

**THE BATTLE OF CRÉCY ACCORDING TO JEAN FROISSART: DATING THE ‘AMIENS’, ‘ABRIDGED’, ‘B’ AND ‘C’
REDACTIONS OF BOOK I OF FROISSART’S CHRONICLES¹**

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The Amiens redaction: 1384–1391

Jean Froissart wrote one of the most extensive and well-known accounts of the first part of the Hundred Years’ War (up to 1400). While he seems to have used oral testimonies for much of the later period, for the earliest part of his *Chronicles* he extensively used written sources. Up to the year 1360 the *Chronicle* of Jean le Bel was his main source, although he reworked his predecessor’s text substantially, possibly putting to use information provided him by eye witnesses.²

Much of Froissart’s own text was rewritten several times by the author himself. The earliest account of the battle of Crécy is found in the so-called ‘Amiens’ version of Book I of Jean Froissart’s *Chronicles*.³ While it is probably not the earliest account of the Battle of Crécy written by Froissart, it is the earliest version to have survived and it is generally closer than any of the other known versions of Froissart’s Book I to the *Chronicle* of Jean Le Bel.

The ‘Amiens’ version was probably written after the death of Duke Louis I of Anjou (21 September 1384) as a passage found further on in the text implies that the duke was dead when it was written.⁴ Palmer has argued that the ‘Amiens’ version must be dated even later and could not have been written before 1385, because it alludes to the release of Guy and John of Brittany from captivity in England, which happened in 1385, and because it uses another written source, the *Life of the Black Prince* by Chandos Herald, whose composition is conventionally dated to 1385.⁵

Diller has shown that the references to the captive Breton brothers are too vague to be used in relation to a precise *terminus post quem* of 1385.⁶ The relationship of Froissart’s Book I to the *Life of the Black Prince* by Chandos Herald also cannot provide a more precise dating, as there are

¹ These notes on the dating of three of the earliest versions of Froissart’s Book I were written as the introduction to my new partial editions of the ‘Amiens’, ‘Abridged’ and ‘C’ redactions, to be published in Michael Livingston and Kelly DeVries (eds.), *The Battle of Crécy: A Casebook* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, in the press).

² When comparing the different versions of the *Chronicles* amongst themselves or to Jean Le Bel’s *Chronicle*, one should also keep in mind that sometimes material was moved between sections from one version to the next.

³ Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 486, fol. 91v–95v. Previously edited by Baron Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Œuvres de Froissart, Chroniques*, vol. 3 (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 1868), pp. 1–3, 6–7, 9–14, 21–22, 24–25, 27–28, 30–32, 37–40, 46–47, 53, 56–60, 70–71, 73–75, 77–78; Siméon Luce (ed.), *Chroniques de J. Froissart*, vol. 3 (Paris: Renouard, 1872), pp. 388–396, 398–403, 405–406, 410–411, 413, 416–418, 420, 423–428, 430–432; George T. Diller (ed.), *Froissart, Chroniques, Livre I, Le manuscrit d’Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale n° 486*, vol. 3 (Geneva: Droz, 1992), pp. 5–26.

⁴ ‘Si vous di que li dus d’Ango ne pooit nullement amer, ne ne fist oncques, les Englés ne lor affaire’ (‘And I tell you that the duke of Anjou could never bring himself to love the English nor the English case, and indeed he never did’), Diller, *Froissart, Chroniques, Livre I, Le manuscrit d’Amiens*, vol. 3, p. 463.

⁵ J. J. N. Palmer, ‘Book I (1325–78) and its sources’, in J. J. N. Palmer (ed.), *Froissart: historian* (Woodbridge — Totowa: Boydell — Rowman & Littlefield, 1981), pp. 7–24 (here p. 12).

⁶ Diller, *Froissart, Chroniques, Livre I, Le manuscrit d’Amiens*, vol. 1, p. XII–XIII.

insufficient reasons to date Chandos' with such precision to c. 1385.⁷ There is therefore no solid argument to date the 'Amiens' text firmly after 1385.

