Old English also had participles, and it could also use verbs as adjectives and nouns in much the same way. But the ending was different. In Old English, the ending was, appropriately enough, '-ende' – E-N-D-E. So the present participle of *sing* in Old English would have been *singend(e)* – not *singing*. But around this point in the West Midlands of England, that 'd' at the end started to be replaced with 'g'. And it went from *singend(e)* to *singinge*. Remember that Layamon was from the West Midlands, so his manuscript was one of the first to show this change. The old ending didn't disappear though. It continued to be used alongside the newer ending, and Layamon uses both forms in the manuscript.

Over the next couple of centuries, the '-ing' suffix spread throughout the Midlands and the south of England. It wasn't really used in the north though. By the time of Geoffrey Chaucer in the late 1300s, both forms were still being used in the East Midlands – including London. Chaucer tended to use the '-ing' suffix, but some of his contemporaries preferred the older ending. Of course, the '-ing' ending became the standard ending by the time of Modern English, and it remains the standard form today. But that 'g' at the end was already variable by the time of early Modern English. Many people were dropping that 'g' even during the time of Shakespeare. And it still varies today. Even though it is not considered standard, many speakers still drop the 'g' at the end. So instead of 'singing and dancing,' some people prefer 'singin' and dancin'.'

Now you may be wondering where that '-ing' ending came from. After all, these types of grammatical changes don't tend to appear out of thin air. Well, it is probably derived from an ending that was used when a verb was used as a noun – in other words, when a verb was a gerund. Today, we use the same form with the '-ing' ending for the verb and the noun. We have the verb form "I am singing" and the noun form "Singing is fun." But in Old English, the two forms were different. The verb form ended in '-ende' and the noun form ended '-ung.' So it would have been "I am *singende*" but "*Singung* is fun." And it appears that those forms blended together in the West Midlands, and the '-ung' ending became '-ing.'

One other quick note. In Old English, that noun form with the '-ung' ending usually followed a preposition like *on*. So it was usually used as the object of a prepositional phrase. Rather than saying "*Singung* is fun," it would have been more common to say something like "*on-singung* is fun." And in Middle English, as this noun form started to merge with the verb form, the *on* at the front was shortened to '*a*.' And it went from 'on-singung' to 'a-singing.' And that form still exists in some dialects today. You might hear someone say "He was a-singing" or "They were a-dancin'." It's usually associated with rural dialects. And it may seem like a corrupt from of English, but it is actually derived from the way the gerunds worked in Old English. And again, it is also the likely source of the '-ing' ending that we still use on verbs today.

Anyway, the important point is that the '-ing' verb ending started to appear in English around this time in the West Midlands, and Layamon's Brut is one of the first English documents to use it.

So returning to our story, there was much 'fiddling' and 'playing of the harp' in Arthur's kingdom. Layamon then writes: "All that Arthur saw, all it submitted to him, rich men and poor, as the hail that falleth" – "Al þat Arður isæh, al hit him to baeh, riche men and povere, swa þe haȝel fallest." In this passage, Layamon uses the phrase "rich men and poor," and this is one of the first recorded instances of the word *poor* in the English language. It comes from the French word *pauvre*. By the way, thanks to the 'p' to 'f' sound shift associated with Grimm's law, English has the native word *few* from the same root. So *few* and *poor* are cognate.

Also, in Modern English, it is very common to use the words *rich* and *poor* together to refer to both elements of society. *Rich* is a native Old English word that we've seen before, and *poor* comes from Old French. So in the phrase 'rich and poor,' we see a classic blending of English and French.

But interestingly, the word *rich* referring to the upper classes is from Old English, and the word *poor* referring to the lower classes comes from French. Usually, it works the other way around. Words associated with the aristocracy tended to come from French, and words associated with the peasants tended to come from Old English.

So both the rich and the poor loved Arthur. And a state of peace exists throughout Britain for the next 12 years. Now up to this point, Layamon has followed the general narrative outlined by Geoffrey of Monmouth in Latin and Wace in French. But at this point, he includes a completely new section. And it relates to the round table.

