

AUTHORS OF THE
MIDDLE AGES.
VOLUME I, NUMBERS 1–4

MICHAEL C. SEYMOUR,
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~AUTHORS OF THE MIDDLE AGES~

Volume I, nos 1–4

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English Writers of the Late Middle Ages

Volume I, nos 1–4

General Editor: M.C. Seymour

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English Writers of the Middle Ages: General Editor, M.C. Seymour

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AUTHORS OF THE MIDDLE AGES • 1

English Writers of the Late Middle Ages

Sir John Mandeville

M.C. Seymour



VARIORUM

AUTHORS OF THE MIDDLE AGES . 1

English Writers of the Late Middle Ages: General Editor, M.C. Seymour

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ABBREVIATIONS

AnM	Analecta Medievalia
AUMLA	Australian University Modern Language Association
BL	British Library, London
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
ES	English Studies
MLN	Modern Language Notes
MLQ	Modern Language Quarterly
MLR	Modern Language Review
MP	Modern Philology
NM	Neuphilologische Mitteilungen
NQ	Notes & Queries
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
RES	Review of English Studies

SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE

PART I. THE FACTS

The nature of the inquiry

When *Mandeville's Travels* appeared c. 1357 its author claimed to be Sir John Mandeville, an English knight, born and bred in St Albans, who had left England in 1322 and travelled the world for thirty-five years, finally writing his account from memory in his old age. For two hundred years, when copies of the book in manuscripts and early prints circulated throughout Europe, this claim was universally accepted. Even after 1550, when the more fabulous parts of the book began to bring the whole into disrepute in the eyes of some, Sir John Mandeville never lacked sturdy supporters. For example, in the eighteenth century at roughly the same time that an anonymous reader wrote in his copy of an early English edition

No occasion to Travel, to write such stuff. A Fool with a wimsical head furniture may do it at Home,¹

Steele wrote in *The Tatler* 22 November 1710 'our renowned Countryman *Sir John Mandeville* has distinguished himself by the Copiousness of his Invention, and Greatness of his Genius', and was followed by Dr. Johnson in the preface to his Dictionary in 1755 who praised the work for its 'force of thought and beauty of expression'.

This see-saw reputation, more commonly up than down, surrounded the book until the late nineteenth century when investigations into other contemporary and near-contemporary travel books of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries showed, beyond question for the most part, that the author had in fact 'done it at Home'.² Yet even in the midst of this detailed cataloguing of the books from which *Mandeville's Travels* had been compiled, scholarly caution prompted a *caveat*:

Nor does it follow that the whole work is borrowed or fictitious...in Mandeville also we find particulars not yet traced to other writers and which

In the footnotes citations by name are to entries in the bibliography of Secondary Sources. Citations of French and English editions of *Mandevilles Travels* by editor and short title are to works listed in the bibliography of Editions.

1 De Worde, 1503 edition fol. cii', in the Bodleian Library, Douce frag. e. 8.

2 Bovenschen in 1888 and G.F. Warner ed., *The Buke of John Maundeuill* (1889), working independently.

may therefore be provisionally assigned either to the writer's own experience or to knowledge acquired by colloquial intercourse in the East.³

These findings and this *caveat* caused the see-saw of reputation to swing more violently, and the identity of the author and so the nature of the book, in whole and in part, became in the twentieth century matters of debate involving everyone who as reader, editor, or scholar touched the work. For a time a physician, Jean de Bourgogne, alias Jean à la barbe, who died at Liège in 1372, was thought to be the author.⁴ Then Jean d'Outremeuse, a Liège notary and chronicler (d. 1400), who was first responsible, it seems, for the association of Jean de Bourgogne with *Mandeville's Travels*, was himself credited with the work.⁵ In 1949 the case for a genuine English knight, Sir John Mandeville, as the book claims, was put forward and re-stated in 1953.⁶ In 1954 a similar argument, though on a different base, was made.⁷ In 1963 a dissenting voice claimed that the author was a French-speaking cleric.⁸ And in 1986, partly reflecting this view, the Oxford History of English Literature reported:

'Sir John Mandeville' is rather more fictitious than the work attributed to him, which is saying a good deal. There can hardly be any doubt that no such knight was ever dubbed or that the name is a pseudo-nym devised by the clever compiler of the book of the *Travels*.⁹

In 1988, however, the case for a genuine English Sir John Mandeville was again, with some qualifications, put forward.¹⁰ Two opposing views are thus current: the first, maintained by English scholars, that the author was not an English knight; the second, now held mainly by Belgian scholars, that he was an Englishman who lived at Liège.

