Bart Besamusca
Readership and Audience

Around 1170, Chrétien de Troyes wrote *Erec et Enide*, which "marks a new departure in medieval vernacular narrative" for being the first Arthurian romance (Maddox and Sturm-Maddox 2005, 103). His famous prologue to the text includes the following statement:

> d'Erec, le fil Lac, est li contes,
> que devant rois et devant contes
> depecier et corronpre suelent
> cil qui de conter vivre vuelent. (Chrétien de Troyes 1990, ll. 19–22)
> [This is the tale of Erec, son of Lac, which those who try to live by storytelling customarily mangle and corrupt before kings and counts. (Chrétien de Troyes 1991, 37)]

Chrétien comments here on the dissemination of Erec's story, and he defines the audience of the Arthurian tale in rather specific terms. His remarks will provide the springboard for this chapter's discussion of the subjects of readership and audience.

By referring to professional story-tellers who fail to tell a tale correctly, Chrétien concludes a line of reasoning which he began by stating that a man ought to make use of his "estuide" (ll. 4 and 6) [learning], and that Chrétien's "escïence" (l. 17) [knowledge] enabled him to create a "molt bele conjointure" (l. 14) [very beautiful composition] out of a "conte d'aventure" (l. 13) [tale of adventure]. Since for him literacy is the prerequisite for learning and knowledge, he is indicating how his story came into being. *Erec et Enide* was created at the time of composition, pen in hand. This way of composing a narrative has resulted in a story that will be appreciated as long as Christianity lasts (ll. 24–26), as it is well structured instead of mutilated and corrupted (or: fragmented and incomplete[1]). The implication seems to be that professional story-tellers are deemed to fall short because their tales are orally composed.

The circulation of both oral and written versions of stories is confirmed by Chrétien's contemporaries. In his *Tristan*, Thomas comments on the many variants of the story of Tristan, and motivates his choice for the Tristan version as

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1 For these translations of "depecier" and "corronpre" by Douglas Kelly, see Burgess and Pratt (2006, 157).

Bart Besamusca (Utrecht University)

told by "Breri", whom scholars have identified as the Welsh nobleman Bleddri ap Cadifor (Gallais 2014 [1965]; Boyd 2014). Thomas states that he heard the story told by professional story-tellers many times, and adds: "Asez sai que chescun en dit/ E ço qu'il unt mis en escrit" (Lacy 1998, 102, ll. 2114–2115) [I am well acquainted with the story each has told and with those consigned to writing (Lacy 1998, 103)]. Likewise, Marie de France notes at the beginning of her lay, *Chèvrefeuille,* that the story was often told to her ("Plusor le m'ont conté et dit", Lacy 1998, 188, l. 5) and that she is aware of written versions of the Tristan story ("et je l'ai trové en escrit/ de Tristan et de la roïne", Lacy 1998, 188, ll. 6–7)

The co-existence of oral and written versions of stories may have prompted Chrétien to promote his written composition of the tale of Erec, son of Lac. His point of view was shared by many authors, French and non-French, throughout the Middle Ages. Ample evidence of this feature of the genre of Arthurian romance is provided by the large amount of long verse romances and the enormous prose romances that came into being in the various linguistic areas of medieval Europe.[2] Their length defies oral composition (but does not exclude aural reception, of course). Other indications of the bookishness of Arthurian romances are the many references to reception situations involving a manuscript. According to Denis Piramus in his *La vie de seint Edmund* (*c.* 1170), for example, the lays of "Dame Mari" (Ravenel 1906, l. 35), Marie de France, were favoured by counts, barons and knights ("cunte, barun et chivaler", l. 42), and in particular by ladies (l. 46): "E si en aiment mult lescrit,/ E lire le funt" (ll. 43–44) [And they loved the writing very much and had it read aloud]. The final lines of the thirteenth-century Welsh *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* [the Dream of Rhonabwy] stress, albeit ironically perhaps, that the story cannot be recited without the use of a book, due to the number of colours on the horses, arms, trappings, mantles and magic stones (Bromwich et al. 1991, 183). A curious example of recitation from a manuscript is given by Jean Froissart. In his *Chroniques* and *Dit dou Florin*, he relates that in late 1388, when visiting Gaston Fébus, Count of Foix-Béarn, he pleased his host by reading aloud his *Roman de Meliador* over a period of ten weeks, seven folios per night (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 490–491).

