## The Peterborough Chronicle and the Transition from Old English to Middle English

In 1116 a fire in Peterborough Cathedral destroyed the copy of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* there. Another copy was borrowed for the new *Peterborough Chronicle*, and its entries from the years 449 to 1079 were copied. Uniquely amongst manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon* Chronicle, the *Peterborough Chronicle* continued to gain new entries until 1155. In entries after 1132 the language demonstrates particularly well the transition from OE to ME. Some of the features of this transition are listed below:

## Older Features

Definite Articles: se, þone, and þa, rather than invariable þe
Dative -e: retention of dative inflexion on nouns after prepositions (e.g. ofer eal Englalande)
Personal Pronouns: OE b-forms rather than ON b-forms
Word Order: Verb-Subject (VS) order in main clauses (e.g. sende se kyng)
Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order in subordinate clauses (e.g. bet hi scolden cumen)
Newer Features:
Reduction of -a, -o, -u to -e (/ə/) in unstressed syllables (e.g. sona > sone)
Loss of Dative -e: No dative inflexion on nouns after prepositions
Word Order: Subject-Verb (SV) order occurred regularly in OE, but the feature that is 'newer' is the increased proportion of its use, at the expense of VS, SOV, and S...V. Check the box whenever SV

# Exercise

occurs.

Compare the frequency of appearance of OE features with new features of ME in the *Peterborough Chronicle* entry for 1123. Where relevant, the standard Old English form is given beneath that found in the *Peterborough* Chronicle. The inflexions are separated from the base of the word by a hyphen. A word-forword translation follows. Place checks in the boxes based on the list of older and newer features is given above.

#### From the Entry for 1123

	Older Features					Newer Features		
	Def.	Dat.	Pro.	VS	SOV	-e(n),	Loss of	SV
	Art.	-е	hi			-es	Date	
Đa sone þæræfter sende se kyng hise								
sona								
write ofer eal Englalande and bed								
writ-u Englaland-e								
hise biscopes and hise abbates and								
biscop-as								
hise <i>þeignes</i> ealle þet <i>hi scolden</i>								
þegn-as hi sceold-on								
cumen to his gewitenemot on Candelmesse								
cum-an								

deig to Gleawceastre him togeanes; and dæg-e     Art.     -e     hi     -es     Dat.     -e       hi     dyd-on     gegaderod, þa bed se kyng heom þæt     Image bed se kyng heom þæt	
deig to Gleawceastre him togeanes; and dæg-e     Image: Construction of the second of th	Def. Dat. Pro. VS SOV -e(n), Loss of SV
dæg-e     image: set	Arte hi -es Date
hi swa diden. Đa hi wæran þær       hi dyd-on       gegaderod, þa bed se kyng heom þæt       hi scoldon cesen hem ærcebiscop to       ceos-an	
hi     dyd-on       gegaderod, þa bed se kyng heom þæt        hi scoldon cesen hem ærcebiscop to        ceos-an	
gegaderod, þa <i>bed se kyng</i> heom þæt <i>hi scoldon</i> cesen hem ærcebiscop to ceos-an	
hi scoldon cesen hem ærcebiscop to ceos-an	
ceos-an	
Cantawaraburia awa buam awa awa hi	
Cantawarabyrig swa hwam swa swa <i>hi</i>	
woldon and he hem hit wolde tyþian.	
Da spræcon ða biscopas hem betwenan	
and <i>sæden</i> þæt hi næfre mare ne wolden	
sæd-on	
haven munechades man to <i>ercebiscop</i> ofer	
arcebiscop-e	
hem, ac iedon ealle samodlice to <i>þone</i>	
kyng and ieornden þet <i>hi mosten cesen</i>	
most-on ceos-an	
of clerchades man swa hwam sea swa <i>bi</i>	
wolden to ercebiscop; and se kyng hit	
wold-on arcebicop-e	
hem tidde.	

## Word-for-Word translation

Then soon thereafter sent the king his writs over all England and bade his bishops and his abbots and his thanes all that they should come to his council on Candlemass day at Gloucester him towards; and they so did. When they were there gathered, then bade the king (to) them that they should choose (for) them (an) archbishop for Canterbury whomever they wished and he them it would grant. Then spoke the bishops themselves between and said that they never more not would have (a) monastic man as archbishop over them, but went all together to the king and asked that they might choose from (a) clergy man whomever they wished as archbishop; and thee king it (to) them granted.

The Ormulum is an East Midlands text which shows how its author, a monk named Orm, grappled with the same difficulties as the *Peterborough Chronicle* scribe. Notice that his spelling is consistent and that he attempts to reform English orthography and relate eeach sound to a symbol. His innovative use of double consonants is particularly remarkable. Other examples are his introduction of three symbols for <g> to differentiate the three sounds that it represented in OE, his use of <wh> for OE <hw>, and his use of <sh> for OE <sc>. The last two are familiar in MnE. Orm alone was not responsible for the adoption of these spellings, but the Ormulum represents new trends in which were taking place, if less systematically, amongst other English writers.

#### Exercise

In the following passage from the *Ormulum*, describe Orm's verse-type and his use of punctuation. Do you think his final -*e* spelling was always pronounced? How many syllables are there before each 'full stop' (period)? What do the full stops mark?

#### The Ormulum, late twelfth century

þiss boc iss nennned Orrmulum. Forrþi þatt Orrm itt wrohhte.

Icc hafe wennd inntill Ennglissh. Goddspelles hall3he lare. Affterr þatt little witt þatt me. Min Drrihhtin hafeþþ lenedd.

Annd wha-se wilenn shall biss boc. Efft oberr sibe writenn. Himm bidde icc þat he't write rihht. Swa-summ þiss bov himm tæcheþþ. All þwerrt-ut affterr þatt itt iss. Uppo þiss firrste bisne. Wiþþall swillc rime alls her iss sett. Wiþþall þe fele wordess. Annd tatt he loke wel þatt he. An bocstaff write twi33ess. E33whær þær itt uppo biss boc. Iss writenn o batt wise. Loke he wel þatt he't wrote swa. Forr he ne ma33 nohht elless. Onn Ennglissh writenn rihht te word. Patt wite he wel to sobe.

this book is called Ormulum. Because Orm it wrought (= *made*).

I have turned into English. (*The*) gospel's holy lore. After that little with that me. My Lord has lent (= granted).

And whoever intend shall this book. Again another time write. Him ask I that he it copy right. In the same way (that) this book him teaches. Entirely after (the way) that it is. According to this first exemplar. With all such rhyme as here is set (down). With all the many words. And (I ask) that he look well that he. A letter writes twice. Everywhere it within this book. Is written in that way. Look he well that he it wrote so. For he must not else (= otherwise). In English write correctly the word. That (should) know he well for sure