These various views of authorship are reflected in editions and literary histories of the twentieth century, though nowadays some writers report the conflicting theories without embracing one or the other and then comment on the work, a practice of dubious value since an understanding of its origins is crucial to an understanding of the book. Part of the problem has lain

3 Nicholson and Yule.

4 Warner, *op. cit.*, pp. xxx–xl.

5 P. Hamelius ed., *Mandeville's Travels* (1919), pp. 8–13.

6 Letts 1949, pp. 13–22 and in his edition (1953) I. xvii–xxiv argues that Bourgogne was the *alias* of Sir John Mandeville.

7 Bennett, *Rediscovery*, pp. 89–216 argues that the Insular Version is the primary text, written by Mandeville in England. She develops the idea, first set down in a review of Letts 1949, that the Liège connection with Mandeville is spurious.

8 M.C. Seymour, *The Bodley Version of Mandeville's Travels* (1963), p. 176.

9 J.A.W. Bennett, *Middle English Literature* (1986), p. 359.

10 Deluz pp. 363–4, who argues for a mature, well-read layman.

in the complex relationship of over 250 manuscripts in French, Latin, English, Czech, Danish, Dutch, German, Irish, and Spanish and in the absence of a critical, if not a definitive edition of the original French book. Thus, in 1921 one scholar felt confident enough to state of the English versions:

It is unlikely that any simple formula will be found to cover the whole web of relationships.¹¹

Fortunately this view proved unfounded. Since 1955 scholars in universities throughout Europe, enlightened by the basic research of the previous seventy years, have made clear much that was dark in the textual tradition, and it is now possible to construct a *stemma* which comprehends the affiliations of all versions and their sub-groups, with the important qualification that the relationship of the two primary French versions has still to be resolved exactly. Such a *stemma* shows indisputably the superiority of the French book, confirming the author's own statement that he wrote *en rommant*. Furthermore, since all other non-French versions of the work are demonstrably the redactions and translations of other men, they can, initially at least, be disregarded in the quest for the author. The French book alone provides whatever primary evidence exists for the identity of Sir John Mandeville.

The French versions

The French book, however, is not a simple text, for there are three French versions, each named after its provenance:

1. The Continental Version, extant in 31 manuscripts and mainly written in France. The earliest dated copy of this version was made in 1371 by the Parisian stationer Raoul d'Orléans for Gervaise Crétien, physician to Charles V. This copy contains numerous scribal corruptions and must lie at some remove from its lost archetype; it was originally associated with a French translation of Jean de Bourgogne's plague tract.¹² The early French prints, which appeared from 1480 to 1550, give this version.¹³ It is distinguished by the presence of a long passage in the account of the Valley Perilous and a shorter passage in Chapter 20 concerning the climates of the world, neither of which are found in the Insular Version.¹⁴

¹¹ Sisam p. 242.

¹² Bibliothèque nationale fonds français nouv. acq. 4515, printed by Letts in his edition of 1953, and described by L. Delisle, *Catalogue des manuscrits des fonds Libri et Barrois* (1888), pp. 251-3. The plague tract was *compile a Liege...m.ccc.lxv*.

¹³ Bennett, *Rediscovery*, pp. 337-45 lists 13 editions between 1480 and 1550.

¹⁴ De Poerck 1956, pp. 135-40.

2. The Insular Version, extant in 23 manuscripts, appeared in England before 1390 when a copy of a Latin translation of it was written at Abingdon Abbey.¹⁵ It is distinguished from the Continental Version by its dialectal colouring of Anglo-French forms and idioms, by some rephrasing, by the absence of part of the account of the Valley Perilous and by the presence in Chapter 20 of a paragraph concerning the climates of the world where the Continental Version has an alternative passage. This was the version of *Mandeville's Travels* known to and used by Chaucer and the poet of *Cleanness*.¹⁶ A manuscript of this version was imported into France before 1402, while a manuscript of the Continental Version which had once belonged to Charles V (given to him by Gervaise Crétien) was obtained by Jean d'Angoulême in England during his captivity after Agincourt.¹⁷
3. The Liège Version, extant in 7 manuscripts, is a recension of the Continental Version. From internal references it may be located at Liège in or shortly after 1373. Its chief characteristics are the presence of several interpolations concerning Ogier le Danois, one of Charlemagne's legendary *douzpers*, who also features extensively in *Ly Myreur des Histors* of Jean d'Outremeuse, the Liège chronicler; the addition of two spurious alphabets of Cathay and the land of Prester John; and the interpolation in the epilogue of a reference to Jean de Bourgogne.¹⁸ The Liège Version is of primary importance in the development of the Mandeville myth that claims that *Mandeville's Travels* was written at Liège, but it is of no value in determining the authorship and provenance of the original work.