The interest of an aristocrat like Gaston Fébus in Arthurian material corroborates Chrétien's statement in his prologue to *Erec et Enide* that the story of Erec was told before kings and counts. As will be shown below, his indication of the elite audience of the Arthurian tale remained valid for all parts of Europe for four centuries, from the middle of the twelfth century until the mid-sixteenth century. We will see that in many linguistic areas aristocrats promoted the production of

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2 For an overview, see the Arthurian Fiction database <http://www.arthurianfiction.org>.

Arthurian romances by acting as patrons of medieval authors and by commissioning manuscripts in which Arthurian texts were copied. The audiences of these romances and books doubtless included the entourages of these patrons and commissioners. We will also see that authors made use of the popularity and the cultural prestige of Arthurian literature to attract aristocratic attention. By dedicating romances to members of the nobility, these writers tried to gain the support of a patron. The popularity and the prestige of the Arthurian genre additionally meant that Arthurian manuscripts, sometimes lavishly illustrated, were present in many aristocratic libraries.

I will start with a discussion of patrons and dedicatees, and continue with a section on commissioners, readers and owners of manuscripts. The order of both sections is loosely chronological. In the conclusion, I will evaluate the persuasiveness of the presented evidence, which is without exception based on explicit references to patrons, dedicatees, commissioners, owners and readers. Conjectural evidence, like the claim that the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Jesus College 111) was made for the nobleman Hopcyn ap Thomas because it contains praise poems addressed to him and his son (Bromwich et al. 1991, 10–11), has not been taken into account. The data, in first instance, was drawn from the Arthurian Fiction database and the eight volumes of the series "Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages".[3]

1 Patrons and dedicatees of Arthurian romances

In the essay in which Stephen Jaeger (1996, 46) refreshingly argued that "patrons did not make courtly romance; courtly romance made patrons", he proposed "a guideline for determining the importance of patronage and the role of patron," which is: "[i]f no patron is mentioned, then none exists." (47)[4] Since nothing is known about the patronage of *Erec et Enide*, we should assume, following Jaeger, that Chrétien's romance came into being without a patron in the background. Probably less than a decade after the writing of *Erec et Enide*, somewhere between 1177 and 1181, the French author found an extremely powerful and well-educated

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3 See <www.arthurianfiction.org>, and Bromwich et al. (1991): *The Arthur of the Welsh*, Barron (1999): *The Arthur of the English*, Jackson and Ranawake (2000): *The Arthur of the Germans*, Burgess and Pratt (2006): *The Arthur of the French*, Kalinke (2011): *The Arthur of the North*, Echard (2011): *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature*, Allaire and Psaki (2014): *The Arthur of the Italians* and Hook (2015): *The Arthur of the Iberians*.
4 Bumke (1979) is particularly ground-breaking on patronage.

patron: Marie de Champagne, daughter of Louis VII, King of France, and his first wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine (McCash 2005). Marie, who was born in 1145, married in 1159 and died in 1198, is the exclusive subject of Chrétien's prologue to his *Lancelot*, which he entitles the *Chevalier de la charrette* (Chrétien de Troyes 1984, l. 24). He playfully flatters her, states that he is obeying her wish that he should begin a romance ("vialt que romans a feire anpraigne", l. 2), and acknowledges her role in the genesis of his story – she provided him with the "matiere et san" (l. 26) [matter and meaning], while he did nothing but add "sa painne et s'antancïon" (l. 29) [effort and intention].[5] Scholars have long held the view that Chrétien disliked the romance's subject, that is, the adulterous relationship between Lancelot and Arthur's wife Guinevere, and did not finish the story for that reason – Godefroi de Leigni completed the text, with Chrétien's permission, so he states (l. 7106). More recently, however, it has been suggested that Marie withdrew her support as a consequence of the untimely death of her husband in 1181 (McCash 2005, 22–23).