Based on internal arguments the 'Amiens' version of Book I can be dated before the death of count William VI of Juliers (13 December 1393), as a passage that mentions his sister Isabella of Juliers, refers to her as the 'sister of duke [William VI] of Juliers'.⁸ The wording implies that Isabella's brother was still alive when this was written and had not yet been succeeded by his son Duke William VII.

This *terminus ad quem* of 1393 can be moved slightly forward based on the textual comparison of the 'Amiens' version with the abridged version of Book I, which indicates that the 'Amiens' version must have been written before the abridgement. The abridgement itself was completed at the latest by 1391 (see below) so the 'Amiens' version must have been completed well before that date.

The Abridged redaction: 1384–1391

The abridged redaction of Book I contains the second surviving version of Froissart's account of the Battle of Crécy.⁹ It survives in a late 15th-century manuscript containing the unique copy of an abridgement of Book I composed by the author himself. Kervyn de Lettenhove and Luce recognised the authenticity of this version, Luce subsuming it into the manuscript tradition of the 'B' redaction of Book I (sigil B6), while Kervyn dated its composition after the 'B' redaction. More recently Palmer and Diller have largely dismissed the abridgement of Book I, justifying this stance on the basis of its assumed brevity and its perceived lack of interest. Diller even argued that it may actually not be by Froissart himself, but by a literary forger posing as Froissart, a gratuitous suggestion that seems largely inspired by his scholar's inability to assign it a satisfactory place in his account of the development of Froissart's Book I.¹⁰

Palmer's and Diller's critique does injustice to the abridgement, which is more than twice as extensive as they suggest, measuring between one third and half of the length of the unabridged text of Book I, rather than about one sixth — as they claim.¹¹ Its interest lies in it being clearly a distinct authorial redaction of Book I, not just an abridgement of an otherwise already known version. It contains many elaborated passages and details that are not simply a summary of material found in any of the other surviving versions of Book I. The account of the battle of Crécy is a case in

⁷ Richard Barber, *The Life and Campaigns of the Black Prince* (Woodbridge, 1979), p. 84.

⁸ 'on l'appelloit madamme Ysabel de Juliers, soer germainne au duc de Juliers', Diller, *Froissart, Chroniques, Livre I, Le manuscrit d'Amiens*, vol. 3, p. 183.

⁹ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 10144, p. 311–341. Previously edited by Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Œuvres de Froissart, Chroniques*, vol. 17, pp. 198–218. Many short and some longer fragments are also printed in Luce (ed.), *Chroniques de J. Froissart*, vol. 3, under the sigil B 6, pp. 390, 392, 395, 399–400, 405, 408–409, 413, 415, 417–418 (notes), 419, 420, 421–422, 425, 430, 434, 435–436.

¹⁰ Palmer, 'Book I (1325–78) and its sources', p. 9; George T. Diller, *Attitudes chevaleresques et réalités politiques chez Froissart. Microlectures du premier livre des Chroniques* (Geneva: Droz, 1984), p. 23–25, 30–32.

¹¹ The abridgement contains about 187,000 words. This represents 37.4% of the total word count of the 'B' version' or 44.1% of the 'Amiens' version (the former contains about 500,000 words, the latter about 424,000 words or 84.8% of the word count of the 'B' version'). Diller, in his introduction to the edition of the 'Amiens' version, makes an ambiguous comment which may seem to imply that the abridgement only mentions about one sixth of the period covered by Book I but this would certainly be incorrect. Diller (ed.), *Froissart, Chroniques, Livre I, Le manuscrit d'Amiens*, vol. 3, p. X.

point, as it is nearly the same length as the corresponding sections in the other versions, and contains material that is unique to this version, including the longer passage towards the end in which the author reflects on Edward III's achievement and makes a reference to the *Prophecies of Merlin*.