The relationship of the Continental and Insular Versions is unclear. One investigator, after a very cursory comparison of these two states of the French book, declared:

the manuscripts written in England in Norman-French represent most faithfully the work of the author;¹⁹

15 Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit MS. Vulcan 96, written by Richard Bledewe, monk of Abingdon, in 1390.

16 Cf. Brown, Bennett 1953, May who note some general correspondences without identifying the version used by Chaucer. The occurrence of the phrase *caue of Galilee* (a variant of the better *Chane in Galilee*) in *Wife of Bath's Prologue* line 11 suggests that Chaucer may have used the Insular Version where the corruption originates.

17 BN fonds fr. nouv. acq. 4515 (see note 1 above) was carried from France into England and back again: P. Champion, *La librairie de Charles d'Orléans* (1910), p. 71, n. 1. BN fonds fr. 5635 was written in France in 1402 from a copy made in England.

18 De Poerck 1961, pp. 31–2.

19 Bennett, *Rediscovery*, p. 146.

But this claim was immediately challenged by another who, after detailed collation of the major passages unique to each version, concluded that these textual discrepancies are complementary, and that both these French texts derive independently from the lost archetype.²⁰ The differences between the versions go far beyond these major passages, however,²¹ and the reality of their relationship can only be determined by a critical edition of both texts, printed side by side with a full collation of all the extant copies of each. With other, dependent versions of the book it is often possible to pin-point exactly the subgroup of the anterior version from which the dependent derives, and no doubt in due course the relationship of the Continental and Insular Versions will be discovered with similar accuracy.

Fortunately for an investigator probing the problems of authorship, these textual complexities and uncertainties do not present an insuperable problem. The passages in both versions which throw light on the identity of the author differ only in minutiae which can be easily noted and accommodated in the argument. On present evidence it would appear that the Continental Version has the earlier and better text, and it is cited as *Mandeville's Travels* in the following pages from the copy dated 1371, with page references to the printed edition of 1953, which notes the more important differences between it and the Insular Version.

The date of composition

In the prologue the author states that he wrote in 1357:

en recordant le temps passe iay ces choses copulees et mis en escript tout ainsi quil men puet souvenir lan de grace mil ccc. lviii. le xxxv^e. an que je me party de nostre pays. (p. 411)

Dates expressed in roman numerals were always liable to scribal confusion, and here the French manuscripts do show some variation; in general, though with variant readings in a few manuscripts of each tradition, the Continental Version records the date as 1357 and the Insular Version as 1356. There can be no certainty about the author's intention at this point. But whether he wrote 1357 or 1356, the actual date of composition was clearly *c.* 1357. The author based a large part of the second half of his book, which describes regions beyond the Holy Land, on the French translations of genuine Latin itineraries which Jean le Long (d. 1388), a Benedictine at the abbey church of St Bertin at St Omer (26 miles south-east of Calais) had completed in

²⁰ De Poerck 1956, p. 136.

²¹ Letts in 1953 prints his collation of the Insular Version (as printed in Warner's edition of 1889) as an apparatus to his edition of the Continental Version.

1351, which is thus a *terminus a quo* for *Mandeville's Travels*.²² Equally obviously, 1371 (the date of the copy made for Gervaise Crétien) is a *terminus ante quem*. When time is allowed for the copying and spreading afield of le Long's translations and for the development of the scribal tradition which produced the corruptions in the copy dated 1371, a date of composition *circa* 1357 cannot be very far from the truth. Initially the author must have been his own scribe, and the circumstances of its transcription by others after 1357 would have offered no incentive for fabrication and little scope for major error because the date of departure in the prologue is controlled by the date of composition and years spent *en voyage* in the epilogue. This dating *c.* 1357 receives some slight confirmation from an observation in the prologue,

il a lonc temps que il ny ot passage general oultre mer.

Though a further offensive against the Saracens was no longer practical after the fall of Acre in 1291 and the subsequent collapse of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the idea of a crusade was actively canvassed throughout the fourteenth century²³ and eventually resulted in the abortive expedition of Pierre de Lusignan against Alexandria in 1365. This reference in *Mandeville's Travels* to a *passage general* 'crusade' would thus appear to relate to a time before 1365.