Perhaps as a result of his fame as a writer of Arthurian romances, Chrétien found a second patron, who was also a member of the high nobility. Philippe d'Alsace, who was Count of Flanders from 1168 to 1191, asked Chrétien to write *Perceval*, which is entitled the "Contes del Graal" in the text's prologue (Chrétien de Troyes 1959, l. 66). In the introductory lines of this unfinished romance, Philippe is excessively praised for his worthiness (he is said to surpasses Alexander the Great) and his generosity (for he gives "sanz ypocrisie et sanz gile" (l. 30) [without hypocrisy or deceit]). Chrétien started to write the greatest story ever told in a royal court (ll. 63–65) "par le comandement le conte" (l. 64) [by the order of the count], who provided the author with his source text: "li quens li bailla le livre" (l. 67) [the count gave him the book]. The count's death in 1191 may well explain the incompleteness of *Perceval*, albeit that around 1230 one of the continuators, Gerbert de Montreuil, claimed that Chrétien died before he was able to finish his work (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 136). It might be that another continuator, Manessier, guessed that a later Flemish ruler would be interested in the patronage of her grandfather. Writing around 1230, Manessier dedicated his romance, which concludes the story of Perceval, to Jeanne, Countess of Flanders between 1205 and 1244. In his epilogue, the author reminds her of Philippe's patronage (Manessier 2004, l. 42653), praises her many virtues and states that inspired by her shining example he was able to finish his text ("Et por ce que tant ai apris/ De ses bonnes meurs a delivre,/ Ai en son non finé mon livre", ll. 42650–42653).

Other twelfth-century French authors were, like Chrétien, engaged in the search for a patron. Wace is an interesting case. In 1155, this Norman cleric

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5 I follow Douglas Kelly's interpretation of the French terms (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 152).

completed a fifteen-thousand lines long French verse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, presumably under the patronage of King Henry II of England, who granted the author a prebend at the Norman cathedral chapter of Bayeux (Barron 1999, 18; Burgess and Pratt 2006, 96). But Wace does not mention a patron in his *Roman de Brut*. The only piece of evidence we have is provided by the English author Layamon, who translated Wace's chronicle somewhere between 1185 and 1225 (Barron 1999, 22–23). In his prologue, he states that Wace had a copy of his book presented to Henry's wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine (the mother of Marie de Champagne) (Layamon 1995, ll. 22–23). It is conceivable, therefore, that Wace did not mention Henry in his *Roman de Brut* because he wrote the text on his own initiative, and not at the king's request, and was rewarded for it afterwards.

Another intriguing instance of twelfth-century patronage is offered by Gautier d'Arras, who wrote *Ille et Galeron* around 1170. The romance has come down to us in a long and a short version, both probably composed by Gautier (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 398–399). The long version of the text is dedicated to "la bone Beatris,/ Qui est de Rome empereris" (Gautier d'Arras 1956, ll. 5808–5809) [the good Beatrice, who is empress of Rome], the wife of Frederick Barbarossa, Empress Beatrice of Burgundy, who is extensively praised in the prologue. The short version, which is most likely a revision of the long version, adds a second addressee, "le bon cont Tiebaut" (l. 5812), that is Thibaut V, Count of Blois. This addition suggests that Gautier composed the second version of his romance in an attempt to please another aristocrat (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 398).

Royal patronage is strikingly present in thirteenth-century Norway. King Hákon Hákonarson, who reigned between 1217 and 1263, cultivated contacts with outlandish royal courts, in particular that of King Henry III of England, and extensively promoted the translation of French literature in Old Norse (Kalinke 2011, 9–16). The *Tristan* by Thomas of Britain seems to be the first French romance that was introduced in Norway. In 1226, Brother Robert finished the prose text, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, which was commissioned by the king, according to the prologue: "Var þá liðit frá hingatburði Christi 1226 ár, er þessi saga var á norrænu skrifuð eptir befalningu ok skipan virðuligs herra Hákonar kóngs." [This saga was translated into the Norse tongue at the behest and decree of King Hákon when 1226 years had passed since the birth of Christ.][6] This statement leaves no doubt that King Hákon was a very involved patron.

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6 Kalinke (1999), I, 28–29 (*Tristrams saga* is edited and translated in this edition by Peter Jorgensen).

Other French romances which came to Norway included three of Chrétien's texts, *Erec et Enide*, *Yvain* and *Perceval*. Only one of them, *Ívens saga*, mentions in its concluding sentence that Hákon ordered the translation (Kalinke 1999, II, 98). This acknowledgement of the king's patronage is repeated in the prologue of *Möttuls saga* (Kalinke 1999, II, 6), which is a translation of the fabliau, *Le Lai du cort mantel*, and in the prologue to the *Strengleikar*, a collection of translated French lays (Kalinke 2011, 11). The author of *Möttuls saga* is the sole translator who comments on Hákon's motivation for requesting the texts. He reveals that the king wanted to provide "gaman" (Kalinke 1999, II, 6) [entertainment] for his courtiers.

