THE AUTHORSHIP, DATE AND HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE FRENCH CHRONICLES ON THE LANCASTRIAN REVOLUTION: I

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PART I

AFTER more than a century of scholarly controversy, it is generally accepted that the French chronicles provide the most accurate account of the Lancastrian Revolution, the English literary sources being "thoroughly unreliable". Despite the authority now accorded to them, however, these French chronicles bristle with unresolved problems. There is no modern critical edition of the *Chronique de la Traison et Mort de Richart II*, of the *Metrical History of the Deposition of Richard II*, or of the *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys*; and no serious attempt has yet been made to establish when they were written or for what purpose. Worse still, the authorship of all three is in dispute. There have been two attributions of the *Metrical

1 Research for this article, which was supported by a generous grant from the British Academy, was originally undertaken to produce a new edition of the *Chronique de la Traison et Mort de Richart II* for Oxford Medieval Texts. For reasons which will become clear in the course of the article, this project has since been abandoned and references to the forthcoming edition in *A Bibliography of English History to 1485*, ed. E. B. Graves (Oxford, 1975), p. ix and nos. 2841, 2856 and 2915, will have to be amended. In preparing this edition, I have benefited considerably from discussions with Professor C. N. L. Brooke, general editor of Oxford Medieval Texts, and from his comments on the original draft of this article.


4 *Chronique de la Traison et Mort de Richart Deux Roy Dengleterre*, ed. B. Williams (London, 1846)—henceforth, the *Traison*; *A Metrical History of the Deposition of Richard II*, ed. J. Webb in *Archaeologia*, xx (1824)—henceforth, *Metrical History*; *Chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys*, ed. L. Bellaguet (Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France, 1839-52), ii.—henceforth, *Saint-Denys*. The *Metrical History* has also been edited by J. A. C. Buchon in *Collection des chroniques nationales françaises*, xxiv (1826). The other editions of the *Traison* are noted in the Appendix to this article.
History, six of Saint-Denys, and no less than seven of the Traison. The problems of authorship are further complicated by the complex interrelationship of the three works, an interrelationship which has so far defied satisfactory definition or explanation. It has been variously claimed that the author of the Metrical History copied from the Traison, that the Traison was copied from the Metrical History, that both were copied from each other, that one or other or both were copied by Saint-Denys, that the monk of Saint-Denys composed the Traison, and that the Traison was written by the author of the Metrical History. Confusion could scarcely be worse confounded. Until it is known how many authors we are dealing with, who they were, when they wrote, who copied from whom, and what was the extent of their plagiarism, considerable uncertainty will continue to surround many of the key episodes of the Lancastrian Revolution. The object of this article is to try to expose and clarify some of these fundamental textual confusions.

It is essential at the outset to establish as securely as possible the identity of the author of the Metrical History; for, as we shall see, the solution to most of the remaining problems posed by the French chronicles depends upon the certainty of this identification. There is a second reason why this identification is particularly important. It would be difficult to imagine two more dissimilar claimants than Jean Creton and John Trevaur. Creton was a young Frenchman, a layman and a valet de chambre to the king of France and the duke of Burgundy; Trevaur, a Welshman, a bishop, a politician, and an author of some eminence. While Creton was rarely more than a humble observer of the events of his day, Trevaur had a particularly stormy political career, even for those unsettled times. A highly trusted servant of Richard II, he deserted to Henry IV well before the Deposition, served him as one of his inner circle of counsellors for five years, deserted to Owen Glendower in 1404, and spent the last six years of his life trying to construct an anti-Lancastrian alliance between France, Wales, Scotland, the Mortimers and the earl of Northumberland. Creton, if he wrote the Metrical History, did so largely because chance

1 Dictionary of National Biography, xix. 1147-8—henceforth, D.N.B.
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happened to make him an eye-witness to the dramatic events of the last weeks of the reign of Richard II. But if Trevaur wrote the *Metrical History*, he did so—ex hypothesi—to drum up support for an anti-Lancastrian crusade; and to serve that purpose lied about himself and his circumstances, deliberately suppressed or distorted information about events in which he had been personally involved, and invented eye-witness accounts of scenes of which he could not possibly have had any first-hand knowledge. If we accept Creton as the author of the poem, his bias is obvious and easily allowed for. But if we accept the claims of Trevaur, then we can place no credence at all in the unsupported testimony of the *Metrical History*. And since, as I hope to demonstrate, considerable sections of the *Traison* and of *Saint-Denys* are derived from Creton, it would follow that the French chronicles are even more "thoroughly unreliable" than the Lancastrian sources.

The case for Trevaur's authorship rests upon three propositions: that he composed the *Metrical History* to provoke opposition to Henry IV; that in order to protect himself he assumed a fictitious identity; and that the proof of his authorship is to be found in the many literary parallels between the *Metrical History* and his other works.

There are formidable objections to all three propositions. If the *Metrical History* was intended to be a piece of anti-Lancastrian propaganda, then it was composed with singular ineptitude. To begin with, the author represents himself as a Frenchman, quite the most unsuitable disguise he could have adopted for his purpose. For given the strained relations between England and France after 1399, information from such a source was bound to be viewed with the greatest of suspicion. Even more remarkably, the poet makes absolutely no reference to the claims of the earl of March to succeed Richard II, claims to succeed Richard II, claims

which were the very foundation of the opposition to Lancaster after 1399. But even more astonishing than his failure to publicize the claims of the earl of March, is the author's treatment of the house of Percy. Of all his opponents, Henry IV had most to fear from Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, his brother Thomas, earl of Worcester, and his son, Henry Percy (Hotspur). Yet all three are represented in the Metrical History in the worst of possible lights. Nothing is said of Hotspur's reputation for chivalry; but he is shown to have been one of the first to desert Richard II, and to have been one of the group (which included his father) to petition Henry IV to murder the deposed king. Worcester did not sink to such depths, but he is shown to have repaid Richard II for raising him to the peerage in 1397 by deserting him in 1399 and, worse still, disbanding the army which the king had entrusted to his keeping. Finally, the earl of Northumberland himself is represented as both the architect of the capture of Richard and as the most despicable character in the poem. "That which he did", said the poet, "surpasseth all other evil deeds". As a piece of propaganda for an anti-Lancastrian alliance, therefore, the Metrical History is quite abysmally inept. We surely cannot associate a man of Trevaur's attainments with such remarkable incompetence.¹

The second proposition in favour of Trevaur's authorship is, if anything, even less plausible than the first. If he were the author, Trevaur had no good reason to conceal his identity. He was well out of the reach of Henry IV; and in the unlikely event of his capture, retribution for his treasonable dealings with Glendower, France, and Scotland would have guaranteed an unpleasant death. So minor a peccadillo as writing the Metrical History could not have affected his fate. Moreover, even if we accept the assumption that Trevaur had need of a disguise, he must be credited with enough intelligence to have devised a more appropriate one than that of a young Frenchman. But the most telling objection to this proposition is that Trevaur was never in the same place at the same time as the author of the

¹ In addition to the points made in the text, it could be added that this proposition assumes that the Metrical History was written after 1404 (when Trevaur deserted Henry IV), an assumption which is both unwarranted and improbable: below, p. 154.
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*Metrical History.* There are three major episodes in the poem: the Irish expedition, Richard II’s last days of freedom in north Wales, and the Deposition Parliament and its aftermath. For the first two of these episodes the author claims to have been an eyewitness to most of what he relates, and the wealth of circumstantial detail which he gives lends credence to this claim; but for the Deposition Parliament and the events which followed, he says that he had to rely upon such second-hand information as filtered through to him in Paris after his return to France, and his many errors and misunderstandings make it all too easy to believe him. Now on all three of these occasions, Trevaur was somewhere else. When the author was in Ireland, Trevaur was on a mission to Scotland; and when he was with Richard II in north Wales, Trevaur was with Henry Bolingbroke at Chester. And most strikingly of all, when the poet was in Paris, piecing together his account of the Deposition Parliament from such meagre and inaccurate scraps of news as found their way across the Channel, Trevaur was not only at Westminster, but actually played a central role in the drama enacted there, heading the committee which deposed the king. If Trevaur wrote the *Metrical History*, therefore, it was not only his identity he lied about. Such massive and often pointless lying seems rather improbable.