There are some other vague temporal references in the French book which have seemed to some to offer evidence for an alternative dating. In Chapter 1 the author lists the possessions of the king of Hungary:

il tient Hongrie, Sclauonie, et des Comains la plus grant partie, et Bulgarie que on appelle la terre des Bougres, et tient du royaume de Rousie grant partie, dont il a fait duche qui dure iusques a la terre de Niflan et marchist a Puce, (p. 232)

which suggests the latter half of the reign of Louis the Great (1342–82) who conquered Bulgaria in 1365 and was crowned king of Poland in 1370.²⁴ But since these lands are already reported as part of the kingly style in 1347,²⁵ they may reflect more the royal pretensions, in a manner characteristic of medieval royal titles, than actual possessions.

22 This claim of dependence on Jean le Long is based on a comparison of the forms of exotic names but, in the absence of critical editions, is subject to caution.

23 A.S. Atiya, *Crusade in the later Middle Ages* (1938), p. 302, n. 3, citing a document of 1345. The *Directorium ad passagium*, one of the sources of 'Mandeville', is essentially an intelligence report for a crusade. See further K.M. Setton, *A history of the Crusades* II (2nd ed., 1969).

24 Warner ed., *op. cit.*, p. 197, n. 4 and Steiner.

25 Bennett, *Rediscovery*, p. 151, n. 8.

In Chapter 6 the author claims to have left Egypt during the caliphate of *Melechinam Damron* (p. 248) who, if his list of caliphs is chronologically accurate, may be identified as Malik al-Ashraf (1341–2). This reference is of no help in dating the work. Equally the statement in Chapter 10 that the Saracens have occupied the Holy Land

par l'espace de vii. vins ans et xiiii (p. 268)

must derive from a written source of 1341, i.e. 154 years after the fall of Jerusalem in 1187; the Insular Version adds *et plus*, which would appear to be a scribal updating; but neither reading helps date *Mandeville's Travels*.

In Chapter 24 the author records the proclamation of Chingis Khan 'universal khan', which occurred in 1206, as

il a plus de iiii. vins ans. (p. 355)

At this point the author follows Haiton, *La flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient*, written before 1308, who does not date the Khan's election. But Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* XXIX. 69, another of the sources of *Mandeville's Travels*, gives the date as 1202. If one then believes that a variant reading *viii^{xx}. ans* once existed (for which the only evidence occurs in the English translations) and was the author's reading, the reference may be dated 1362, i.e. 160 years after Vincent's date of 1202. This tenuous argument is wholly unconvincing.²⁶

One subgroup of the Insular Version includes a Latin dedication to Edward III (1312–77), among whose titles it gives *Aquitanie Duci*.²⁷ Aquitaine was ceded to the English by the Treaty of Calais in 1360 but reverted to the French in 1375, when it was formally surrendered by the Truce of Bruges. Even if the dedication is contemporary and not posthumous and reflects reality and not pretension, there is no reason to regard it as an integral part of *Mandeville's Travels*. Another interpolation which seems to derive from the same version (though now only extant in its English and Latin derivatives) has the author submitting his book for approval to the Pope at Rome, but the papal court did not return to Rome from Avignon until 1377.²⁸

None of these six references offers a convincing argument for believing that *Mandeville's Travels* was not, as the author states, written in 1357 or thereabouts. And acceptance of this date c. 1357 is now common ground among Mandeville scholars.

²⁶ Thomas.

²⁷ Warner ed., *op. cit.*, p. xxix.

²⁸ Sisam pp. 239–40.

Provenance

The place of composition of *Mandeville's Travels* is unknown. In the prologue the author states:

sachies qe ie eusse cest liuret mis en latin pour plus briefment deuiser. Mais pour ce qe plusieurs entendent mieulx rommant qe latin, ie lay mis en rommant par quoy qe chascun lentende. (p. 231)

It is possible that this claim could have been made in England c. 1357. French was then the language of the Court and the law, and the *Polychronicon*, chapter 59 of Ralph Higden (d. 1364) attested its widespread usage; though when Trevisa translated the chronicle in 1387 he reported that the teaching of French was being abandoned since the Black Death of 1349,²⁹ and this decline is emphasised by the eight translations (four into Latin, four into English) of *Mandeville's Travels* made in England before 1400. However, the dominance of French over Latin in France and its north-eastern borderlands was always unchallenged, and the author's desire to reach a wider public by writing *en rommant* makes better sense in such a geographical context. Le Long's translations of Latin itineraries into French in 1351 offer an exact parallel of time and place and matter. No certainty of provenance, then, can be pressed from this statement of preference for writing in French though, significantly perhaps, it is unaccompanied by a record of his place of writing and so may be deliberately ambiguous.