Geoffrey of Monmouth didn't mention anything about a round table. But Wace had included a very brief passage at this point in his French translation where he said that Arthur had directed the construction of a round table so that all of his knights could sit around it, and none would hold a position higher or more prominent than the others. Layamon takes this brief reference to a round table, and he composes an extended passage about how the table came to be created.

In the passage, men from all of Arthur's kingdoms come to London at Christmas time to celebrate the holiday. And a feast is held where everyone is present. All the knights are proud, and each one thinks he is better than the others. Layamon writes, "Each had in heart proud thoughts, and thought that he was better than his companion" – "Ælc havede an heorte leches heȝe, and lette þat he weore betere þan his iuere."

Soon the knights start to argue and a fight breaks out. Loaves of bread and bowls of wine are thrown around. The argument escalates into a fistfight. And then weapons are drawn and the fight turns into a riot. Arthur needs 100 knights to quell the riot. When the fight is finally brought to the end, Arthur punishes the knight who started the riot by having him thrown into a bog, and he has the knight's nearest kinsmen beheaded.

A short time later, Arthur travels to Cornwall and meets a craftsman. The man says to Arthur, "I know of tree works many wonderful crafts" – "ich co of treo-wrekes wunder feole craftes." 'Tree-works' is an old term for 'carpentry.' **Carpentry** came in from French about a century after this text. The carpenter says that he has heard about the fight involving the king's knights, and he offers to build a large round table so that none is above the other. The man says, "I will the work a board exceedingly fair, that there-at may sit 1600 hundred and more, all turn about, so that none be without, without and within, man against man" – "Ah ich þe wulle wurche a bord swiðe hende, þat þer maȝen setten to sixtene hundred & ma, al turn abute, þat nan ne beon wið ute, wið uten and wið inne, mo to-ȝæines monne." Four weeks later the board – or table – is finished. From that point on, Arthur's knights sit around the table, and no more fights occur.

Layamon then includes another passage which is new to the legend and very important to the idea that Arthur was the 'once and future' king of Britain. He says that Arthur's rise fulfilled the prophesy foretold by Merlin. But he adds that Merlin made another prophesy. He says that no Briton will believe and accept the death of Arthur unless it is Judgment Day – the last of all mankind – because "he will fare into Avalon, into the island, to Argante the fair, for she will with heal his wounds, and when he is whole, he will return to them" – "þat he uaren wolde into Aualune, in to þan æit-londe, to Argante þere hende, for heo sculde mid haleweie, helen his wunden, and þene he weore al hal, he wolde sone com heom."

So after these new sections added by Layamon, he returns to the basic narrative of Geoffrey and Wace. Arthur's knights propose that they go to France, and force the submission of the French. Arthur agrees, but says that they must take Norway first. The Norwegian king has died and he has no sons or daughters. The later scribe changed this line to read – "and heir he haveth none" – "and eyr haueþ he nanne." This is the first recorded use of the French word **heir** in an English document.

Since the Norwegian king has no children, Arthur says that the king's nephew who is also a relative of Arthur should be made king, so Arthur travel to Norway to make sure that the nephew succeeds to the throne. After this is accomplished, Arthur heads home, but he stops in Denmark on his way back. The Danish king is so afraid of Arthur that his submits on the spot. Arthur is now the overlord of Norway and Denmark.

Arthur then sets his sights on France. He gathers knights and soldiers from throughout his massive realm, and he crosses the channel to Flanders where he begins his conquest. Over the next nine years, he completes the conquest of France as well.

Arthur then arranges a great coronation ceremony at Kaerleon in Wales. Layamon says that no city was as fair during the time of Arthur with the possible exception of Rome. There were broad meadows, and abundant fish, fowl and wild deer. And he says that the city has never been as great as it was during the days of Arthur. He writes, "Some books say certainly that the burgh was bewitched" – "Sume bokes suggeð to iwisse þat þa burh wes biwucched." Now this is the first time the word *bewitched* appears in the English language. It is based on the Old English word *witch*, but the verb *bewitch* is not found in any document before this point. Later in the story, Layamon suggests why the town has been bewitched. But more on that later.