Half a century after the death of Hákon Hákonarson, royal patronage in the north of Europe again involved Chrétien's *Yvain*. The author of *Herr Ivan* informs us in the text's epilogue that Queen Eufemia, the wife of Hákon's grandson Hákon Magnússon, ordered him to translate the French romance (Kalinke 1999, III, 298; cf. Lodén, *infra*). *Herr Ivan*, completed in 1303, is a Swedish verse text, which seems to have served a political goal. Scholars assume that the queen requested the translation on the occasion of the betrothal of her daughter, Ingiborg, to the Swedish duke, Erik, brother of the King of Sweden (Kalinke 1999, III, 3).

Like Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach, the third giant of early German narrative literature, Gottfried von Straßburg, is silent about an alleged patron for his *Tristan*, though the poet may have had planned to mention one, but he did not finish the work. There is irrefutable evidence that people in the high echelons of the German-speaking society were attracted by Gottfried's love story (Rasmussen 2000, 193–194). One of his continuators, Ulrich von Türheim, was probably a ministerial and certainly a productive author – as well as his *Tristan*, he wrote *Rennewart* and a Cligès narrative (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 126). In the prologue to his *Tristan*, which can be dated to around 1240, Ulrich starts by regretting the death of Gottfried, who was "ein kunstricher man" (Ulrich von Türheim 1992, l. 8) [a great artist], as is shown by both the style and the composition of his story (ll. 9–14). Then Ulrich announces his intention to complete the narrative, and states that he acts at the urgent request of the imperial minister Konrad von Winterstetten, who has "mit vlize mich gebeten" (l. 25) [insistently asked me] to do so "im ze liebe" (l. 27) [out of love for him]. Ulrich's extensive praise of his patron's generosity (ll. 33–39) makes us suspect that Ulrich's intentions were not solely artistic.

Half a century later, around 1290, a second *Tristan* continuator was active at the renowned Prague court of Wenceslas II of Bohemia (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 129). Like Ulrich, this poet, Heinrich von Freiberg, honours Gottfried in the opening lines of his prologue, characterizing his predecessor's work as "meisterlich" (Heinrich von Freiburg 1993, ll. 14 and 18) [masterly]. He then explains that

his own writing is inspired by the virtue of a nobleman ("eines herren tugent", l. 55), and reveals his name: Raymond von Lichtenburg (ll. 74–77). The exact role of this powerful aristocrat (Bumke 1991, 486–487) in the genesis of Heinrich's text is, however, not clear due to the poet's phrasing. He writes: "In Behemlant ist er geborn,/ dem ich diz senecliche mer/ mit innecliches herzen ger/ vol tichten und vol bringen sol" (Ulrich von Türheim 1993, ll. 62–65) [he for whom I have to dedicatedly finish the writing of this sorrowful story is born in Bohemia]. This statement may indicate that Raymond was Heinrich's patron, but we cannot rule out the possibility that the poet intended to dedicate his text to the nobleman.

This uncertainty is absent in the case of Girart d'Amiens who, around 1280, wrote one of the last French Arthurian romances in verse, *Escanor*. The genesis of this narrative, which features a remarkably heroic seneschal, Kay (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 442), involved royal patronage, according to Girart's prologue and epilogue. Right at the beginning of *Escanor*, he states that he is obeying a noble, beautiful and wise lady (Girart d'Amiens 1994, ll. 8–9), who is "la pluz vaillant roïne/ Qui onques fust d'Espaigne nee" (ll. 24–25) [the most worthy queen ever born in Spain] and wife of the renowned King of England (ll. 29–33). In the text's epilogue, Girart begs God to protect from dishonour those "Qui ce romant escouteront/ Et qui escrire le feront" (ll. 25913–25914) [who listened to this romance and who had it written], in particular the Queen of England (ll. 25915–25916). This noble lady is Eleanor of Castile, who was married to Edward I, became queen in 1274 and died in 1290 (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 440). In the next section of this chapter, we will see that Edward can be connected to another Arthurian author, Rustichello da Pisa.