Equally ambiguous is a single reference to Liège which occurs in the Continental Version (but not in the Insular Version) in Chapter 11 where Aix-la-Chapelle is said to lie *a viii. lieues de Liege* (p. 273). None of the author's sources at this point refer to Liège. The reference may indicate some local connexion, though the dominance of the city of the Prince Bishops over the region was, of course, not merely local knowledge; or it may derive from a scribal interpolation made very early in the scribal tradition, possibly citing Liège as a depository of other relics. In either case the stated distance of Aix-la-Chapelle (now Aachen) is approximately accurate; the French league was roughly equivalent to three English miles, and the distance as the crow flies is about 25 miles (40 kilometres).

An examination of the sources which the author used in compiling his book is more rewarding. The precise number of these is an area of dispute where analogues, like William of Rubruck, *Historia Mongolorum*, 1255 and Marco Polo, *Le divisament dou Monde*, 1299, are sometimes cited as sources without irrefutable proof. The author's use of the following main sources, however, is uncontroversial:

²⁹ Sisam p. 149.

Twelfth and thirteenth centuries

Albert of Aix, *Historia Hierosolimitana*, 1125

Brunetto Latini, *Le livre dou tresor*, c. 1264

Jacques de voragine, *Legenda aurea*, c. 1275

Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Hierosolimitana*, before 1240

Pseudo-Odoric, *De terra sancta*, c. 1250

Letter of Prester John, c. 1165

Peter Comestor, *Historia scholastica*, before 1179

Vincent of Beauvais *Speculum historiale*, c. 1250, which includes lengthy extracts from John of Plano Carpini, *Historia Mongolorum*

John Sacrobosco, *De sphaera*, c. 1220

William of Tripoli, *De statu Saracenorum*, 1270

Fourteenth century

Directorium ad faciendum passagium transmarinum, c. 1330

Haiton, *La flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient*, before 1308

Odoric, *Itinerarius*, 1330

William of Boldensele, *Itinerarium*, 1337

Several of these works and others of comparable interest were translated into French in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. Thus, one volume written in Paris c. 1350 (now British Library MS. Royal 19 D. i) contains French versions of the *Historia de proelis* and the *Vengeance d'Alexandre*, Marco Polo, Odoric, the extracts from Carpini concerning the Mongols found in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, and the *Directorium*; the last three of these translations being the work of Jean de Vignay (d. c. 1342), a Hospitaller of the Italian Order of St Jacques de Haut Pas, then living at the French house in Paris. And Jean le Long's translations, partly indebted to Jean de Vignay, of Haiton, Odoric, William of Boldensele, Ricold of Monte Croce, an account of the Great Khan by the archbishop of Sultanieh, and some letters from the Khan to Pope Benedict XII, were completed in 1351. 'Mandeville', who used le Long's work, may well have used other contemporary French translations of these sources, and it is worth remarking that when he compiled his own travel book in French c. 1357, he was writing in a well-established literary tradition.

Such a large and expensive collection of books, in Latin and in French translation, could only have been found c. 1357 in a major ecclesiastical or academic library. The admittedly incomplete but well-researched records of English libraries at this time provide several examples of the sources listed above which were written before 1300, with the exception of the Letter of Prester John in the recension used by 'Mandeville' which is not recorded in

England at all.³⁰ But there is no trace of any of the later sources listed, in Latin or in French translation, in England in the first half of the fourteenth century. Indeed, the only copy of le Long's translation known to have been in England before 1500 was written c. 1450,³¹ at approximately the time of writing of the only known English copy of the *Directorium* (now Magdalen College, Oxford, MS. 43). Bibliographic argument in such a context is necessarily incomplete, but these tentative pointers towards a non-English origin are supported by the absence of any reference to Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, c. 1245 (which contained the most comprehensive descriptions of countries then available) and to Higden, *Polychronicon*, c. 1347, both widely available in English libraries at that time.³² The failure to use these two recognised English authorities is inexplicable if *Mandeville's Travels* were compiled in England. Indeed, so widespread was the national reputation of the *Polychronicon* that in one Latin interpolation concerning the submission of the book to the Pope at Rome it is stated to be the authority by which 'Mandeville' is confirmed.³³

The evidence offered by the sources, together with the author's stated preference for writing *en rommant*, suggests the likelihood that *Mandeville's Travels* was compiled in a Continental ecclesiastical library in a French-speaking area which had acquired a copy of le Long's translations within six years of its completion in 1351. The investigation of such libraries in France and adjacent regions in the north-west and their contents c. 1357 is far advanced but not yet brought to a systematic conclusion.³⁴ Consequently, any large ecclesiastical library within these regions offers the possibility of hypothesis, be it at Paris or Liège or elsewhere. The dissemination and language of the early manuscripts point to Paris and its regions as a probable centre of production, but whether this centre was also the point of origin is uncertain. At best, one can infer that *Mandeville's Travels* was written in an ecclesiastical library in northern or north-eastern France.