What, then, of the proofs that Trevaur was the author? These Professor E. J. Jones found in the literary parallels between the *Metrical History* and Trevaur’s other works, and in particular in “the duplication of nouns, verbs and adjectives” common to them all. But this is a common stylistic device which might almost be said to be characteristic of medieval writers in general. However this may be, there is an even more fundamental objection to this argument; for it does not appear that there are, in fact, any “other” works by Trevaur with

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1 Public Record Office [henceforth, P.R.O.], Exchequer Enrolled Accounts, E 364/32, m. 9v. Trevaur was absent from 13 April to 23 May. There is no record that he went to Ireland after this date.

2 His appointment as chamberlain of Chester and north Wales on 16 August 1399—the first official act of Bolingbroke in the name of the captive Richard II—proves this (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1396-99, p. 591).

3 E. J. Jones, op. cit. 474.
which to compare the *Metrical History*. He has, it is true, been credited with the authorship of four very diverse compositions: a Latin chronicle (the *Continuation of the Eulogium Historiarum*); a Welsh life of Saint Martin (*Buchedd Sant Martin*); and two treatises on heraldry, one in Latin (*Tractatus de Armis*), and one in Welsh (*Llyfr Arveu*). But all four have been attributed to Trevaur by Professor Jones on grounds no stronger than those on which he would credit him with the *Metrical History*; and in all four cases his attribution has been convincingly refuted. The *Continuation of the Eulogium Historiarum*, for instance, has been shown to have been the work of a Franciscan friar; and Professor Ivor Williams has demonstrated that there is no shred of evidence to connect Trevaur with the *Tractatus de Armis*, and that the *Buchedd Sant Martin* was compiled in 1488, 78 years after Trevaur’s death. As for the *Llyfr Arveu*, this is a translation from the *Tractatus de Armis*, so the stylistic argument cannot easily be applied; but even here, it is highly probable that the translation belongs to the second half of the fifteenth century. In short, even if the stylistic criteria were admissible, they could not be applied since there are no other works by Trevaur with which to compare the *Metrical History*.

There is therefore no evidence to connect Trevaur with the poem. No surviving manuscript attributes the work to him, nor did any contemporary, nor indeed any commentator prior to 1940; and there is no indication in any surviving source, early or late, that Trevaur wrote anything which in any way resembled the *Metrical History*. In fact, the only known connection between Trevaur and the *Metrical History* is that he was probably buried in the abbey of Saint Victor, near Paris, which owned a manuscript of the work. That manuscript,

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2 J. I. Catto, “An alleged great council of 1374”, *E.H.R.*, lxxxii (1967), 764-71; I. Williams, “*Sion Trefor o Wigynt*”, *Bull. of the Board of Celtic Studies*, v (1931), 40-44. I am most grateful to my colleague, Dr. H. A. Lloyd, for translating this important article for me.
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however, specifically attributes the poem to our other candidate, Jean Creton.

This attribution, at the end of one of the earliest surviving manuscripts, could not have been made more clearly: “Explicit l’ystoire du roi Richart d’Engleterre composee par Creton”. The wording leaves no room for ambiguity. Creton was not the scribe who copied the work, nor the patron who commissioned it. He was the author; he composed it.

Is it possible that the colophon is inaccurate? There is no positive reason for assuming so, and several good reasons for believing the contrary. Although not a holograph, the manuscript is an early one. It is also the only manuscript to name an author. And finally, whoever commissioned the manuscript showed considerable interest in Creton; for, in addition to attributing the Metrical History to him, he also included in his collection a ballad and two letters written by Creton. In the circumstances, it seems quite possible that Creton himself commissioned the manuscript as such.

Although this last point cannot be proved, the letters of Creton included in this manuscript do provide the final link in the chain of evidence which proves his authorship of the Metrical History beyond any reasonable doubt. The first of these letters states internally that it was written by Creton to Richard II: “Je, Creton, ton lege serviteur te envoie ceste epistre”. He goes on to say that he has recently heard news that the king was alive and well in Scotland; and he promises to follow hard on the heels of his letter in order to see the king again, bringing with him his Metrical History of the treachery of Richard’s subjects which, he adds, he has already published throughout the realm of France “par escrit et par figures”. This last

1 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale [henceforth, B.N.], Nouvelle acquisition française 6223; the remaining manuscripts are: MSS. Franc. 1441, 1668, 14645; B.L. Harley MS. 1319; Lambeth MS. 598; and Bodleian MS. 9788.

2 See also the record in the Burgundian accounts, under the date 16 July 1402, of a payment to Jean Creton “pour et en recompensation d’un livre faisant mention de la prise de feu le roy Richard ” (P. Cockshaw, “Mentions d’auteurs, de copistes, d’enlumineurs et de libraires dans les comptes généraux de l’état bourguignon (1384-1419)”, Scriptorium, xxiii (1969), no. 50).

3 Published by D. W. Dillon, “Remarks on the Manner of Death of Richard II”, Archaeologia, xxviii (1840), 75-95.
phrase alone is all but sufficient to identify the writer of the letter as the author of the *Metrical History*, for the poem was conceived as a work in which text and illuminations were interdependent; but the remainder of the letter puts the identification beyond doubt. For the writer states that his illuminated history tells of Richard's last Irish expedition, of the treachery of the earl of Rutland, of the perjury of the earl of Northumberland, and of the deceitful means employed to seize the king and to lead him in duress to Flint. These are precisely the key episodes of the *Metrical History*; and, like the author of that poem, the writer of the letter claims that he witnessed all these events while actually in the king's company: "Je les vus avenir, moy esteant avec toy en Hybernie et en Angleterre".2

If Creton wrote these letters, therefore, he certainly wrote the *Metrical History*; and since his name is given in the body of the first letter and is attached to the ballad which accompanies the second,3 his authorship of the poem can only be disputed on the grounds that the letters are forgeries.4 Though inherently improbable, this deserves some discussion, since it will not only serve to remove any lingering doubt as to Creton's authorship but will also introduce evidence to determine the date of the composition of the poem.

Perhaps the most convincing single argument for the authenticity of these letters is the absence of any discernible motive for forgery, for they contain nothing of any great moment to anyone other than Creton himself. But there are also more positive reasons for rejecting the suggestion of forgery. Stylistically, the two letters are indistinguishable from the prose sections of the *Metrical History*, and the second of the two letters is composed in a mixture of prose and verse similar to that used in the *Metrical History*. But it is the contents of the two letters

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2 Dillon, op. cit. 89.

3 The second letter alludes to Creton's authorship of the *Metrical History*, though less precisely than the first. The authenticity of either letter therefore warrants the other.

4 E. J. Jones, *Speculum*, xv. 477, argues that "Creton" is a scribal error for "Trevor". It hardly seems likely that a scribe could mistake T for C, v for t, and r for n, and do so on three separate occasions.
which practically rule out the possibility of forgery; for they reveal a familiarity with the activities and opinions of the man called Creton which we can only plausibly attribute to Creton himself.

At the time he penned the first letter, for instance, the writer—like the author of the *Metrical History*—was convinced that Richard II was alive and well; but by the time he wrote the second letter, he was convinced that the king was dead. Creton’s conversion to this belief is warranted by a note attached to one version of Froissart’s *Chronicles*, which records that the scribe had been informed,¹

par ung homme digne de foy nomme Creton et par escript de sa propre main, lequel pour ce temps estoit en Angleterre et au pais, et escript ce que je vous dirai; que le roy Richart d’Angleterre fut occis et mis a mort en la Tour de Londres par ung jour des Roys, l’an mil ccc iij*x et xix, par la maniere qui s’ensuit . . .

The writer of these letters was not only accurately informed as to Creton’s views on the death of Richard II at two different dates, but he was also aware of certain details of Creton’s activities which explained his conversion. In particular, he knew that Creton had been sent on a mission to Scotland to verify the rumour that Richard II was alive and well, and he knew that the result of this mission had been to convince Creton that Richard was dead. The first letter refers to the writer’s impending departure on this mission; the second reveals all too clearly its result. Once again, these facts are independently warranted. In 1410, Jean Creton, *valet de chambre*, was paid by Charles VI,²

pour et en recompensacion d’un voyage que par nostre commandement et ordonnance il fist pieca au pays d’Escoce pour savoir et enquierir la verite de nostre tres cher et tres ame fils, le roy Richart d’Angleterre, que l’on disoit alors estre envie audict pays d’Escoce; pour lequel voyage faire nous ne feismes aucune chose pour lors ni depois audit Creton bailler . . .