Now during this period of Arthur's reign, Kaerleon has many scholars. They use special skills to examine the sky. Layamon says that the craft is called *astronomy* – "þe craft is ihate Astronomie." This is the first time the word *astronomy* appears in an English document. It's actually a Greek word, and it passed through Latin and French into English. The appearance of this word also shows the increasing influence of Greco-Roman scholarship in Britain at the time. And I'll cover that topic in more detail in the next episode.

A short time after Arthur's grand coronation, twelve soldiers arrive in Arthur's court from Rome. They address Arthur and inform him that they have been sent by the Roman Emperor. Remember that this story is set at the end of the classical Roman period. The messengers tell Arthur that the Roman Emperor is the most powerful ruler in Europe, and he demands that Arthur recognize him as Arthur's lord. If Arthur refuses to submit to Rome, the Emperor will send forces to destroy Arthur and his kingdom.

Arthur's knights are outraged at the demand. Arthur addresses them and tells them that Rome had conquered Britain by force several centuries earlier and killed many Britons in the process. So as the ruler of Britain, he has every right to return the favor and he intends to invade and conquer Rome itself.

This will be Arthur's greatest test, and the battle between Arthur's realm and Rome is the culmination of the story. Several of Arthur's nobles step forward to offer their support for the Roman campaign. One of them is the leader of the Scots, and he steps forward to address Arthur and the gathered knights. Layamon says that he 'stood upon a bank' – "stod uppen ane boncke.' The word *bank* here means 'a bench.' In fact, the later scribe didn't like Layamon's use of the word *bank* here, so he changed it to the Old English word *bench*. In fact, *bank* and *bench* are cognate.

The reason I mention this is because this is one of the first known uses of the word *bank* in the English language. The word *bank* actually came into English from Old Norse. *Bank* is the Norse word, and *bench* is the related Old English word. They have a common Germanic root. Now the Norse word *bank* was first used by Orm in the Ormulum. He used it in the sense of a mound or slope like a 'river bank.'   And here, Layamon uses it as a synonym for *bench*. And that's notable because the same Germanic word *bank* also passed into the Romance languages. And in Italy, money-changers exchanged money at a table or bench that was called a *bank* from this same sense of the word as a bench.

And of course, that gave rise to the other sense of the word *bank* as a financial institution. So I just wanted to make the note that the sense of the word *bank* as a bench was well-established in England long before the later connection between banks, benches and financial institutions.

So Arthur decides to take on the Roman Emperor, and he sends a message to Rome that he will not pay tribute to the Emperor or recognize the Emperor as his overlord. The Romans are stunned by Arthur's defiance. And Layamon says that the senators in the Roman Senate advised and counseled the Emperor how to respond. This is the first recorded use of the words *Senate* and *Senator* in the English language. Of course, these are references to the Roman institutions, but they now became part of English as well.

The Senate advises the Emperor to gather a great army to take on Arthur. They suggest that he obtain troops from the four corners of his massive Empire. Meanwhile, Arthur assembles his forces and prepares to cross the Channel to France. He leaves his nephew Modred in charge of Britain. Modred is the child of Arthur's sister. Modred is a well-respected knight, but as we'll soon discover, he is also a traitor.

During his journey to engage the Romans, Arthur has a dream in which a giant bear battles a dragon. During the fight, Layamon says that "flames flew from their eyes as firebrands" – "floʒe of heore hæʒene swulc fur-burondes." This is the first recorded use of the term *firebrand*. Here it is used to mean a spark or flame. Today, the word has a more figurative sense, usually referring to someone with a great deal of energy – often an agitator. But Layamon is the first known writer to use the term, and he uses it here to describe the fight between the bear and the dragon in Arthur's dream. Arthur is confused by the dream. He is unsure how it should be interpreted.