30 N.R. Ker, *Medieval libraries of Great Britain* (2nd ed., 1964) and its *Supplement*, ed. A.G. Watson (1987).

31 British Library MS. Cotton Otto D. i.

32 M.C. Seymour, 'Some medieval English owners of *De proprietatibus rerum*', *Bodleian Library Record* ix (1974), pp. 156-65 and J. Taylor, *The 'Universal Chronicle' of Ralph Higden* (1966). The *Polychronicon* was always rare on the Continent; see *Speculum* 42 (1963), p. 193.

33 Seymour ed., *Bodley Version* (1963), p. 175.

34 See A. Vernet, *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises*, Vol. 1 *Les bibliothèques médiévales* (1989); and A. Genevois et al., *Bibliographie des manuscrits médiévaux en France relevé des inventaires du VIII^e au XVIII^e siècle* (1987).

The nationality of the author

At the beginning of the work the author claims to be an Englishman:

ie Iehan de Mandeuille, cheualier, ia soit ce chose que ie ne seie mie dignes,
nez et nourris dengleterre de la ville de Saint Aubin, qui passay le mer lan
m. ccc. xxii. le iour de Saint Michiel. (p. 231)

This claim is supported by a number of overtly English references in the text. The first of these occurs in Chapter 15 where, having transcribed a form of the 'Arabic' alphabet in his account of the Saracens, the author writes:

nous auons en nostre langaige en Engleterre deux lettres plus quil ny a en
abc, cest assauoir ȝ et þ. (p. 309)

These Middle English letters *yogh* and *thorn* were widely known throughout the Continent through the common exchange of persons on embassies, trade, and other public and private expeditions, including the return of French prisoners held captive in England for ransom. An awareness of them cannot be construed as a confirmation of nationality. It may be. On the other hand, it may be simply a device to encourage credibility, like the author's demonstrably false claims to have travelled through the Valley Perilous in the company of two friars (Friar Odoric being his source at that point) and to have calculated the circumference of the globe (properly the work of Eratosthenes, quoted by Vincent of Beauvais) *selon la petitece de mon sens*.

Another English reference is merely a gloss on *eder que nous appellons* *yvy* which occurs in the account of the castle of the sparrowhawk in Chapter 16 (p. 311) and also in the account of the pepper forest in Chapter 18 (p. 325); neither gloss is found in the Insular Version. Whether it is a genuine gloss by the author or a scribal interpolation is unclear, for such glosses added by scribes at random in the later Middle Ages are not by any means unknown. Whatever its origins, the glosses do add some English colouring to the book, but since an acquaintance with the English word *ivy*, like the letters ȝ and þ, was not confined to Englishmen, they too cannot be construed as proof of nationality.

A more explicit claim to Englishness is made in Chapter 18:

nous sommes en i. climat qui est de la lune, et la lune est de legier
mouuement et si est planete de voie. Et pour ce elle nous donne matere et
uolente de mouuoir legierement et de cheminer par diuerses voies et de
cerchier choses estranges et le diuerses choses du mond. (p. 321)

This national reputation for restlessness dates from the appearance of English mercenaries in the Varangian Guard after the disaster at Hastings in 1066, and is so supported by a constant stream of English pilgrims, crusaders, and

scholars to Europe and the Holy Land that it is reported by Gower among others.³⁵ Clearly, it is something of a *topos* and as such admirably apposite in a travel book allegedly written by an Englishman, but it cannot be considered as proof of the author's nationality.

There are several other, apparently casual references to an English heritage (to Richard I, Edward I, the shrine of St James of Compostela, pp. 247, 328), but all were within common knowledge and none of contemporary notice. The one investigator who accepts their credibility without qualification writes of them:

These are artful notes on Englishry, if they were put in to sustain the pretense that the author was an Englishman, but they would be natural enough if he really was an Englishman.³⁶

Just so. But there are also two other statements in the book which, in conjunction with the many demonstrably false claims that the author makes on his own behalf in other contexts, cast doubt on his veracity in this regard.

The first is the claim that he is an English knight *nez et nourris dengleterre de la ville de Saint Aubin*. English gentry were occasionally born in towns but they were never bred there. The whole structure of feudalism was based on their living on their estates, and the custom of sending sons at an early age into the households of others superior in the social hierarchy was so well established that the concept of such a son's being raised in the town of his birth is without historical parallel. Even if the phrase *nez et nourris* is regarded as an alliterative legal or literary collocation, the author's use of it is clearly intended to mislead.