The abridgement ends with two sections that are not found in any of the other versions of Book I. The second of these contains an account of the visit of Emperor Charles IV to Paris in December 1377 and January 1378. The abridgement therefore cannot have been completed before the latter date and further internal arguments show that it needs to be dated even later. A reference to the death of Owen of Wales dates it after July 1378,¹² while the statement that after the killing of King Pedro the Cruel of Castile, the people of Castile, Cordoba, Galicia, Lisbon, and Seville recognised his half-brother Henry as their rightful king 'as long as he lived', puts the drafting of this version after Henry's death on 29 May 1379.¹³ A reference to the successors of Count Louis I of Blois, who was succeeded in turn by his three sons Louis II (d. 1372), John (d. 1381) and Guy, implies that both Louis II and John had already died and had been succeeded by their youngest brother Guy when the comment was written down.¹⁴

The *terminus post quem* for the abridged version of Book I can be moved forward even further on the basis of textual comparison, which indicates that the abridgement is in some ways an intermediary version between the 'Amiens' and 'B' versions (see below). As has been demonstrated above, the 'Amiens' version cannot have been completed before the death of Duke Louis I of Anjou (21 September 1384). Therefore, the abridgement, which must be younger than the 'Amiens' version, can also not have been written before the latter date. The *terminus ante quem* is provided by the abridgement's prologue, which refers to an earlier and fuller version of his *Chronicles* which Froissart says he had written for his patron Robert of Namur.¹⁵ As the prologue implies that Robert was still alive, it must have been written before Robert's death in April or May 1391.¹⁶

The *termini post* and *ante quem* for the date of composition of the abridged version of Froissart's Book I are the same as those established for the 'Amiens' version. Nevertheless, it is important to realise that the 'Amiens' version was written first. This can be seen in the fact that the 'Amiens' version largely agrees with Le Bel's account of the battle. The later 'B'/'C' redaction introduces many new elements which are still found in the 'Rome' version, undoubtedly the youngest version of Book

¹² Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Œuvres de Froissart, Chroniques*, vol. 17, p. 518.

¹³ Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Œuvres de Froissart, Chroniques*, vol. 17, p. 462 : 'et le tinrent depuis a roy tant qu'il vesquy'.

¹⁴ '... enfans monsieur le conte Loÿs de Blois, qui furent fils de sa fille et qui adont estoient moult jovene, Loÿs, Jehan et Guis. Chil resgnerent moult honnourablement et moult loyaument, sy comme vous orés recorder chy avant' ('... the children of count Louis I of Blois, who were the sons of his [John of Hainault's] daughter and who were then very young. They were called Louis, John and Guy, and they reigned honorably and loyally, as you will hear further on'), Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Œuvres de Froissart, Chroniques*, vol. 17, p. 316. John died on 9 Jun 1381.

¹⁵ 'a la contemplacion de mon treschier et redoubté seigneur monsieur Robert de Namur, seigneur de Renais en Flandres et de Bieaufort sur Meuse, je en fich ung grant livre en prose' ('I wrote a large book in prose about this [the wars between the kings of France and England] for the consideration of my very dear and formidable lord, Sir Robert of Namur, lord of Renais in Flanders and Beaufort on the Meuse'), Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Œuvres de Froissart, Chroniques*, vol. 17, p. 1.

¹⁶ F. Quicke, 'Itinéraire de Jeanne, duchesse de Brabant, de Limbourg et de Luxembourg (1383–1404)', *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d'Histoire*, 98 (1934), p. 193–194.

I to have survived.¹⁷ The abridgement largely agrees with the 'B'/'C' version, in that it contains many of these innovations, is generally closer to the narrative order found in the 'B'/'C' version and often has the same or closely related wording as the 'B'/'C' version. It is not clear whether that means that the abridgement was based on a lost version of Book I that was itself already close to the 'B' version, or whether these innovations were introduced by the author in the very composition of the abridgement and then kept in the 'B' version which Froissart composed later.

Despite the abridgement's closeness to the 'B'/'C' text, it nevertheless retains a number of elements present in the 'Amiens' version, which shows that it should be dated between both these versions.¹⁸ Shared elements in the Crécy passage include the numbers given in the assessment of the strength of each of the three English battalions (§ 274), the reference in § 279 to Miles of Noyers as bearer of the oriflamme, which is absent from the 'B'/'C' version, and the estimates of French infantrymen killed in the battle.¹⁹

The 'B'/'C' redaction: 1391–1399

This is the third surviving version of Froissart's account of the Battle of Crécy, which is included in the so-called 'B' and 'C' redactions of Book I.²⁰ The 'B' redaction is often seen as the 'standard' version of Book I, especially after S. Luce based his scholarly edition of Book I on one of the earliest manuscripts of that redaction, which he called the 'première rédaction révisée'. Kervyn de Lettenhove labelled this version the 'troisième rédaction'. Froissart did not alter his account of the battle of Crécy when preparing his later 'C' redaction of Book I but instead kept the 'B' version of this section in the same form.