The date of this mission, evidently some years (pieca) previously,

¹ Published in J. Froissart, *Oeuvres*, ed. K. de Lettenhove (Brussels, 1867-77), xvi. 385-6.
² Dillon, op. cit. 94. The documents, which Dillon prints without archival reference, are in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, pièces originales 930, Creton, nos. 1-2.
certainly before 1407,¹ and very probably before 1405,² can be pinpointed by a draft ordinance of Charles VI announcing that it is

commune renomme que nostre filz Richart, iadis roy d'Angleterre, est en vie ou royaume d'Escoce, auquel pour en savoir la verite nous avons envoiee certains nos messaiges . . .

This draft, though undated, can confidently be assigned to April 1402 or very slightly later.³ This agrees exactly with the deductions about Creton's mission which can be made from the two letters.⁴ The second, written after his journey to Scotland, can be dated on internal evidence to October 1402 or slightly earlier⁵; the first, written before the journey, must necessarily be several months earlier; and since it could not have been written much, if at all, before the end of 1401,⁶ it was almost certainly written during the first few months of 1402.

The two letters are thus factually accurate both about Creton's activities and his state of mind at two different dates in the year 1402; they are written in a style indistinguishable from that of the Metrical History; and they are written by someone calling himself Creton, who claims to have composed the Metrical History. Proof of his authorship could not be very much stronger.

Finally, it should be observed that these facts fix the date of composition within narrow limits. In the first letter, written before April 1402, Creton states that his poem is not only finished but already in circulation. Since the last event it records took place late in August 1401, and since some months would have been required for its composition and illumination, the Metrical History was evidently completed at some date between November 1401 and March 1402.

While there were only two claimants to the authorship of the

¹ When he was paid for the same mission by the duke of Burgundy (Cockshaw, op. cit. no. 69).
² When Isabel, Richard II's wife, remarried.
⁴ Dillon, op. cit. 79-82.
⁵ This is established by an allusion to the offer of the regency of Brittany to the duke of Burgundy.
⁶ Below, next paragraph.
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Metrical History, there are no less than six or seven candidates for the authorship of the Traison. It has been attributed to Creton himself; to the monk of Saint-Denys, the historiographer of the reign of Charles VI; to Berry Herald, a later historiographer-royal; to Georges Chastellain, poet and historian of dukes Philip the Good and Charles the Rash of Burgundy; to Jean le Beau, canon of Liège, also identified as the confessor of Richard II's queen, Isabel; and to one Nathan ben Saddi, a Jew. Finally, the Traison has also been described as anonymous,¹ and as a "prose translation" of the Metrical History.²

Several of these candidates, however, are not to be taken seriously. Nathan ben Saddi is certainly in this class; and when it appears that the Traison is attributed to him in only one out of thirty-seven manuscripts, and that one an edited version of a translation of the eighteenth century,³ then it is apparent that he is not a contender to be considered at all.

Neither are Berry Herald nor Georges Chastellain.⁴ The belief that either of these writers had any connection with the Traison arose because it was bound up with copies of their works in the fifteenth century,⁵ and later historians assumed their authorship on this basis alone. No manuscript of the Traison actually attributes the work to either of them; neither anywhere lays claim to it; and since the Traison is undoubtedly the work of an eye-witness, neither Berry (b. 1386) nor Chastellain (b. 1404/5) was in a position to have been its author.

The claim of Jean le Beau, or le Bel, canon of Liège, presents a more complex problem. Two arguments have been advanced to support his authorship: his autograph in a mid-fifteenth century manuscript of the Traison, and a direct attribution in two other surviving manuscripts. Though either argument would appear to be conclusive, both are in fact open to serious

¹ H. Wallon, Richard II (Paris, 1864), i. 390-3.
² A. Molinier, Les sources de l'histoire de France des origines aux guerres d'Italie (Paris, 1901-6), iv. no. 3998; Cockshaw, op. cit. no. 20.
³ Aix MS. 1054, pp. 97-103.
⁴ Molinier, op. cit. no. 4134; Dictionnaire de biographie française (Paris, 1933-), in progress); vi. cols. 153-4; Traison, xxvi ff.
⁵ Rouen MS. 1052; MSS. Fr. 5028, 5327 (Berry); Rouen MS. 1234; Brussels MS. 4632 (Chastellain).
objections. The autograph runs: "Je, Jehan Lebaud, licencie en loix, conseiller du roy nostre seigneur, ay donne et donne ceste livre... au moys de Juillet 1449". This Jehan Lebaud makes no claim to have written the Traison, only to have owned a copy. Moreover, since he was a subject of Charles VI, he cannot be identified with Jean le Beau of Liège; and since he was alive in 1449, it is a little unlikely that he could have been an eye-witness to events dating from 1396.

The argument in favour of the second Jean le Beau, of Liège, appears to be stronger. Two manuscripts of the Traison, including one of the very earliest, contain an introduction which states:

Affin que les grans fais d'armes et les grans trahisons qui par les guerres de France et d'Angleterre sont advenues soient notablement mis en memoire perpetuelle, par quoy les bons puissent prendre example, je messire Jean Lebeau, jadis chanoine de Saint-Lambert de Liège, ay mis en prose ce petit livre.

But although this might appear conclusive, it is very far from being so. In the first place, these two manuscripts represent a variant version of the Traison which, although undoubtedly early, is equally undoubtedly a pirated edition. The introduction containing the name of the putative author is itself an interpolation, not to be found in the remaining thirty-five manuscripts. In addition, the version represented by these two manuscripts contains a number of passages of a moralizing and reflective nature which are not in the other manuscripts and which are foreign to the spirit of the bulk of the text, which is a largely non-committal narrative of events. It also contains four other passages which dilate upon the war-proneness of the English. All these are evidently interpolations. Finally, there are a number of instances where the editor of the le Beau version has adapted the original text and in so doing made nonsense of it. One instance must suffice. The original author of the Traison represents the duke of Surrey taking leave of his mother ("la contesse de Kent, sa dame et mere") and of the earl of Salisbury

8 Published by Buchon, op. cit. xxv, suppl. ii. See Appendix.
on his departure to raise the standard of revolt against Henry IV in 1400. In the le Beau version, Surrey is made to bid farewell to his wife, the mother of the earl of Salisbury ("sa femme, mere du conte de Sallebry"). All these points indicate the same conclusion: that if Jean le Beau had anything at all to do with the *Traison*, he was merely the editor of a pirated version of the chronicle.

But it is not even necessary to believe this. If the introduction to the le Beau version is examined carefully, it will be found to contain some very suspicious features. In itself, "Je messire Jean le Beau, iadis chanoine," is a very peculiar formula. The writer is either claiming to be dead (iadis = late) or to be an ex-canon (= formerly), both singularly strange forms of self-description. The clauses which precede this description are equally bizarre. The author says that he is about to describe the wars of the English and French, which do not feature in the *Traison* at all, and the "great feats of arms", which are equally conspicuous by their absence; and he states that his purpose in relating these and the "great treasons" occasioned by the war is to provide examples to be imitated by all good men. On internal evidence, therefore, the attribution to le Beau has been tampered with, the phrase "great treasons" is an interpolation, and the remainder of the introduction does not belong to this chronicle at all. But how could a wrong introduction become attached to the chronicle, and why was it mutilated in the process?

The solution to this puzzle was provided long ago by Kervyn de Lettenhove. He pointed out that one of the manuscripts of the *Traison* is bound up with part of the first book of Froissart's

1 *Traison*, p. 79 = Buchon, p. 39. There is another good example on p. 7 of the *Traison* ("Adonc...mourir") = Buchon, p. 8.
2 Valenciennes MS. 638. Lettenhove's hypothesis explains the peculiarities of the le Beau version of the *Traison* so well that it can be accepted without serious reservation; but it should be pointed out that the manuscript published by Buchon could not possibly have been derived from the Valenciennes MS. itself, since this is undoubtedly the later of the two manuscripts. It is therefore necessary to posit the existence of an earlier version of the Valenciennes MS. which has not survived. It should also be noted that further confirmation of Lettenhove's hypothesis is provided by the fact that both the le Beau version and the Valenciennes MS. are based on the first edition of the *Traison* (see below, pp. 172-3).
Chronicles, the introduction to which appears to have been appropriated and adapted (with singular ineptitude) by the scribe responsible for the le Beau version of the Traison:

Froissart

Affin que les grans fais d'armes qui, par les guerres de France et d'Angleterre sont advenues, soient notablement mis en memoire perpetuelle, par quoy les bons y puissent prendre exemple, je me veul ensonnier de les mettre en prose. Voirs est que messire Jean li Biaux, jadis canonnes de Saint-Lambert de Liege, engrossa en son temps aucune chose.