The second reason to doubt the author's claim to be English is more precise. When he refers to the stone bearing the imprint of the left foot of Jesus when he ascended to heaven which was revered as a relic in the chapel of Mount Olivet (p. 281), he fails to mention, in contrast to his general practice of referring to rival and often duplicate claims of various churches and shrines to possess identical relics, another stone bearing the imprint of the right foot which was given to Henry III (d 1272) and displayed at Westminster abbey from 1249, rivalling in sanctity the phial of holy blood at Hailes abbey as the most venerated relic in the kingdom. So remarkable is this omission that it is rectified by the maker of the Metrical Version, himself indisputably an Englishman of the north:

That oper stone is in Engeland here

³⁵ Gower, *Confessio Amantis* VII. 749–54.

³⁶ Bennett, *Rediscovery*, p. 177.

In the abbeie of Westmynstere.³⁷

It is not credible that any man, born and bred in St Albans, a town dominated by its Benedictine abbey, should not have known of so celebrated a relic displayed within a twenty mile distance, and that, knowing of it, should fail to mention it in defiance of his normal practice.

The fiction of nationality is made the more obvious by the author's assumption of the name 'Sir John Mandeville'. The descendants of Geoffrey de Mandeville flourished throughout the kingdom after the Conquest, and there are historical records of several John Mandevilles in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But detailed searching and argument intent on locating a Sir John Mandeville born at St Albans c. 1300 (the latest approximate date of birth of one who must have attained his majority before leaving the kingdom in 1322) has failed to discover any trace of him. And all posthumous references in England to 'Sir John Mandeville' the author of his book, which begin with the chronicles of Thomas de Burton and Thomas Walsingham, both writing before 1396, reflect the claims of the book without offering any additional information, which is a cogent argument that such information was never available in England, especially as Walsingham was writing at St Albans itself.³⁸ Even the most ardent advocate of a genuine Sir John Mandeville as author of the work was forced to conclude her investigations and speculations:

In the end we know no more about him than he tells us in his book.³⁹

Just so, but in the end he tells us that he was not an Englishman and that his name was not 'Sir John Mandeville'.

Why the author adopted such a pseudonym remains a matter of speculation. It was a name of some dignity, with an authentic aristocratic association but not remarkable enough to require a detailed lineage, and it denoted a member of the nation which, after the victories at Crécy in 1346 and Poitiers in 1356, seemed to dominate France. There was even a genuine John Mandeville in Edward III's army at Crécy in 1346 who returned with the king to Calais in October 1355 and may have unconsciously lent his name.⁴⁰ More likely, it was the imaginative choice of a well-known name from a

37 Seymour ed., *Metrical Version* (1973), p. 32, lines 1166-7.

38 Thomas de Burton, *Chronica*, ed. E.A. Bond (Rolls Ser. 1886-8) III. 158; and Thomas Walsingham, *Annales*, ed. H.T. Riley (Rolls Ser. 1871) II. 306.

39 Bennett, *Rediscovery*, p. 216.

40 G. Wrotlesley, 'Crécy and Calais. From the Public Records', *Collections... William Salt Arch. Soc.* xviii (1897), p. 238. On this John Mandeville of Beelsby, Lincs. see Bennett, *Rediscovery*, pp. 188-9. Boston Public Library, Boston, Mass. MS. 1519 lists the retinue of Edward III at the siege of Calais, 3 Sept. 1346 to 3 Aug. 1347.

restless race; and if so, it was an inspired one, for it passed the muster of credibility for hundreds of years. Yet, as always with *Mandeville's Travels*, there is an intriguing possibility that it may have had a literary origin. There appeared in France c. 1340 a satiric romance, *Le roman de Mandevie*, in which a *noble chevalier nomme Mandevie* leads the reader through an imaginary moral world, echoing the footsteps of Virgil, Dante and the future Chaucer, in much the same way that 'Mandeville' guides the reader through the terrestrial world.⁴¹ The home of this noble knight is on a *blanche montaigne*, in Latin *mons albus*. Both names, *Mandevie* and *mons albus*, are teasingly close to *Mandeville* and *St Albans*, and the temptation to link them becomes the greater when it is discovered that the date 'Mandeville' gives for his departure may also have a literary origin.

'Mandeville' claims to have left England on Michaelmas 1322, a surprisingly precise date for which there are no parallels in the book. The port of departure during the reign of Edward II (1284–1327) was Dover, and in the aftermath of the defeat of Thomas of Lancaster at Boroughbridge 16 March 1322 it was strictly guarded. The feast of Michaelmas, 29 September, fell on a Wednesday that year. Later September is a time of equinoctial gales in the English channel, but there are no records of shipping movements or weather for that day to confirm whether or not a passage to France was possible.