Arthur then musters his forces for the confrontation with the Roman army. The two armies meet in France, and several battles are fought. Over time, Arthur gets the better of the Emperor, and the city of Rome itself falls to Arthur's forces. But the Emperor continues to hold out and wage war.

During one great battle, Arthur's knights are attacked by one of the Emperor's allies from the Near East. In Layamon's words, "an admiral, of Babylon, he was prince" – "on admirail of Babiloine he was ældere." Now this is an interesting passage for a couple of reasons. First, Layamon render the name of Babylon as Babiloine – spelled B-A-B-I-L-O-I-N-E. That spelling – 'O-I' – was a brand new spelling in English. And that's because it represented a new sound or phoneme in English. It represented the /oy/ sound – as in *toy* or *boy* or *voice.*   This vowel sound

is a diphtong, and it didn't exist in Old English. It actually came in from French. And we now see evidence that that new /oy/ sound was being used in spoken Englisih.

The other reason why this passage is interesting is because it contains the first recorded use of the word *admiral* in an English document. And if it seems a little strange that Layamon describes a Babylonian ruler as an *admiral*, it shouldn't, because *admiral* is actually an Arabic word.

As we saw a few episodes back, this was a period in which Arabic influences were moving into northwestern Europe – thanks to trade, pilgrimage and the Crusades. And that included quite a few Arabic words. And the word *admiral* was another one of those words. In fact, the word *admiral* is actually derived from the Arabic title of *emir* which is still used today.

Emir – or *Amir* – meant 'leader or commander' in Arabic. As we know from the recent episodes about Arabic influences, the word *al* was the Arabic word for 'the.' So *Amir-al* meant the 'commander of the.' So that phrase usually came before some other noun. *Amir-al-muninin* meant the 'Commander of the Faithful.' *Amir-al-Umara* meant the 'Commander of commanders' or the 'ruler of rulers.'

Now Europeans picked up that phrase *Amir-al*, but they didn't really understand that the *al* part was the word for 'the.' They just thought *Amir-al* was the full name of the title.   So rather than just *Amir*, French and English took the title as *Amir-al*. And it's not surprising that it first appears in Layamon's Brut in reference to a Babylonian prince because it was still considered a Arabic title at the time.

So how did *Amir-al* become *admiral* with a 'd'? Well, it is appears to be the result of some confusion among scribes who generally wrote in Medieval Latin. Latin had this title as *amiralis*, but Latin also had the word *admirabilis* which later produced the word *admirable*. So modern scholars think that scribes sometimes confused the two words. After all, admirals were often admirable. So it became increasingly common for scribes to write this title with a 'd' at the end of the first syllable. And that's how it appears in Layamon's text.

So if that's how the *amir-al* became *admiral*, how did the title come to be associated with naval commanders? As we can see, it didn't originally have that meaning. It meant any kind of commander or leader. Well, the answer is related to the fact that Arab navies were very prominent in the Mediterranean during this period. In the 1100s, Arab leaders in Spain and Sicily created a specific naval rank called the 'Commander (or Amir) of the sea' – the *Amir-al-bahr*. During the Crusades, Crusaders and pilgrims often encountered these Arabic naval officers in the Mediterranean. When Christian forces took control of Sicily, they retained the position and the title.   And over time, Europeans started to associate that title of *admiral* with naval commanders.   In the late 1200s, King John's grandson, Edward I, appointed a man named William de Laybourne to a newly-created position in the English navy called "Admiral of the English Seas" which was obviously based on that title used in the Mediterranean. And from there, the word *admiral* acquired a very specific meaning as a naval commander in English. But those developments took place about a century after Layamon's text, so Layamon uses the title of *admiral* in its original sense as an Arabic commander or military leader.

In the story, the Babylonian admiral is killed in battle by one of Arthur's knights. But the admiral's son witnesses his father's death, and he grabs a spear and stabs the knight (quote) "on the left side throughout his heart" – "a þa lift side þurh ut þa heorte." The knight falls to the ground and dies.

Now this passage shows another development in the language. And that development has to do with the statement that the knight was stabbed on the 'left' side of the heart. This is the first use of the word *left* in an English document to mean the opposite of the right side. The Anglo-Saxons actually used the word *winestra* to refer the left side. So where did the word *left* come from?