Le Beau

Affin que les grans fais d'armes et les grans trahisons qui, par les guerres de France et d'Angleterre sont advenues, soient notablement mis en memoire perpetuelle, par quoy les bons puissent prendre exemple, je messire Jean le Beau, jadis chanoine de Saint-Lambert de Liege, ay mis en prose ce petit livre.

This Jean le Beau, or le Bel, was indeed an historian, and a canon of Liège; but he was very definitely "late" at the time the Traison was composed, having died more than a quarter of a century previously.

Once it is recognized that the attribution to Jean le Beau is a hoax, then the claim of the confessor of Queen Isabel collapses; for this claim depended upon the certainty of le Beau's authorship and his identification as Isabel's confessor.¹

The claim of the sixth candidate, the monk of Saint-Denys, was advanced by the last editor of the Traison, Benjamin Williams. Williams rested his identification upon two grounds: first, the marked similarities between the Traison and long passages in the Chronique... de Saint-Denys; and second, the fact that the author of the Traison showed considerable personal sympathy for Thomas Merke, the Benedictine bishop of Carlisle, and so was probably a Benedictine himself, and hence possibly the monk of Saint-Denys.² This last argument is obviously very tenuous indeed, and as we shall see there is good reason to believe that our author was a layman. As to the first argument, it will readily be conceded that there is near-identity between

¹ H. Moranvillé, "La chronique du religieux de Saint-Denys, les mémoires de Salmon, et la chronique de la mort de Richard II", Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes, i (1889), 5-40, esp. 13-18. (Moranvillé had overlooked the works of Lettenhove cited in p. 156, n. 1 above).

² Traison, xxiv ff.
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long passages in the two works; but there can be no doubt that the two accounts are by different hands and that the common material is borrowed by the monk from the Traison, not vice-versa. Double authorship is proven both by the occasional disagreements between the two writers¹ and by their styles, which could scarcely be more dissimilar. The monk wrote a fluent, polished and intricate Latin prose of the variety favoured by highly educated churchmen in the later middle ages, while the author of the Traison used a crude and unsophisticated French dialect which defeated the understanding of every single scribe who tried to reproduce it. Despite his superior education, however, there can be no doubt that the monk was the plagiarist. He himself states that his account of the death of Richard II (which is identical to that of the Traison) is borrowed from another source²; and for the greater part of his narrative he gives a slightly condensed version of the story told by the author of the Traison. In the few instances where his version of events is the fuller of the two, the additional material is invariably of French provenance,³ of no interest to the original author of the Traison whose story is exclusively concerned with domestic events in England. All these considerations point to the same conclusion: that the monk did not compose, he merely plagiarized the Traison. It should be added that he was not alone in doing so, and that this was his normal method of composition.⁴

Perhaps the most serious contender for the authorship of the Traison might be thought to be Jean Creton,⁵ the author of the Metrical History. Like the monk of Saint-Denys, Creton’s

¹ E.g., Saint-Denys gives a different date for Lancaster’s return to England, and he modifies the Traison’s account of the Shrewsbury parliament.
² Saint-Denys, ii. 740.
³ Notably, his account of Lancaster’s exile in France, of the fate of Queen Isabel’s attendants after Richard’s departure for Ireland, and of the reception of the news of the Lancastrian revolution in France (ii. 672-7, 704-5, 720-1).
⁴ See below, p. 173, nn. 5-6 and N. Valois, “Jacques de Nouvion et le religieux de Saint-Denis”, Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes, lxxi (1902), 233-62. A persuasive case has recently been made for identifying the monk of Saint-Denys as one Michel Pintoin, precentor of Saint-Denys (N. Grévy-Pons and E. Ornato, “Qui est l’auteur de la chronique latine de Charles VI, dite du Religieux de Saint-Denis?”, Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes, cxxxiv (1976), 85-102).
⁵ Argued by Lettenhove, in the works cited in p. 156, n. 1.
claims rely in part on the virtual identity of certain passages of his poem with sections of the *Traison*; moreover, Creton's authorship is attested by a note attached to a number of manuscripts of Froissart's *Chronicles*. It is impossible, however, to sustain this attribution.

The problem of the duplicated passages in the *Traison* and the *Metrical History* will be dealt with at greater length below, but it must be said here that although these passages may indicate borrowing by one or other (or both) authors, they cannot be taken as proof of unitary authorship. There are two reasons for this, equally cogent and collectively compelling. In the first place, if the two works are considered as entities, then it quickly becomes apparent that they cannot have been composed by the same person. The *Traison*, for example, contains eyewitness descriptions of events in England between April 1398 and April 1399, though Creton tells us he did not arrive in England until May 1399; the author of the *Traison* gives a detailed account of events around London at a time when the author of the *Metrical History* was in Ireland; the two works give totally dissimilar accounts of the Deposition Parliament; and the *Traison* gives a graphic description of Richard II's death and burial while Creton protested his belief that the king was still alive.

But it is probably the duplicated passages in the two works which provide the clearest evidence of double authorship; for in the process of borrowing, one author has corrected or misunderstood the material derived from the other. In his account of the crucial interview between Richard II and the earl of Northumberland at Conway, for instance, Creton states in his poem that Northumberland told the king that the duke of Lancaster would accept a peaceful settlement on the basis of the restitution of his lands, the summons of a parliament at which he was to act as seneschal, and the trial of the king's five principal counsellors—Exeter, Surrey, Salisbury, the bishop of Carlisle and Richard Maudelyn—for treason. The account in the *Traison*, though identical in many particulars, substitutes the earl of Westmorland for Surrey and states that these five men

\[1\] Below, p. 164.
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were to act as arbitrators between the king and the duke.¹ Though related to each other, the two accounts must be by different hands. One further example must suffice. Both writers give a circumstantial account of an embassy sent by Richard II from Conway to the duke of Lancaster at Chester. But although the framework and much of the incidental detail of the two accounts is identical, the overall effect is very different and in places gives the impression that one writer is deliberately correcting the other. According to the Traison, the embassy was headed by Exeter alone; according to Creton, by Exeter and Surrey. Creton says that the embassy was decided upon in council at Conway; the Traison, at Pembroke. According to Creton, the ambassadors delivered their message openly and fearlessly; according to the Traison, Exeter approached Lancaster with obsequious deference. Finally, the Traison states that this embassy left Conway for Chester on the very day that the earl of Northumberland left Chester for Conway, while Creton says that Northumberland set out from Chester eight days after Exeter’s arrival there.²

These passages prove that we are dealing with two authors; and since it has been established that Creton wrote the Metrical History, it follows that he could not have written the Traison. What, then, are we to make of the following note attached to a number of manuscripts of the fourth book of Froissart’s Chronicles³:

Pour ce que vous, sire Jehan Froissart, qui fait aves les chroniques des guerres de France et d’Angleterre, sur votre quart volume vous taises de la mort du noble roy Richard, roy d’Angleterre, en vous excusant par une maniere de dire que au jour que vous feistes vostre dit quart volume, vous n’esties point informe de la maniere de sa mort ; a celle fin qu’elle ne soit point oubliée, ne mise en ruyne, et que tous vaillans hommes se puissent mirer et exemplier ou fait douloureux de sa mort, je fais savoir a tous, ainsi que j’ay este informe par ung homme digne de foy nomme Creton et par escript de sa propre main, lequel pour ce temps estoit en Angleterre et au pais, et escript ce que je vous dirai ; que le roy Richard d’Angleterre fut occis et mis a mort en la Tour de Londres par ung jour des Roys, l’an mil ccc iiiijxx et xix par la maniere qui s’ensuit.

There then follows a long and circumstantial account of the

¹ Metrical History, pp. 354-5; Traison, p. 48.
³ Œuvres, xvi. 385-6.
murder of Richard by Sir Peter Exton, taken almost verbatim from the *Traison*. Had it not already been established that Creton could not have written the *Traison*, this would be compelling proof of his authorship. How, then, is it to be explained? There would appear to be only one hypothesis which will fit all the facts: that Creton, though not the original author of this story of the assassination of the king by Exton, adopted it and circulated it as his own.