The same version of the account of the battle of Crécy also appears in identical form in the manuscripts of the so-called 'A' version of Book I, which is the form in which Froissart's Book I circulated most widely in the Middle Ages, with currently nearly fifty manuscripts of this version still in existence. While the 'B' and 'C' redactions are both unmistakably authorial versions of Book I, this is not the case for the 'A' version. Although most scholars, including Luce and Kervyn de Lettenhove,

¹⁷ Palmer, 'Book I (1325–78) and its sources', p. 16.

¹⁸ Palmer offers an alternative but far less satisfactory explanation for this situation by suggesting that the abridgement was actually compiled from the 'Amiens', 'A' and 'B' versions, therefore dating its composition until after all these versions were written. This relative chronology does not, however, agree with the datings of the different versions based on internal elements. Palmer, 'Book I (1325–78) and its sources', p. 19.

¹⁹ The numbers are given in § 286 as 15,000–16,000 according to Le Bel and 'Amiens', 16,000 according to the abridgement, 30,000 according to the 'B' version and more than 30,000 according to the 'Rome' version.

²⁰ Chicago, Newberry Library, MS Case f.37, vol. 1, fol. 105v–113v (the unique witness of the 'C' version). Edited previously from Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS fr. 6477–6479 by Luce (ed.), *Chroniques de J. Froissart*, vol. 3, pp. 154–192; and from Luce's edition by Peter F. Ainsworth and George T. Diller (eds.), *Jean Froissart, Chroniques, Livre I (premier partie, 1325–1350) et Livre II, redaction du manuscrit de New York, Pierpont Morgan Library M.804* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 2001), pp. 558–591. Nearly all the text can also be found in Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Œuvres de Froissart, Chroniques*, vol. 5, pp. 3–5, 7–8, 14–18, 22–23, 25–26, 28–29, 32–34, 40–42, 47–50, 53–55, 60–66, 71–72, 75–76, 78 and 79, where it is labelled 'Sec. réd.' It is not clear whether this edition is based on a single manuscript and if so, on which.

have assumed that the 'A' version is an authentic authorial redaction,²¹ there are very good reasons to believe that it is not.²² Instead, it seems very likely that the 'A' version resulted from a process of combination and accretion, in the course of which three or four texts of different origins and different dates of composition were joined together, including parts of Froissart's original authorial 'A' redaction, in particular its opening section with the prologue, and two large sections of the 'B' redaction. Froissart's original 'A' redaction of Book I must be presumed largely lost. He probably composed it before the 'Amiens' redaction of Book I.²³ The 'A' version of the chapters which recount the battle of Crécy does not seem to have survived and in all the existing 'A' manuscripts that section has been substituted by the text taken from the 'B' redaction.

The 'B' redaction of Book I was from the start probably part of a version of the *Chronicles* that continued at least up to the end of 1385.²⁴ This version, which effectively included the whole of Book II, cannot therefore have been completed before that date. Internal arguments show that it needs to be dated even later.²⁵ A reference, in the 'B'/'C' version of the account of the Black Prince's military operations of 1355 in Gascony, to incomplete oral information that the author received suggests that it may have been written after Froissart's famous journey to Béarn in the Pyrenees in the winter of 1388–1389. This took him across the regions affected by these operations, and it is quite likely that it allowed him to pick up details of the 1355 episode.²⁶ Authorial comments made when reporting events that happened in 1369 and 1372, to the effect that in those years Albert of Bavaria was still regent and not yet count in Hainault, imply that they were written after 15 March 1389,

²¹ Luce called this the 'première rédaction proprement dite' while for Kervyn de Lettenhove it was the 'seconde rédaction'.

