

# Voices in the text

7 lor bataille deusek



ien ordene  
cho mest auis  
selont lor  
al uore mil  
trouent euidie  
rent suancie  
hail bielem  
et p lozia

se sont uscu de laete  
pit de bataille couree  
puis cheualcierenent lagement  
penchassent dorient

An extract from Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie* with a miniature showing two mounted Greek knights. They ride in medieval fashion with lances and pennants raised (WLC/LM/6 f.124).

A number of images of grotesques feature in the decoration of the *Romances* (WLC/LM/6 f.78v).



Galahad son frere.  
Et dit li contes que qua  
nt ioseph ot corone  
Galahad son frere que il  
era tant que u. d. v. t.  
arriere a Galahad. e  
quant il i uist il ot  
grant ne de ce que li uis u. d. v. t. la  
uort demanda. quar mlt auot grant  
desirier de hu uoir e de parler a lui. e  
ioseph estoit ia uel passer. e auot este  
entere en escote. en une abeie que len  
apele labie de la croiz. e ce fu une cho  
se dont il est auquel desconfortez. quar  
molt amoit son pere de grant amoz e  
il fu foibles e del geuner e del ueillier  
del tannulier. quil ot fet. si ala uoir

Major divisions in the text are marked by large blue and red Lombard initials, with marginal flourishes. This passage mentions Joseph, his brother Galaaz (Galahad), a journey to Scotland (Escoce) and the Abbey of the Cross ('labeie de la Croiz') (WLC/LM/7 f.70).

Storytelling is universally enjoyed but has taken various forms in different cultures over the ages. The texts described here include some of the most famous narrative works of medieval literature, and show that a Midlands gentry family had the interest and opportunity to acquire fine manuscript books.

Medieval romances were concerned with kings and knights, and their pursuit of chivalric quests. 'Romance' in its modern sense of romantic love came from the genre's later focus on idealised love. Familiar classical themes often provided inspiration. Here, Benoît de Sainte-Maure retells the story of the Trojan war in *Le Roman de Troie* (*The Romance of Troy*), a French verse manuscript of the early thirteenth century. This is just one of seven romances in a volume which also contains a collection of fabliaux – comic or bawdy tales about ordinary life.

Firmly rooted in Western European and Christian experience, the romances influenced popular notions of British history. Familiar tales of King Arthur and stories about the Holy Grail look back to these origins. The early Thirteenth century *L'estoire del Saint Graal* tells the adventures of the Biblical figure Joseph of Arimathea and his companions as they travel to Britain.

John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (*The Lover's Confession*), written in the late fourteenth century contains many different stories. He draws on classical events and characters and provides incidental instruction about the world and the life of man. The entire work is an allegory in verse, presented as a dream dialogue between an ageing lover ('Amans') and his 'Confessor', a priest of Venus, the goddess of love.

A single leaf from a *Life of St Zita* (WLC/LM/37) illustrates the popularity of biographies of saints. This is our only evidence of an English life of the Italian St Zita who enjoyed a Midlands cult in the fifteenth century.

The familiar woman  
gopuz dlat thezore did leue Cith  
yne into the ditee pygan. And for  
wgyr who seid purpofith to do the  
more gode sethe make vulefull  
the lasse gode y he gathe lusted. Cith  
not leuiny the stabliffed purpof  
did go to the forfud dgruthe of the

An extract from the fragmentary English *Life of St Zita*, here spelled 'Cithe', 1450-1500 (WLC/LM/38).

ow speke if you ert on of all Confess  
pat wy pis vice hast ben wtholde  
als zitt for ought yzeme told. Amans  
ay fadre i not what it is  
In gode fey son i troue zis Confessoz  
y fadre uay bot zeme leue. Amans  
Now lest my son i you shalt here co  
hate is a wrape noght shewande fes  
But of longe tyme gedreande soz.  
And dwelley i ye herte lofen  
Bil he se time to be wroken

At the end of lines, the speakers are identified in red ink, with Amans (Lover) responding to promptings of the Confessor, extract from John Gower, *Confessio Amantis* (WLC/LM/8 f.153v).