Although this hypothesis might appear a rather desperate expedient, it reconciles the otherwise irreconcilable and, moreover, is warranted by a certain amount of circumstantial evidence. In the first place, it dovetails very well into what we know of Creton and his activities. His *Metrical History*, his letters, his ballad and his journey to Scotland, all show a determination to uncover the truth about Richard's end and to disseminate it as widely as possible; and these same sources show that he was initially uncertain of the truth and receptive to new information. In the *Metrical History*, he had given a received account of Richard's death by voluntary starvation, but had nevertheless asserted his belief that the king was still alive. His mission to Scotland had convinced him that he was wrong on this latter point; but since he had already expressed his scepticism of the starvation story, it left him without any satisfactory account of the manner of the king's death. He may therefore have been even predisposed to accept so circumstantial a tale as that told in the *Traison*. Indeed, he had already, before the end of 1402, come to accept that the king had been done to death by violence, for his second letter of that year refers to "the noble blood of the good and catholic king, Richard, spilt so treacherously and so villainously".¹

If Creton's ambivalence as to the fact and manner of Richard's death suggests that he may have been predisposed to appropriate the assassination story, there is some evidence that he actually did so. The account appended to Froissart's *Chronicles*, though derived almost verbatim from the *Traison*, contains two details not found there. The first concerns the place where the king was done to death. In the extract from Froissart quoted above,

¹ Dillon, op. cit. (p. 151, n. 3), p. 93.
the deed is said to have been committed in the Tower. Now
the author of the Traison does not name the location of the
assassination scene, and it has to be inferred from his narrative
that it occurred either at Gravesend or near Pontefract. What
is clear from this chronicle, however, is that the episode did not
take place in the Tower, for the author tells a highly-coloured
story of the way in which Richard was spirited away from the
capital shortly before his murder. The second detail added by
Creton is even more revealing. In a postscript to the assassina-
tion story, he suggests that the king may have died from
starvation rather than in the bloody manner he has just described.
Now the original author of the saga of Sir Peter Exton would
scarcely have impugned the authority of his own account in this
way, especially since that account is represented as that of an
eye-witness. Creton, on the other hand, had tentatively accepted
the theory of starvation in his Metrical History, or at least had
accepted that, if the king was dead, then that is how he had
probably died. It would seem therefore that Creton merely
edited the assassination story but did not originally compose it.
The original author, the writer of the Traison, was a different
person.

If the Traison was not written by Creton, Chastellain, le Baud,
le Bel, the queen's confessor, Berry Herald, the monk of Saint-
Denys, or Nathan ben Saddi, then who was the author? I am
afraid that he must remain anonymous. However, although he
cannot yet be given a name, it is possible to glean enough about
him from his chronicle to understand his strengths and
weaknesses as a historian, and perhaps to make possible his
identification at a later date.

To begin with, he was almost certainly a subject of Charles VI.
Although he nowhere says so directly, his frequent use of the
words "English" and "England" betray him as a foreigner
and hence, since he wrote in French, as a Frenchman or a
Fleming. As often as not, he refers to Richard II as "the king
of England", to the Commons as "the Commons of England",

1 Traison, pp. 75-76; cf. p. 96.
2 Ibid. p. 104.
3 Metrical History, p. 408.
and to the treasurer as "the treasurer of England". Well-known English towns are located with a precision which also suggests foreign authorship. St. Albans, we are told, "is twenty leagues from London, in England", and Kingston-on-Thames "is ten leagues from London". He devotes a disproportionate amount of space to the "noble queen of England", Richard II's young French wife; and his account of the events of July 1399 suggests that he may have been left in her company at Wallingford after Richard's departure for Ireland. Finally, the time-span of his chronicle (1397-1400) is consistent with the view that he arrived in England with Isabel in 1397 and returned with her to France in 1401.

Almost certainly a Frenchman, the author was very probably a subject of the duke of Burgundy from Artois or West Flanders. The bulk of the surviving manuscripts, and all the earliest among them, are in the Picard or Walloon dialect. At one point in his chronicle, the author makes Henry IV declare that he feared no one in the world but the Flemings (an improbable sentiment), and elsewhere the Londoners are made to cry "Let us wage war with all the world, except the Flemings" (an even more improbable sentiment).

Though a foreigner, the author was evidently often at the English court in the years covered by his chronicle. His habit of describing in great detail scenes he could not possibly have witnessed makes it necessary to view his many eye-witness accounts with considerable suspicion, but he would appear to have been with the court at Windsor in April 1398, and to have accompanied the king's entourage in its peregrinations through the Midlands in the autumn, noting en route such details as the "tower" of Sir William Bagot a quarter of a league outside Coventry, the place where Richard slept the night before the Mowbray-Bolingbroke duel, the Carthusian house where Richard bade farewell to Mowbray, the red (Lancastrian) roses that adorned the tent of the duke of Hereford, and the parrot presented to the queen by the papal legate. He was apparently at court

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1 *Traison*, pp. 1, 3, 10, 12, 24, 28, 36, 38, etc.
2 Ibid. pp. 3, 77.
5 Ibid. pp. 13, 17, 23.
again the following Easter, when he penned an accurate description of the topography of Windsor, before moving to Wallingford and thence to London, where he appears to have remained until after the Deposition.

His knowledge of the court nobility is impressive, and in one case at least superior to that of the Complete Peerage. But his greatest strength is undoubtedly his familiarity with the Holand family, and it seems very probable that he was attached to the household of John Holand, the king's half-brother, earl of Huntingdon until 1397, then duke of Exeter. He describes accurately Holand's beautiful palace, called Cold Harbour, "in the road behind the church of All Hallows on the bank of the Thames"; he takes note when his wife, the duchess of Exeter, wins the prize as the best dancer; he gives the correct titles and husbands to Holand's daughters, and to his wife and her relations; and—most striking of all—he knows the names, and is obviously interested in the fates, of the master of Holand's household, Sir Thomas Shelley, and his chief butler, Hugh Cade. No such domestic details are given of any other household, not even that of the queen.

His close familiarity with the Holands is further apparent in the amount of space he devotes to them and in the evident strength of his feeling towards them. John Holand's nephew, Thomas, earl of Kent, then duke of Surrey, is treated with marked respect and affection. He is "the noble duke of Surrey", and his role is never less than honourable and often heroic. After frequent if brief appearances in the early part of the narrative, he comes into his own during the revolt of January 1400. Though the youngest of the conspirators, he is consistently represented as their leader. For three whole days he holds the bridge at Maidenhead against the forces of Henry IV, enabling his companions to escape to the west. After rejoining them at Cirencester, he again takes charge, forcing the issue with the townspeople and heroically precipitating battle. Then, unlike

1 Traison, p. 80 shows that one of John Holand's daughters was married to the heir to the earldom of Oxford (as suspected by Complete Peerage, x. 235), and that both his daughters were married by January 1400 (cf. ibid. ix. 604-5).
most of his fellow conspirators, who flee ignominiously or are captured and executed by mere villains, he dies a hero's death in battle. None of this is corroborated, and much is directly refuted by other sources. His stand at Maidenhead is not mentioned elsewhere and cannot be fitted into the chronology of the revolt; and the story of his leadership at Cirencester, and of the manner of his death, is refuted not only by Walsingham but by a contemporary newsletter. It is just possible that the author has reproduced the facts available to him in all good faith; but it is more likely that he has deliberately distorted the facts to fit the manner in which he would have liked his hero to act. He has certainly done this in one section of his narrative derived directly from the Metrical History, where he suppresses Surrey's part in the embassy which led to the capture of Richard II, omits the story of his imprisonment, and deletes his name from the list of "traitors" who were to be brought before parliament for trial.

His treatment of John Holand is even more remarkable. Unlike his nephew, John Holand is never described as "noble", is never shown to act (in the author's favourite phrase) "comme bon et loyal chevalier deoit faire", and is invariably depicted in an inept, pathetic or unsavoury role, often in flagrant contradiction of facts available to the writer. Throughout the revolt of January 1400, Exeter takes second place to his nephew, running away from the fight in which Surrey is killed, only to be captured later and made to plead for his life so desperately, and to suffer such a pathetic and bungled death, that even the peasant rabble felt sorry for him. Judging by his treatment of Exeter elsewhere, the writer considered this to be a fitting end.