²² Accepting that the 'A' version, as it has survived in the manuscripts, is an authentic authorial version, leads to serious inconsistencies in any possible interpretation of the chronology and textual development of Book I, see amongst others Paul Saenger, 'A lost manuscript of Froissart refound: Newberry Library Manuscript f 37', *Manuscripta*, 19 (1975), 15–26; Palmer, 'Book I (1325–78) and its sources'; and Jean-Marie Moeglin, 'Froissart, le métier d'historien et l'invention de la Guerre de Cent Ans', *Romania*, 124 (2006), 429–470. These scholars discuss several of the problematic implications of the 'A' version, but all of them still assume that it is an authorial redaction. None of them, however, is able to provide satisfactory solutions to the problems they outline or formulate a convincing overall interpretation of the development of Froissart's Book I. For the theory that the 'A' version manuscripts actually only contain a small part of the original authorial 'A' redaction, see Susan Wales, 'Froissart, Book I: manuscripts and texts', unpublished PhD thesis, (University of Sydney, 1988), I, pp. 146–213.

²³ Moeglin, 'Froissart, le métier d'historien', has convincingly argued that the opening section of the manuscript 'A' version, which is a part of the text that represents the original authorial 'A' redaction, must have been written before the 'Amiens' redaction. For the rest of Moeglin's argument, however, see above note 22.

²⁴ Of the six extant manuscripts of the 'B' redaction, one is a fragment that in its current state only contains the beginning of the text. Of the rest, four copies also contain Book II and only one copy, the base manuscript used by Luce for his edition, ends with what has come to be regarded as the 'normal' end of Book I. The 'C' redaction contains the whole of Book II and originally probably also contained Book III.

²⁵ The account of the battle of Neville's Cross, in both the 'B' and 'C' redactions, refers in the present tense about John MacDonald, lord of the Isles, however this Scottish lord seems to have been a half-mythical character for Froissart and it is doubtful whether he would have known that John died ca. 1387. The passage in question can therefore not really be used to deduce a reliable *terminus ante quem*, especially given that other more reliable internal arguments show that these redactions must be dated later: 'Jehans des Adultilles, qui gouverne les sauvages Escos, qui obeissent a lui et non a autrui' ('John of the Out-Isles, who rules the wild Scots [= Highlanders and Islanders], who obey him but nobody else'), Luce (ed.), *Chroniques*, vol. 4, p. 18.

²⁶ Luce (ed.), *Chroniques*, vol. 4, p. 168.

when Albert succeeded his elder brother William V as count.²⁷ Finally, the remark that in his lifetime the mercenary captain, Bernard de la Salle, had captured several cities by climbing over their walls shows that it was written after Bernard's death, which occurred on 29 May 1391.²⁸ The *terminus ante quem* for the 'B' and 'C' redactions is provided by a reference to John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, which speaks of him in the present tense implying that he was still alive, thereby dating it to before the duke's death (February 1399).²⁹

Codicological evidence from the earliest manuscripts of the 'B' redaction indicates that its composition should probably be dated in the earlier part of the final decade of the 14th century, so closer to 1391 than to 1399. While the 'C' redaction kept the 'B' version of the account of the battle of Crécy, the 'C' redaction as a whole should be dated slightly later, to the period [1395–1399]. It was probably composed after Froissart had returned from his last journey to England, in the autumn of 1395, as it contains much additional information on English affairs. It refers to Hugh Calveley (d. 1394) and the Chanoine d'Aubercicourt (d. 1395/6) in ways that make it clear that both had already died.³⁰ The 'C' redaction cannot have been composed later than 1399, as it kept the same passage already present in the 'B' redaction that implies that John of Gaunt was still alive when it was being composed. In an added passage it also refers in the present tense to Béraud II of Clermont, dauphin of Auvergne, who died in the same year as John of Gaunt, making 1399 therefore a firm *terminus ante quem*.³¹

Rewriting the account of the battle of Crécy

When comparing the 'B'/'C' redactions to the earlier versions of Froissart's *Chronicles* and to the *Chronicle* of Jean Le Bel, it becomes clear that in each successive version elements were changed or added. Since the 'B' version of the account of the battle of Crécy was written about half a century after the battle, one can wonder what sources Froissart used for these additions. In his text the author refers at times to informants who told him about certain details. In the 'Amiens' redaction he states that he heard about King Edward's praying the night before the battle, a comment also present in the 'B'/'C' redactions (§ 274). In the abridgement Froissart makes a similar vague statement about hearing the story of the knights being sent to King Edward III with the request to come to the rescue of his son, the Black Prince, and about the manner in which King Philip was led away from the battlefield (§ 280 and 281).