Well, it apparently came from Old English. But it isn't actually found in any of the surviving Old English documents. Modern scholars think the word probably existed in Old English because it has cognates throughout the Germanic languages. So it was almost certainly a Proto-Germanic word.

Now, it is possible that it fell out of use in Old English, but there is an old Latin text that has some English glosses or translations in the margins, and one of those texts has the Latin word *inanis* which meant 'empty or weak.' And in the margin, an English scribe translated that word as 'left.' And in Old English, paralysis was called *lyftadl*. This had been interpreted by some as the 'lifting disease' meaning a disease that makes a person unable to lift his or her limbs. But other scholars have interpreted the word *lyftadl* to mean the 'left disease.' Again, this alternate interpretation assumes that the word *left* originally meant 'weak,' just like it did in that Latin translation. So *lyftadl* meant the 'weakening disease' – the disease that made a person so weak that they can't move.

So all of this suggests that the word *left* did exist in Old English, and it probably meant 'weak.' And since most people were right-handed, their right arm was their stronger arm. And that meant their left arm was their weaker arm. And since *left* meant weak, that weaker arm became known as the 'left' arm. So *left* came to mean the opposite of 'right.' Anyway, that's the best theory as to how the word *left* evolved within English.

All we can say for certain is that Layamon gave us the first use of the word *left* to mean the opposite of right, and he did so in the passage where one of Arthur's knights is stabbed in the left side of the heart.

Despite the death of Arthur's knight, the Emperor's forces are finally defeated, and the Emperor himself is killed in battle. This is the Arthurian explanation for the fall of the Roman Empire in Western Europe. Rome fell because Arthur defeated it.

A short time after Arthur's victory, while he is still on the continent, a visitor arrives from Modred's court back in Britain. As you may recall, Modred is Arthur's nephew – his sister's son – and Arthur had left Modred in charge of Britain during the campaign against Rome. Arthur and the visiting knight speak for much of the evening, and Arthur eventually retires to bed. While sleeping, Arthur has a disturbing dream. His nephew Modred attacks him with an ax. So Arthur

pulls his sword and cuts off Modred's head. And he also kills his wife, Guinevere, and cuts her to pieces.

The next morning, the visiting knight asks Arthur how he slept, and in reply Arthur recalls the dream. Arthur tries to interpret the meaning of the dream, and he says that he thinks that Modred has committed treachery, and he suspects that he has taken Guinevere as his lover. The visiting knight reluctantly confirms Arthur's suspicions.

He says "þus hafeð Modred idon" – "thus hath Modred done" – "þine quene he hafeð ifon" – "thy queen he hath taken" – "and þi wuliche lond isæt an his aȝere hond" – "and thy fair land set in his own hand" – "he is king & heo is quene" – "he is king and she is queen."

In anger, Arthur vows to immediately return to Britain and kill Modred and Guinevere for their treachery, as well as all people in Britain that have sided with them. Before Arthur and his forces can make their way to Britain, word arrives that they are on their way. Guinevere flees to Kaerleon and lives in secrecy as a nun. Layamon says that no one thereafter knew where she was – or if she was living or dead. This also explains Layamon's earlier statement that Kaerleon was 'be-witched,' and had never regained the glory that it had during the time when Arthur's coronation was held there.

Meanwhile, Modred realizes that he will face Arthur's wrath, so he sends his messengers to Saxony to ask for help from the Saxons. Modred offers them part of his realm if they will help him defeat Arthur. As the Saxons arrive, Modred retreats to Winchester where he is besieged by Arthur. He then escapes to Cornwall. Arthur maintains his pursuit of Modred, and finally traps him in Cornwall. The two leaders and their respective forces meet for a final battle. A bloody showdown takes place where almost all of the warriors on both sides are killed. Arthur himself is slashed and bloody, but he is able to kill Modred with his sword.