Perhaps the most striking instance of his contempt for John Holand is his account of the latter's role in the events leading to the capture of the king. This section of the Traison is derived from the Metrical History, so we can observe the writer manipulating his material to achieve the effect he desires. In

3 See p. 162, n. 2 and below, p. 172 and p. 173, n. 1.
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the original version of Creton, Exeter enjoys the centre of the stage and is represented in an entirely favourable light. In a masterly speech, he advises the king to send an embassy to the duke of Lancaster to find out his intentions and to warn him against any treacherous course. The king, finding his advice "excellent", is convinced, and appoints Exeter himself to head the embassy since "they could not there have found a man who knew how to speak so wisely or to set forth and relate so great a matter". Accompanied by his nephew Surrey, Exeter made his way to Chester and delivered his message eloquently and fearlessly, "for he would not have crouched to him [Lancaster] for all the gold in England". Only force majeure then prevented him from returning to the king.

In the Traison the story of the advice, the embassy, the interview, and its outcome is retained in its essentials, together with much of the accompanying detail, but with a few decisive alterations which transform Exeter from a noble, courageous and eloquent figure into a cringing and treacherous villain on whose shoulders the responsibility for the king's tragic fate is made to rest. His advice to the king is given baldly, shorn of its eloquence, and in this account is opposed by the king himself, who argues for a strategic withdrawal to Bordeaux, a course favoured by the remainder of his entourage. When Exeter's advice is eventually (and inexplicably) accepted, the embassy is entrusted to him alone (without any comment on his high qualifications). The net effect of these changes is to thrust the responsibility for what follows on to Exeter, and to imply that but for him the king could have made good his escape. The alterations which follow are even more drastic. Exeter is made to approach Lancaster with such deference that the duke is provoked to remark, "I have not been accustomed to receive such honour from you". Then, pace his source, the author says that he does not know what message Exeter delivered; but despite this disingenuous confession of ignorance, he then goes on to hint fairly broadly that there was treachery of a particularly despicable kind involved; for when we next meet Exeter, he is in the company of the arch-traitor Rutland, wearing the Lancastrian livery, and—most astonishing of all—providing the
earl of Northumberland with a credence to the king which urges Richard “to believe the earl in everything that he shall say to you, for the duke of Lancaster greatly desires true peace and a settlement with you”. The king accepted his brother’s advice for the second time, and lost his freedom, his throne and his life.

No other character in the Traison is blackened in quite the same way; and the intensity of the author’s feelings towards Holand, taken together with his interest in his family and his household servants, betrays a familiarity which affords presumptive evidence that the writer, though a Frenchman, had been attached to the household of the duke of Exeter.

In what capacity? This is not so clear, though there are a number of suggestive clues. We can be fairly sure that he was not employed as a scribe, poet or author. His indifferent education—or, more precisely, his lack of literary skill—manifests itself on every page of his chronicle. Virtually every sentence begins with an “et”, “adonc”, “car” or an “il est verite”, and many of them are grammatically incomplete. The poverty of his vocabulary and his tiresome repetition of stock phrases are such that every single one of the thirty-seven surviving manuscripts contains numerous examples of homoeoteleuton. Our author appears to have had authorship thrust upon him. His anonymity is well-deserved.

He would appear to have been a layman with an obsessive interest in chivalry. Of all his stock phrases, the most favoured is probably “comme bon et loyal chevalier devoit faire”. The longest set-piece in the entire chronicle is a loving description of the technicalities and ceremonial of a duel which never took place. In place of the abdication scene in the Tower, we are treated to a highly coloured account of Rutland challenging the king to a duel, and of Richard II himself challenging Lancaster; and the challenges and duels which issued from the usurpation are detailed at the expense of the political issues of the Deposition Parliament. The author is meticulous about rank and title, and the etiquette and ceremonial of state occasions are often given more space than their political aspects. Finally, perhaps explaining all this, the writer is particularly interested in heralds

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1 Traison, p. 48.  
2 Ibid. pp. 17-23.  
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and heraldry. We are given accurate descriptions of the royal arms, of the arms of Hereford, St. George, St. Edmund, of the Garter, and of the banner of the city of London. On the occasion of the duel between Hereford and Mowbray, we are told that the duke of Hereford's tents were adorned with red, Lancastrian roses; that heralds reiterated proclamations three times "at every tribune of the lists"; and that a special proclamation was made by the herald of Brittany. At the feast which followed the coronation of Henry IV, the author remarks "that the king of the heralds had a little bag in his hand, while the other heralds cried out 'largesse'; and at the feast at which the duchess of Exeter won the prize as the best dancer, he notes—before commenting on the duchess's triumph—"that the heralds received large gifts from the lords and ladies and cried 'largesse'." Throughout the chronicle, in fact, the "crys" and "proclamations" which accompany state occasions are carefully noted. It seems likely, therefore, that the author was either a herald or aspired to be one; and since he never claims to have participated in any of the "crys" and proclamations he so diligently records, it is perhaps more probable that he was a herald in the making, temporarily on loan from the duke of Burgundy, and receiving his training in the household of John Holand, duke of Exeter.

When did he compose his work? Since he undoubtedly borrows from Creton, it might be thought that the date of the Metrical History (winter of 1401/2) provides a sure terminus a quo; but for reasons which will become clear later on in this article, this apparently certain conclusion does not follow. There are slight hints in Creton's two letters of 1402 that he may by then have become acquainted with the Traison. In his first letter, for instance, he refers to Richard's farewell to Isabel at Windsor, a scene described in great detail in the Traison; and in the second letter he mentions Richard II's violent death, which may be an allusion to the assassination scene in the Traison.

1 Ibid. pp. 18, 19, 103.
2 Williams's text is corrupt here (p. 83) and should read: "la baniere de Londres, la quelle fut d'argent et une crois de guules a tout un espet de guules ou souverain quart, la pointe contremont" (Aix MS. 1054, p. 65).
3 Traison, pp. 17-21.
Neither point is, unfortunately, conclusive, though the second in particular deserves some weight, since the majority of other sources ascribed the king's death to starvation.

A number of more general considerations indicate an early date. The Traison is clearly a pièce d'occasion, which by its very nature is likely to have been written immediately after the events it records. Its internal structure suggests the same conclusion. Although the author frequently anticipates events to be recorded later in his narrative—the first few pages presage the tragic denouement—he never once refers to an event later than the last date (March 1400) in his work. The manuscript tradition of the work also favours an early date. The chronicle was to go through several editions,¹ and some of the earliest manuscripts are of the latest versions. One fourth recension manuscript, for instance, would appear to be of the first quarter of the fifteenth century, and probably early within that period, suggesting that the first edition was composed well within the first decade of the century.² The pirated edition fraudulently attributed to Jean le Beau implies an equally early date. As we have seen, this version contains several interpolated passages devoted to the war-proneness of the English and the treacherous conduct of the earl of Rutland; yet in none of these passages does the interpolator mention Rutland's further treason in 1405 or the military events of the middle years of Henry IV. Finally, a précis of part of the third or fourth edition of the Traison is contained in Rylands French MS. 54, originally compiled c. 1410.³ None of these points, unfortunately, enables us to give a precise date to the composition of the Traison; but they certainly suggest a date within the first decade of the fifteenth century, very probably early in the decade, and possibly as early as 1401-2.

This leaves one final problem concerning the authorship of these chronicles to be resolved—the nature of their interrelationship. Even those historians who have accepted that the Traison,

¹ See below, pp. 172 ff.
² Traison, p. lxxxvi.
³ The manuscript has been added to at a later date, but the account of Richard's reign would appear to be contemporary with the original composition, since it is referred to in the rubric at the beginning of the manuscript.
the Metrical History, and Saint-Denys are by three different hands, have been unable to agree on this question. Some have argued that Creton copied from the Traison, others that the Traison is copied from the Metrical History, and others still that both copied from each other. But the question of who copied from whom is not the only puzzle. Even more curious are the startling variations in the degree to which different sections of these works are related to each other. In some episodes, all three accounts are virtually identical; in others, there is no connection between them at all; and between these extremes there are passages where one account appears to have been written to correct, or contradict, the others. How is all this to be explained?