Various examples of thirteenth-century authors who dedicate their Arthurian romances to high aristocrats point to the continued appeal of these texts for the upper class of medieval society. The Flemish poet Jacob van Maerlant, for instance, adapted French prose versions of Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie* and *Merlin* around 1261 (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 191–192). In the prologue to his *Graal-Merlijn*, he cleverly relates the high status of the addressee, Albrecht van Voorne, viscount of Zealand, to the contents of the Middle Dutch text: "Desse historie van den grale/ Dichte ick to eren hern alabrechte/ Den heer van vorne wal myt rechte/ want hoge lude myt hoger historie/ Manichfolden zuken er glorie/ Vnde korten dar mede er tijt." (Jacob van Maerlant 1980, ll. 14–19) [I composed this story of the Grail in the honour of Lord Albrecht, the rightful lord of Voorne, because high-placed persons are often in search of honour by means of their important history, and amuse themselves in this way.]

Around the same time, the Occitan poet who composed *Jaufre* tried to attract princely attention by claiming that he heard the story told "en la cort del plus onrat rei / Qe anc fos de neguna lei" (Brunel 1943, ll. 59–60) [at the court of the

most honored king who ever followed any faith (Arthur 1992, 4)]. He goes on to flatter this King of Aragon at length (Brunel 1943, ll. 61 and 62–84), who is identified as Jaume I (Hook 2015, 166). Of interest in this context is the case of the German poet Albrecht, who wrote the *Jüngerer Titurel* around 1275. Scholars have argued that Albrecht dedicated his text to Ludwig II of Bavaria, that is Ludwig the Severe (Bumke 1991, 392), in order to gain a new patron after having being abandoned by his original supporters, as the poet laments (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 76).

An intriguing case of German patronage dates from the fourteenth century. Here we encounter the rare example of an aristocrat who is not supporting a single author, but what looks like an authorial collective (Dietl 2013, 36). The so-called Rappoltsteiner *Parzival*, which came into being between 1331 and 1336, is named after the nobleman who requested the translation of the French *Perceval* Continuations and the *Élucidation*, according to the epilogue (Schorbach 1888, 846.17–23). Ulrich von Rappoltstein, who was a member of a rich and powerful aristocratic family (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 167–168, 170–172), supported a team of three authors consisting of two goldsmiths from Strasbourg, Phillip Colin (Schorbach 1888, 846.21) and Claus Wisse (854.7), as well as Samson Pine (854.27), their Jewish co-worker who participated in translating the French text (854.26–36).

After the middle of the fourteenth century, the interest of authors in composing Arthurian romances diminished everywhere in Europe, with the notable exception of England (Cooper 2003). There, we finally come across an example of non-noble interest in Arthurian literature. Around 1430, Henry Lovelich made two English verse translations of the French *Estoire del saint Graal* and *Estoire de Merlin* (Cooper 2003, 151). He was a London skinner, who produced the text "at þe instance of harry barton", according to a marginal note in the unique copy of Lovelich's text (Barron 1999, 78). Since Harry (Henry) Barton was, like Lovelich, a member of the Company of Skinners, his request is a clear indication of mercantile interest in Arthurian literature. It should be noted, however, that Barton belonged to the London elite. This is demonstrated by the fact that he served the city twice as Lord Mayor (Ackerman 1952, 476).

The late Middle Ages still witnessed high-placed nobles supporting authors of Arthurian romances. In the last quarter of the fifteenth century, for example, the Munich painter and author Ulrich Fuetrer combined various Grail and Arthurian romances in his huge, strophic *Buch der Abenteuer* (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 173). In a number of passages the narrator, aptly called Ulrich, praises the aristocrat whose name is revealed by an acrostic right at the beginning of the text: Albrecht IV, Duke of Upper Bavaria. Fuetrer's narrator claims that he would have given up the writing, were it not for his wish to fulfil the duke's request (Bastert 1993, 146–149).

Even royal interest in the patronage of Arthurian literature is documented for this late period. Decades after the invention of printing, Pierre Sala, who worked as an important administrator at the court of France, wrote two Arthurian romances, *Yvain* (around 1522) and *Tristan* (around 1527) (Taylor 2014, 11–37). Although Sala's *Tristan* is in prose, the text starts with a short verse prologue, in which the author addresses his patron. He states that he is writing at the order of a gentleman (Sala 1958, ll. 1–2) who gave him a "vieil Tristan" [old Tristan], quite indecipherably copied in a rather damaged manuscript (ll. 5–8), as his source. At the end of the prologue, he identifies himself as "Vostre Sala, tres humble en vostre chambre" (l. 21) [Your Sala, very modest at your court]. This statement indicates that Sala's patron was none other than François I, King of France (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 546). We will return to Sala, who was both an author and a bibliophile, in the next section.