²⁷ Luce (ed.), *Chroniques*, vol. 7, p. 126 and vol. 8, p. 33.

²⁸ Luce (ed.), *Chroniques*, vol. 5, p. 134. For Bernard's death see Elina Bellondi (ed.), 'Cronica volgare di Anonimo Fiorentino', in *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, vol. XXVI, pt. II (Città di Castello, n.d.), pp. 132–133; M.L. Bellaguet (ed.), *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis*, vol. 1 (Paris: Crapelet, 1839), pp. 708–713 ; and Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana di Firenze, Ashburnham MS 1830, III – 35. I am indebted to Prof Kenneth Fowler for the latter reference, which gives the precise date for Bernard's death.

²⁹ Luce (ed.), *Chroniques*, vol. 5, p. 135.

³⁰ Croenen, 'A 're-found' manuscript', p. 58; Chicago, Newberry Library, MS Case f.37, vol. 2, fol. 40v and 53v.

³¹ Chicago, Newberry Library, MS Case f.37, vol. 2, fol. 39v (transcription on the Online Froissart): 'Li dus de Berri, qui tient grant paÿs en Auvergne, et ossi font li contes de Boulongne et li contes dauffins d'Auvergne, ...' ('The duke of Berry, who has many possessions in Auvergne, as do the count of Boulogne and the dauphin of Auvergne, ...'). The duke of Berry and Jean II of Auvergne, count of Boulogne, who are also talked about here in the present tense, died respectively in 1416 and in 1404.

In the 'B'/'C' version Froissart added a section in which he explains that he had received reliable information about the battle mainly from the English, because the chaos on the French side prevented them from being able to observe accurately the action as it unfolded (§ 277). He also refers to some men of Jean of Hainault as his informants. This whole passage is an expanded and rephrased version of a passage borrowed directly from Jean Le Bel that had not been kept in the 'Amiens' redaction and the abridgement, except for a vague general allusion to eye witnesses in § 282 in the 'Amiens' redaction.³²

Froissart rewrote his account of the battle of Crécy once more a decade or so after the 'B'/'C' version in the so-called 'Rome' redaction of Book I. In that text he now identified some of his informants, referring by name to John Chandos and Bartholomew Burghersh on the English side and Charles of Montmorency on the French side.³³ These men all died years before Froissart wrote any of the surviving versions of the *Chronicles* — Chandos and Burghersh both in 1369, and Montmorency in 1381. It is possible that Froissart had kept back some of the information he had received from them to be used in later versions and it is also possible that over the years he received additional information from sources that he did not want to identify. It is nevertheless important to realise that the textual innovations were not simply the result of additional factual information that reached the author. Many innovations involved changes to the narrative order and the addition of explicit or implicit authorial commentary on the effectiveness or appropriateness of actions on both sides during the battle. The logic underpinning the rewriting was at least partly to compose a better, more coherent, and more convincing piece of historical writing, whose aim was not only to record historical facts accurately, but also to teach its readers important lessons relating to, amongst others, the importance of soldiers' physical strength and fitness, their courage, their commanders' ability to select appropriate tactics and to use features of the terrain to their advantage, and of military discipline on the battlefield.

³² Le Bel mentions Jean of Hainault himself as a source, something which Froissart does not repeat.

³³ George T. Diller (ed.), *Froissart, Chroniques. Dernière rédaction du premier livre. Édition du manuscrit de Rome Reg. Lat. 869* (Geneva: Droz, 1972), p. 726; Luce (ed.), *Chroniques*, vol. 3, p. 415; Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Chroniques*, vol. 5, p. 50.