The first point to be made is that the interdependence of the Traison and the Metrical History is confined to four episodes: the Irish expedition, the capture of the king, the return of Queen Isabel to France, and an alternative version of the death of Richard II. These episodes apart, neither author shows any awareness of the work of the other. At many points their narratives do not touch; and where they do, their treatment of events could scarcely be more dissimilar. In the long section of both works devoted to the period September 1399—January 1400, for example, there are literally dozens of opportunities for mutual borrowing, and many fine passages in both works which deserved to be incorporated in the other; yet about the only point they have in common is that the earl of Rutland was responsible for betraying the conspiracy of January 1400 to Henry IV, and even this point is made with different emphasis, different circumstantial detail, and without any sign that either author was aware of the story told by the other. By contrast, in the four episodes mentioned above, one author has taken over the text of the other in its entirety, borrowing not only his facts and his sequence of events, but even phrases, sentences and entire paragraphs verbatim. Even in those places where he has taken considerable


2 Traison, pp. 27-33, 34-37, 41-64, 104; these passages include virtually all of the Metrical History up to the capture of the king (pp. 295-368).
liberties with his borrowed material, a multitude of details reveals the fact of his dependence.¹

Secondly, despite the opinion of some historians that Creton borrowed from the author of the Traison, there can be no doubt that all the borrowing was done by the latter. The stories of the Irish campaign and of the king's capture are unmistakably eyewitness accounts, and Creton was by the king's side during both these episodes while the author of the Traison was far away, at Wallingford or in London. This in itself is sufficient to prove that Creton is the original and the Traison the plagiarized version; but it may be added that there are other indications in the latter work that in the act of copying the writer has misunderstood or twisted the text, thereby betraying his dependence.² For the third passage which the two works have in common—their story of the return of Queen Isabel to France—Creton's is the fuller and more specific account and cannot possibly have been copied from the Traison, whereas the latter, which contains only one solitary detail not found in the Metrical History,³ is clearly derivative. The Metrical History, therefore, is a completely independent work; and the material common to the two works was all borrowed by the Traison from Creton, and is confined to four episodes.

Why did the author of the Traison confine his borrowing to these four passages, ignoring the remainder of Creton's work? And why did he purloin some passages verbatim but subject other episodes to drastic editorial amendments? The solution to these puzzles is provided by the manuscript history of the Traison.

The Traison survives in four different versions, which are distinguished by the amount of material they derive from Creton. For ease of discussion, I shall label these variants first, second, third and fourth editions respectively, without intending thereby to prejudge the order of their composition. The first edition is a completely independent work which has nothing at all in common with Creton's Metrical History.⁴ Unfortunately, this has never been recognized; and although the Traison has been published several times, no first edition manuscript has ever

¹ See, e.g., above pp. 160-61.
² Above, p. 161, n. 1.
³ The name of Sir Thomas Erpingham.
⁴ See Appendix.
been used as the text. This is the root cause of almost all the confusion concerning the interrelationships of the Traison, the Metrical History, and Saint-Denys.

The remaining three editions all include the complete text of the first edition, but add other material, derived almost entirely from Creton. The second edition contains a long passage derived from Creton on the capture of the king; the third edition adds to this an alternative version of the king’s death, also taken from Creton; and the fourth edition adds to the whole of the third two further episodes borrowed from Creton, the Irish campaign and the account of Queen Isabel’s return to France. The fourth edition survives in only a single manuscript and the third in only two manuscripts; but there are nineteen manuscripts of the first and fifteen of the second edition. In addition, these different editions are preserved in a number of other chronicles. The monk of Saint-Denys, for example, incorporates the second edition of the Traison in his chronicle almost in its entirety, as does Jean Waurin; and Jean Jouvenal des Ursins derived his own very corrupt account of the Lancastrian Revolution from the second edition text, via the monk of Saint-Denys. The first edition text, on the other hand, is produced almost word for word by Jean Brandon and by the author of the Chronique des Pays-Bas, in a slightly condensed form in the Chronographia regum Francorum, and in a highly abbreviated version by F. Sweertius and in the Cronique martiniéne. The third or fourth edition was used by the compiler of Rylands

1 Traison, pp. 41-64.  
2 Ibid. pp. 27-33, 105-7.  
3 Ibid. p. 104.  
4 See Appendix.  
Finally, it is perhaps worth remarking, neither these nor any other fifteenth-century chroniclers show any awareness of the *Metrical History* except for those portions of the poem that were embedded in the editions of the *Traison* they made use of.

There are two minor modifications to this broad classification of manuscripts of the *Traison* which should be noted for the sake of completeness. Of the nineteen first edition manuscripts, three are pirated versions which attribute the work to a fictitious author (Jean le Beau and Nathan ben Saddi). They contain brief historical introductions, and in the case of the two manuscripts of the version attributed to le Beau, the interpolation of a few short reflective or moralizing passages. Otherwise, however, they are identical with the remaining first edition manuscripts and, in particular, betray no familiarity with Creton’s work. The fifteen second edition manuscripts contain, in addition to the long passage derived from Creton, a second interpolation describing the success of the duke of Lancaster’s propaganda which is an original contribution entirely independent of any known source. The significance of this addition will be considered later; but neither this nor the pirated versions of the first edition affect the validity of the broad classification of manuscripts sketched above.

In what order were these four editions composed? Common sense suggests that the shortest version is the earliest and the longest the latest, since it is inherently improbable that an author would go to the trouble of copying certain sections of his work from another writer and then successively remove these passages in subsequent editions. The text supports this conclusion. If the sections derived from Creton are deleted, it will be found that what remains reads as a consecutive narrative, an effect which could scarcely have been achieved if these derivative passages had been conceived as part of the original structure of the work. Finally, this order of composition explains why the *Traison* is so dependent on Creton in some passages and totally free of his influence elsewhere. When he originally composed

2 *Traison*, p. 34 ("Il est verite.") to p. 37 ("daler a Londres").
the Traison, the author had not read the Metrical History, and so the short first edition is an entirely independent work. In the three subsequent editions, the original text was reproduced without alterations, but was expanded by the insertion of the material derived from Creton at appropriate points in the narrative. Hence the peculiar structure of the work and the very uneven quality of its dependence on Creton.

One final problem remains: was the author of the original chronicle also responsible for the later editions? The initial presumption must be that he was, and the style of the additions would seem to support this conclusion, since it is as awkward and as threadbare as the original. On the other hand, it would be unwise to put too much weight upon stylistic considerations. Whoever he was, the author of the later editions would have wanted to match the style of the original, in the interests of uniformity. Moreover, though broadly similar, there are detectable differences between the various editions. The passages added in the second edition employ a more lavish use of adverbs and adjectives, while the fourth edition interpolations are slightly more fluent, with longer sentences. But though these differences could indicate multiple authorship, they are slight enough to be no more than the differences in the style of one man writing at three different dates. Stylistic considerations cannot be conclusive.

So far as the content of the second edition is concerned, there is one detail which militates against common authorship of the first two editions. In the original version of the Traison, the earl of Westmorland is mentioned as one of the lords who deserted to Lancaster at Pontefract, shortly after his arrival in England; yet in the second edition we are told a circumstantial story of how Westmorland was seduced by Lancaster's propaganda letters while actually in the king’s company at Pembroke in south Wales. Both accounts cannot be correct, and they would seem to presuppose dual authorship. However,

1 Except for the very brief paragraph on the king's capture given in the first edition. This became redundant when the long account of Creton was added to the later editions of the Traison, and was deleted. It is reproduced in Traison, p. 64, n. 4.

2 Ibid. pp. 34, 42.
it would probably be a mistake to put so much weight upon a single contradiction. The mention of Westmorland in the first edition was no more than a passing reference; and since the second edition material was added months, possibly years later, the author could easily have overlooked this earlier statement. At the best of times, he was not overscrupulous about his facts and was quite capable of inaccuracy and even of deliberate distortion when it suited his purposes. Nor was he immune from self contradiction. The original text implies two different locations for Richard II’s death, and the second edition contains within the space of a few pages two opposed statements as to where Richard II landed on his return from Ireland. Moreover, there are a number of very close connections between the first edition text and the material added in the second edition. We have already seen that the treatment of Surrey and Exeter and the prominence accorded to the Holands is uniform throughout, and that this uniformity was achieved by making deliberate, and in many cases quite unwarranted, alterations to the material derived from Creton: all these episodes are added to the second edition. Very similar treatment is accorded to bishop Merke. In the original version of the chronicle, the bishop is given a key role in opposing the duke of Lancaster, fearlessly denouncing his usurpation before the Deposition Parliament, and suffering imprisonment and the loss of his wealth for his bold conduct. The part he plays in Creton’s History was altogether too tame for the author of the Traison, and when he appropriated these passages for his second edition, he gave the bishop a larger and more dramatic role. Thus, Merke is made to propose that the earl of Northumberland at Conway be made to take an oath on the sacraments; he is the first to discern Northumberland’s treachery; he bravely gives the earl the lie to his face; he comforts the king in his distress after his capture; and, finally, he bids a moving farewell to the king when he is separated from his companions. These episodes are all in Creton, or implicit in his narrative; but they are either assigned to another actor, or are anonymous. This tendency to

1 Above, pp. 165-8.
2 Traison, pp. 75-76, 96, 41, 46.
3 Ibid. 47-52, 56, 59-61.
dramatize events by personalizing them—in extreme cases, by fictionalizing them—is one of the author's trademarks, and it is stamped on all the material in the first two editions.