2 Commissioners, readers and owners of Arthurian manuscripts

Whereas the claim that someone acted as the patron of an Arthurian romance is very often impossible to verify – we will return to this issue at the end of this chapter – and whereas it is unfeasible to find out whether an author successfully dedicated his text to a person (that is, if he or she was rewarded for it, in some way or another), we are on more solid ground in the case of manuscripts. There is very little room for doubt when we read that someone commissioned the production of a codex, had the book in his or her possession or made him- or herself known as the person who added notes to a text. After all, what could be the reason for false statements in these cases? However, it should be noted that the information provided by manuscripts is not unambiguous. It is conceivable, for example, that a commissioner did not order a codex for his own use, but as a gift for someone else. And books that are part of a library may not have been read by the owner of the book collection. In both cases, the crucial aspect related to the books may have been that codices were objects that carried social prestige. It is very likely that commissioners and owners of manuscripts containing Arthurian romances were interested in the texts, but we cannot rule out the possibility that some of these books only served as markers of status. After all, irrespective of its contents, a manuscript expressed both an economic advantage (one could afford a book) and cultural prestige.

In two known instances, an important aristocrat carried an Arthurian manuscript with him across land borders. In these cases, the owners were definitely

"addicted" to Arthurian material. The first nobleman was Hugh of Morville, who was one of the hostages of Richard I Lionheart in Germany, according to Ulrich von Zatzikhoven (2006, ll. 9325–9339). The German author states in the epilogue of *Lanzelet*, his idiosyncratic version of the Lancelot story, that Hugh owned "das welsche/ Buch von Lanzelet" (ll. 9340–9341) [the French book of Lanzelet] that the poet used as source text for the production of a faithful translation into German (ll. 9322–9324) at the request of some dear friends (l. 9342). The second nobleman who travelled with an Arthurian book was one of the most powerful men of Europe in his time. In the prologue to his Arthurian compilation, Rustichello da Pisa notes that his text is based on a "livre monseingneur Odoard, li roi d'Engleterre" (Rustichello da Pisa 1994, 233, par. 1.2) [book of Lord Edward, the King of England], and explains what made it possible for the author to be in contact with this royal person. He got the book when Edward "passé houtre la mer en servise nostre Sire Damedeu pour conquister le saint Sepoucre" (par. 1.2) [crossed the sea in the service of Our Lord to conquer the Holy Sepulchre]. Somewhere between 1270 and 1274, when Edward was in the Mediterranean area in order to participate in the unsuccessful crusade under Louis IX of France, Rustichello must have been introduced into Edward's circle (Allaire and Psaki 2014, 23–24). At that time, the future king of England was in the company of his wife Eleanor of Castile, who ordered Girart d'Amiens to write *Escanor* some years later (see above).

Whereas we do not know if Hugh and Edward commissioned the manuscripts they carried with them, there is ample evidence of aristocrats ordering the production of codices. A fine example is the luxurious book that is now in Leiden (UB, Ltk. 537). The single-text codex preserves Wirnt von Grafenberg's *Wigalois*, copied by the Cistercian monk Jan von Brunswick from Amelungsborn ("her jan uon brunswik monek tho amelunges born", f. 117v) in 1372 (Meuwese 2005, 30–31). The monk, who probably painted the forty-seven miniatures as well, made the manuscript at the request of Duke Albrecht II von Braunschweig.

Albrecht evidently had the means to commission a costly codex. The same is true for many other high-placed aristocrats. The manuscript now known as Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek 2534, an early-fourteenth-century codex containing parts of the French *Lancelot-Grail* (*Estoire*, *Merlin*, *Suite*), for example, was made for the Count of Blois (f. 210), who is thought to be Louis de Châtillon (†1346) (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 58). Another French nobleman, Jacques d'Armagnac, was one of the most famous commissioners of Arthurian manuscripts. This Duke of Nemours, who was decapitated for treason in 1477, was a bibliophile, and possessed multiple copies of various Arthurian romances (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 66–67). He ordered an illustrated copy of the Prose *Tristan*, which was produced by the scribe and priest Micheau Gonnot in 1463 (now Paris, BnF, fr. 99). Some years later, in 1470 and again at the request

of the duke, Gonnot completed a unique *Lancelot-Grail* compilation (Paris, BnF, fr. 112; see Pickford 1960). Another bibliophile, connected to the court of France, was introduced above: Pierre Sala. In the 1520s, he commissioned for his own use three illustrated manuscripts in which his own romances, *Tristan* and the *Chevalier au lion*, were copied (Taylor 2013, 153–154).