One of the major sources for the account of the Holy Land in *Mandeville's Travels* is the *Itinerarium* written after his return in 1336 by the German knight Wilhelm von Boldensele at the instance of Cardinal Talleyrand-Périgord, then at the papal court at Avignon and the patron of Petrarch. Boldensele dated his dedicatory preface to Peter abbot of Aula Regiae

Auinione anno domini millesimo trecentesimo tricesimo septimo in die sancti Michaelis.⁴²

This *Itinerarium* was translated by Jean le Long in 1351, and that translation was used by 'Mandeville', possibly alongside the original. All extant manuscripts of le Long's translation read *m. iii. xxxvii.* here, but 'Mandeville' may have used a copy which had *m. iii. xxii.*; cf. the variation of dates of departure, expressed in roman numerals, in the English versions of *Mandeville's Travels*, 1300, 1302, 1312, 1322, 1332, 1333. What appears beyond reasonable coincidence is the occurrence in both source and book

41 *Roman de Mandevie et les Melancholies de Jean du Pin*, ed. L. Karl (1913) and Karl's articles in *Revue des langues romans* 63 (1926), pp. 297–302 and 71 (1951), p. 69–70; Warner ed., *op. cit.*, pp. xxxix–xl.

42 Boldensele, *Itinerarium*, ed. C.L. Grotefend (1887), p. 237. Jean le Long's translation of Boldensele is edited by C. Deluz (Sorbonne thesis, privately printed 1972).

of the reference to *die sancti Michaelis*. In the context of similarly contrived disguises of his sources it seems certain that 'Mandeville' began his imaginary travels on the day that Boldensele completed his record of his own genuine travels.

The account of Egypt and the Holy Land

In his descriptions of Egypt and the Holy Land 'Mandeville' follows mainly the accounts of Boldensele 1337 and the Pseudo-Odoric c. 1250, which are supplemented by many other pilgrim records, like those of Haiton, Jacques de Vitry, Thietmar, William of Tripoli. In accordance with his usual method he conflates and inflates these accounts into his own allegedly first-hand report. The bulk of his information can be traced, readily enough, to the writers mentioned above, but some few details cannot. For example, at the end of a list of the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans of Egypt (which is otherwise wholly derived from Haiton's account which ended at 1307 when Malik al-Nasir, d. 1341, was sultan) he adds the names of two successors, *Melechmader* and *Melechinam Damron* (p. 248), saying that the latter murdered the former and was the sultan when he left Egypt. If these names, despite the wide variation of different spellings in the manuscripts, can be identified with the immediate historical heirs of al-Nasir, i.e. al-Mansur murdered by his brother al-Ashraf who was himself murdered in 1342, it can be argued that 'Mandeville' left Egypt in 1341/2.⁴³ Alternatively, he could have heard these names from the lips of a traveller. In similar fashion, 'Mandeville' records some minor details, like the number of columns and

⁴³ Warner ed., *op. cit.*, p. xviii suggests 'Melik-'Imād-ed-deen and Melik-el-Mudhaffar', the fourth and sixth sons. In his list of the caliphs for the Mamluk sultanate Atiya, *op. cit.*, p. 534 transliterates the names of the sons of al-Mustakfi Nasir thus:

- 1340 al-Mansur Sayf-al-Dīn Abu-Bakr
- 1341 al-Ashraf 'Alā'-al-Dīn Qujuq
- 1342 al-Nāsir Shibāb-al-Dīn Ahmad
- 1342 al-Sālih 'Imād-al-Dīn Ismā'īl
- 1345 al-Kāmil Sayf-al-Dīn Sha'ban
- 1346 al-Muzaffar Sayf-al-Dīn Hajjī
- 1347 al-Nāsir-al-Dīn Hassan
- 1351 al-Šālih Salah-al-Dīn Šālih.

M. Ross, *Rulers and Governments of the World*, vol. 1 (1978), p. 55 lists only three: 4 May 1340 al Wathiq, 18 June 1340 al-Hakim II, July–August 1352 al-Mu'tadid. Difficulties of transliteration and dating within the Christian system, as well as scribal corruption within the textual traditon of *Mandeville's Travels*, make identification hazardous. Haiton's list of the Ayyubid sultans and the Mamluk caliphs (in Jean le Long's version) is given by L. de Baecker, *L'extrême Orient au Moyen Age* (1877), pp. 226–31.