These indications of unitary authorship of the first two editions are reinforced by the other interpolated passage in the second edition. In this, the one substantial addition not derived from Creton, the author attributes the success of the Lancastrian usurpation to the unscrupulous propaganda of Bolingbroke. He summarizes at length letters allegedly sent by Henry to the towns, nobles and commons, 150 letters in all, and quotes from the version which came ("vindrent") to London. His interest in these propaganda letters is further reflected in another second edition interpolation already referred to, the seduction of the earl of Westmorland. Now these indications of a London-based writer who had a somewhat obsessive interest in Lancastrian propaganda agrees perfectly with what we can deduce about the author of the first edition, who was certainly resident in London at this date and who was similarly interested in Bolingbroke's propaganda techniques. He, too, quotes from (another) letter of Henry's which came ("vindrent") to London, and he relates in another episode how the marquis of Dorset, one of Henry's legitimized half-brothers, was saved from the wrath of the Percies by the revelation of his correspondence with the exiled Lancaster. Though not absolutely conclusive, these marked similarities between the first two editions are a powerful argument in favour of unitary authorship.

The third and fourth editions present a different problem. Here, the stylistic resemblances to the original are not so marked, the additional material is derived exclusively from Creton, and it is reproduced with much greater fidelity, and certainly without any of the alterations of the sense which disfigured the second edition insertions. Moreover, whereas the material added to the second edition was made to serve the interests and to reflect the outlook of the author of the original version of the chronicle, that added to the third and fourth editions has no bearing, either thematically or dramatically, upon the story told in the Traison. And finally, the third and fourth editions reproduce a note which

1 See p. 174, n. 2.  
2 Traison, pp. 35, 39.
offers an alternative account of the death of Richard II to the very circumstantial story of his assassination told in the first edition of the chronicle. It seems probable, therefore, that we should look for the author of the later editions elsewhere.

The most plausible candidate is Creton himself. He, of course, had a proprietary interest in his stories of the Irish expedition and of Queen Isabel’s return to France; and if he were responsible for their inclusion in the final editions of the Traison, this would account for the greater fidelity with which they were resumed. In the normal course of events we would not, of course, expect an author to quarry his own work for the benefit of a third party. But in this case the circumstances were not normal. The Traison was evidently a much more popular work than the Metrical History; and Creton had already seen his work plundered to produce the second edition of the Traison, and plundered with a lack of scruple which may well have hurt his feelings. By supervising the later editions of the Traison himself, he could arrange that all the major episodes of his history were incorporated in the popular Traison, and at the same time ensure that they were reproduced accurately.

In addition to these general considerations, there are two specific features of the later editions which point to Creton. The first concerns the account of the Irish expedition, added to the fourth edition. Although this is taken almost verbatim from the Metrical History, it does contain in addition a brief introductory note on the language, manners and customs of the Irish and Anglo-Irish:

For in the country of Hibemia and of Ireland there are two races speaking two languages: the one speak bastard English, and dwell in the good towns, cities, castles and fortresses of the country, and in the sea-ports, and have always been friendly to King Richard; the other are a wild people, who speak a strange language, and are called Crichemons, which have neither town, house, castle, nor dwelling, and dwell always in the woods, and on the mountains of the country, and have many chiefs among themselves, of whom the most powerful go barefoot and without breeches, and ride horses without saddles.

Apart from the larger number of surviving manuscripts—37 as opposed to 7—the Traison was incorporated in a large number of fifteenth-century chronicles (above, p. 173, nn. 5-6) whereas no historian of the period shows any knowledge of Creton’s work other than those portions embedded in the Traison.
This description must have been penned by someone reasonably familiar with Ireland, a qualification possessed by few Frenchmen other than Creton himself. Secondly, the alternative version of Richard II's death added to the third and fourth editions of the *Traison*, reproduces Creton's own account of death by voluntary starvation, without finally preferring either version. Now we have already seen that Creton was responsible for circulating this double version of Richard's death, in the same ambivalent form; and if he were responsible for this final postscript to the *Traison*, he is obviously a very strong candidate for the other editorial insertions in the final editions. Though not absolutely conclusive, it does create a strong presumption of Creton's responsibility. Certainly, the additions made to the two final recensions of the *Traison* are in a very different spirit from those of the second edition and reflect far more closely Creton's interests and views than those of the original author of the chronicle.

This has been a long argument and it would perhaps be as well to restate concisely the main conclusions. The *Metrical History* was written by Jean Creton, a layman and valet de chambre of Charles VI and of the duke of Burgundy, and was composed between November 1401 and March 1402. When he wrote this work, Creton had no knowledge of the *Traison*. The author of the latter chronicle was also a layman, a Frenchman, and a subject of the duke of Burgundy, and was temporarily attached to the household of John Holand, duke of Exeter, probably to learn his trade as a herald. His work survives in four versions, the earliest of which was probably composed c. 1401/2 and was quite independent of Creton's work. In its subsequent editions, the original text of the *Traison* was reproduced as it stood but was greatly extended by the insertion of several long passages, derived in the main from Creton's *Metrical History*. The spirit of these later editions is not, however, uniform; and it seems probable that while the second edition was the work of the original author, the third and fourth editions were supervised by Creton. Finally, the monk of Saint-Denys offers a slightly condensed version of the second edition.

1 Above, pp. 161-3 and p. 161, n. 3 and 162, n. 1.
edition of the *Traison*, which consequently has no independent value where it agrees with that work.

With these necessary preliminaries complete, it is now possible to attempt an estimate of the historical value of these sources.

The second part of this article will appear in the next number of the *Bulletin*.

**APPENDIX**

*List of Traison Manuscripts*

Within each edition, manuscripts are listed in approximate chronological order. Those described by Williams in his edition are indicated by the Roman numeral by which he designated them. The following abbreviations are used: BL, British Library; BM, Bibliothèque municipale; BN, Bibliothèque nationale; BR, Bibliothèque royale; NAF, Nouvelle acquisition française.

**First Editions**

2. Aix, BM, MS. 1054, pp. 1-95; early C15 (XV).
3. Paris, BN, NAF 6216, fols. 1-60; early C15 (III).1
6. Lyons, BM, MS. 899, fols. 190-214; Flemish translation c. 1420.
7. London, College of Arms, Arundel MS. 48, fols. 196-204v; mid-C15.2
8. Brussels, BR, MS. 19684, fols. 135-54; late C15.3
14. Rouen, BM, MS. 1234, fols. 144-172; late C15 (IV).
15. Valenciennes, BM, MS. 638, fols. 93-123v; late C15 (XVI).
16. Paris, BN, NAF 10232, fols. 49-82v; late C15.4
17. London, BL, Harley MS. 902, fols. 150-157; C16.5
18. London, BL, Harley MS. 6219, fols. 9-12; C16.5
19. Aix, BM, MS. 1054, pp. 97-198; C18.6

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1 Pirated version; published by Buchon, op. cit. xxv, supplément ii.
2 These three manuscripts are all fragments, so it is not absolutely certain to which category they belong.
3 Published as part of a composite work entitled *Chronique des Pays-Bas, de France, d’Angleterre et de Toarnai* by J. J. de Smet in *Receuil des chroniques de Flandres*, iii (Brussels, 1856). The editor did not realize that the manuscript he published was a composite work. The *Traison* is printed on pp. 294-332.
4 Pirated edition, identical to that noted above (n. 1).
5 Copy of Aix MS. 1054, pp. 1-95, with the addition of an introduction by Nathan ben Saddi.
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Second Editions

23. Paris, BN, MS. Fr. 1404, fols. 147-190v; early C15.
28. Leiden, University, Scaliga MS. 40, fols. 1-52v; mid-C15.
32. Lyons, BM, MS. 918, fols. 1-61; late C15.
33. Paris, BN, MS. Fr. 3884, fols. 109-71; C17 (XIV).

Third Editions


Fourth Edition


¹ Published by B. Williams, for the English Historical Society, London, 1846.
² Published in La revue retrospective, 2nd series, ii (Paris, 1835), 209-89.
³ Copy of an early fifteenth century MS. at Ypres, destroyed in the First World War.