Examples of royal commissioners include King Pere IV of Aragon. As a result of his lively interest in Arthurian romances, he both bought and ordered books containing these texts (Hook 2015, 169). Archival documentation shows that he commissioned the production of a (French or Catalan prose) *Lancelot* twice, in 1339 and in 1346. Another Iberian monarch, King Enrique IV of Castile, ordered a codex in which the *Libro del cavallero Cifar* was copied. Made in the last third of the fifteenth century, this codex, now Paris, BnF, Esp. 36, contains no less than two hundred and sixty-two miniatures (Hook 2015, 44). The Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I commissioned the so-called Ambraser Heldenbuch (cf. Busby, *supra*). This splendid codex, now in Vienna's Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ser. nova 2663) contains a large text collection, copied by Hans Ried between 1504 and 1516, including four German Arthurian romances (Hartmann's *Iwein* and *Erec*, *Der Mantel* and Wolfram's *Titurel*) (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 237–238).

Albeit scarce, there is also evidence of Arthurian manuscripts which were commissioned by the city elite. A late-thirteenth-century copy of the *Mort le roi Artu* (Chantilly, Musée Condé 649) was made by the scribe Giovanni Gualandi for Brexianus de Salis, who was a top administrator ("capitano del popolo") at Modena around 1281 (Allaire and Psaki 2014, 193). Another example involves the English verse text *Arthur*, which has come down to us in a unique copy that is part of the so-called Red Book of Bath (Warminster, Longleat House 62, 55). This multi-text codex, preserving texts in English, Latin and French, was produced somewhere between 1412 and 1428 for the Magistrate of Bath (Barron 1999, 72).

Assuming that commissioners who ordered codices for their own use and not as gifts for others were often genuinely interested in Arthurian romances, one might expect to find ample evidence of readership in the preserved manuscripts. However, this does not seem the case (albeit that many codices still need to be studied from this perspective). It is quite rare to come across marginal annotations that prove that commissioners or subsequent readers consulted the manuscripts. Of course, this may have been caused, at least in part, by the frequent trimming of codices. A notable exception concerns the English prose *Merlin* in the mid-fifteenth century codex, Cambridge, CUL, Ff. 3. 11. Many users have left their marks on this manuscript, including Elyanor Guldeford, who was a member of a very prominent family, living around 1500. Judging from her many glosses on the narrative, she read the text very carefully (Meale 1986, 97–107). Another attentive reader had Cambridge, CUL, Additional 7071, containing parts of the *Lancelot-*

Grail cycle and the *Suite du Merlin*, on his or her desk. This sixteenth-century, unidentified person added a note to the French text, referring to Caxton's edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur* (Middleton 2003, 234). A final example of readership is a little less straightforward. At the time he was held captive in England, John II of France borrowed two *Lancelot-Grail* manuscripts from the English queen, returning them by the end of 1357 (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 59). It is highly likely that the king wanted these copies for reading purposes.

When we look at acquisitions, next to commissions, it is safe to conclude that Arthurian manuscripts were highly valued throughout the Middle Ages. The impressive documentation, mainly consisting of expenditure statements, wills, inventories of libraries and owners' marks (coats of arms, names), points in particular towards aristocratic families as owners of Arthurian books. For example, Everwin I (†1454), Count of Bentheim, possessed a *Merlin*, three *Lancelot* manuscripts, and a copy of *Perceval*, according to a list written on a folio of a manuscript that is still owned by the counts of Bentheim-Steinfurt (Jacob van Maerlant 1980, 425). French codices, to give another illustrative example, were acquired in large quantities by noble families (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 31–37; 57–84). The successive inventories of the royal library of France, starting in 1373, contain more than thirty copies of Arthurian prose romances (59). Of the nineteen books in the possession of Prigent de Coëtivy (†1450), Admiral of France, five were Arthurian (71). The inventory, which was made after the death of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (†1467), lists more than thirty Arthurian books (62–63).