Arthur is in a very bad state after the fight. Layamon writes, "Arthur was wounded wondrously much" – "Arður wes for-wunded wunder ane swiðe."

Arthur is lying on the ground, and he is attended to by a knight named Constantine who is both Arthur's kinsmen and the son of the Earl of Cornwall. Arthur gives his kingdom to Constantine and asks him to defend the kingdom and maintain his laws. He then says that he will fare to Avalon, where the elfen queen named Argante will heal his wounds. He then says the following: "And seoðe ich cumen wulle to mine kineriche and wunien mid Brutten mid muchelere wunne" – "And afterward I will come again to my kingdom and dwell with the Britons with much joy." This establishes the legend that Arthur is the 'once and future' king of Britain.

As Arthur speaks, a small boat arrives from the sea with two women inside. They take Arthur and place him in the boat. And the boat then sails away.

Layamon concludes his section on Arthur by saying that the Britons believe that Arthur is still alive, and he dwells in Avalon with the elves. They expect him to return one day. Layamon's final line regarding Arthur is very interesting. He says that Merlin foretold that Arthur would one

day return.   "His quiðes weoren soðe" – "His saying were sooth" – "þar an Arður sculde ʒete cum Anglen to fulste" – "that an Arthur should yet come to help the English."

Notice that Layamon concludes his Arthurian story by saying the future Arthur will come to the aid of the *Anglen* – the English. Throughout the poem, he has referred to Arthur's people as the 'Britons,' but here at the end he changes the word to the 'English.' I should note that the later scribe changed Layamon's word to the *Bruttes* – the 'British.' But that was not Layamon's word. Layamon concludes by identifying Arthur with the English. So he in effect makes Arthur an English king – not a strictly British king.

This is all the more interesting when we consider that the remaining sections of the manuscript describe how the Saxons invited by Modred proceed to conquer the Britons. This is the legendary version of how the Anglo-Saxons came to capture so much of the island. So the Saxons were the mortal enemies of Arthur's Britons. But by the time that Layamon composed his poem – around the year 1200 – the people of England were no longer seen as Germanic Saxons. Now they were the English. And Arthur was just as much their king as the king of the Britons who had proceeded them.

This distinction makes sense when we consider that the Celtic Britons had mixed with the Saxons, and the Vikings, and the Norman-French to produce the nation of England. Notions of Saxon purity were long gone by this point. In Layamon's mind, there was very little difference between the ancient Britons and modern English.   And that helps to explain how Arthur was embraced as an English king.

In fact, let me make this point with some additional evidence. Contemporary evidence from this period suggests that the terms 'England' and 'Britain' were being used interchangeably. In prior episodes, I've mentioned the well-known writer of the period known as Gerald of Wales. Around the year 1188 – so about a decade before this manuscript was completed – Gerald wrote a text in Latin called "Topography of Ireland" which was about the people and landscape of Ireland. The text included a map of the British Isles. Ireland is identified with its Latin name "Hybernia." Scotland is identified with its Latin name "Scotia." Wales was labeled with its Latin name "Wallia." But England is not identified as "Anglia," as we would expect. It is labeled as "Britannia." That suggests that "Bittannia" – or Britain – was considered a synonym of England at the time.

Henry of Huntingdon was another English writer who lived during the 1100s. Again he wrote in Latin as was customary at the time. But in one of his texts called "Historia Anglorum" – or "History of the English" – he states that the island of Britain was once called "Albion," then it came to be known as "Britain," and he says that during his lifetime, it is known as "England." So he calls the entire island "England."

So all of this suggests that the old distinctions between Britons and Saxons had been eroded over time, and the political and social and economic power of England had caused some people during this time to equate Britain with England. The English were seen an the natural heirs and successors of the people who had once inhabited the island. It was their island as much as the

Welsh or the Cornish or the Scots. And when Arthur one day returns from Avalon, he will be a king of the English as much as anyone else. And they had Layamon's words to prove it, and those words were written in English. And that's how a British legend became an English king.

Next time, we'll return to events during the reign of King John. And we'll continue to look at developments in the language during the early 1200s. Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.