Non-noble interest in Arthurian literature is attested, finally, by evidence of book ownership. Attracted by the narratives and/or the social prestige attached to manuscripts, middle class representatives, such as merchants, lawyers, doctors, notaries, barbers, tailors and silversmiths, acquired codices containing Arthurian texts. An early example is manuscript Paris, BnF, fr. 12576, which preserves Chrétien's *Perceval* and all four Continuations. A note of rents relating to property in Amiens, written between 1270 and 1290, indicates that this codex was in the possession of a wealthy bourgeois family of that town (Busby et al. 1993, vol. 2, 49–51, 216–224). In addition to many aristocratic families, Italian owners of Arthurian books include notaries, doctors of law, a late fourteenth-century shoemaker, who possessed a book containing the *Tavola Ritonda*, and a late-fifteenth-century soldier, who called himself a trumpeter, and who owned a copy of the same romance (Allaire and Psaki 2014, 190–204). On the Iberian Peninsula, non-noble owners of Arthurian books were members of the bourgeoisie, who were particularly fond of *Tristan* texts (Hook 2015, 324–325). Among them are a pharmacist (1469), a physician (fifteenth century), a painter (1396), a clergyman (1436), the widow of a baker (1464) and many merchants (Hook 2015, 52–54). The dominance

of the mercantile class may indicate an economy-driven interest in manuscripts instead of literary curiosity.

3 Conclusion: the persuasiveness of the evidence

Throughout the Middle Ages and in many languages, Arthurian romances were extremely popular (Besamusca and Quinlan 2012). Although we are clearly dealing with a pan-European phenomenon (see also Besamusca and Brandsma 2007), the observations in the two preceding sections suggest that one social class in particular favoured these texts: people of royalty and (high) nobility. However, this conclusion begs a question: how convincing is the evidence presented in this chapter?

It is important to realize that we have applied the inductive method in this enquiry. As a result, there is no conclusive evidence on offer here. Even if we are able to identify hundreds of (documented) aristocratic white swans, we may be unaware of thousands of (undocumented) middle-class black swans. In addition, we could ask if we can trust authors who claim the support of a patron. Their statements are, after all, rather conventional, often impossible to verify, and sometimes entirely false. A famous example of such an untrustworthy claim can be found at the end of the *Queste del saint Graal* (Pauphilet 1949, 280) and the beginning of the *Mort le roi Artu* (Frappier 1964, 1), where it is stated that both romances, composed around 1220–1230, were written by Gautier (Walter) Map (who died, however, in 1209) at the request of King Henry II of England (†1189). Finally, one cannot unconditionally assume that commissioners and owners of manuscripts favoured Arthurian literature, because they may have appreciated the books above all for their economical value and as markers of status.

It is true that these objections cast some doubt on the force of the evidence included in this chapter. However, it is worth noting that the visual arts also support the view that Arthurian literature was an elite affair. Schloß Rodenegg, for example, houses a cycle of wall paintings featuring Iwein, made between 1220 and 1230 (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 257–259; Allaire and Psaki 2014, 209–210). At Schloß Wilhelmsburg, Schmalkalden, murals painted around the middle of the thirteenth century also tell the Iwein story (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 259–260). Around 1400, the bankers Niklaus and Franz Vintler commissioned fresco cycles, based on Wirnt von Gravenberg's *Wigalois*, Gottfried's *Tristan* and Der Pleier's *Garel von dem blühenden Tal*, and images of the three greatest knights of the Round Table, Parzival, Gawein and Iwein, at Schloß Runkelstein (Jackson and Ranawake 2000, 261–262; Allaire and Psaki 2014, 210–212). Other Arthurian

mural cycles are located in the Ducal Palace at Mantua, in a fortification near Frugarolo, in the Palazzo Ricchieri in Pordenone, in the Castle of Manta and in the French castle, Saint Floret (Allaire and Psaki 2014, 212–219). Since the second half of the fourteenth century, a pictorial series based on *Jaufre* has adorned a room at the royal palace of the Aljafería of Zaragoza (Hook 2015, 167). Philip the Bold (†1404) commissioned a tapestry featuring *Perceval* scenes as a gift for the Duke of York (Burgess and Pratt 2006, 35). These objects and decorated rooms do not argue against middle-class interest in Arthurian literature, of course. But they do confirm that this genre was both a truly pan-European and an elite phenomenon throughout the Middle Ages.

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