

T7 THE KNIGHT

In the «General Prologue» to his *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer provides descriptions of some of the pilgrims. The texts are given in a modern English version since Chaucer's language is quite difficult to understand for contemporary readers of English. The text below presents the readers with the first pilgrim of the whole party.

There was a Knight, a most distinguished man,
Who from the day on which he first began
To ride abroad¹ had followed chivalry,
Truth, honour, generousness and courtesy,
5 He had done nobly in his sovereign's war
And ridden into battle, no man more,
As Well in Christian as in heathen² places,
And ever honoured for his noble graces.
When we took Alexandria³, he was there.
10 He often sat at table in the chair
Of honour, above all nations, when in Prussia.
In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,
No Christian man so often, of his rank⁴.

G. Chaucer

Canterbury Tales
General Prologue

Genre: Poetry

► Map 7

► Track 5

1. abroad. *Qui*: fuori dal suo paese, in giro.
2. heathen. Pagani.
3. Alexandria. Alessandria d'Egitto, occupata dai Saraceni e liberata nel 1365 da un esercito cristiano comandato dal re di Cipro, Pietro di Lusignano.
4. rank. Rango.

15 When, in Granada, Algeciras⁵ sank
Under assault, he had been there, and in
North Africa, raiding Benamarin⁶,
In Anatolia he had been as well
And fought when Ayas⁷ and Attalia⁸ fell,
For all along the Mediterranean coast
20 He had embarked with many a noble host⁹.
In fifteen mortal battles he had been
And jousted¹⁰ for our faith at Tramissene¹¹
Thrice in the lists¹², and always killed his man.
This same distinguished knight had led the van¹³
25 Once with the Bey of Balat¹⁴, doing work
For him against another heathen Turk;
He was of sovereign value in all eyes.
And though so much distinguished, he was wise
And in his bearing¹⁵ modest as a maid.
30 He never yet a boorish¹⁶ thing had said
In all his life to any, come what might;
He was a true a perfect gentle-knight.

Speaking of his equipment, he possessed
Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.
35 He wore a fustian¹⁷ tunic stained¹⁸ and dark-
With smudges¹⁹ where his armour had left mark;
Just home from service, he had joined our ranks
To do his pilgrimage and render thanks.

TO THE PRIORESS

In the «Prologue» to *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer includes representatives of all social classes. Among his pilgrims, there is also a Nun.

There also was Nun¹, a Prioress,
Her way of smiling very simple and coy².
Her greatest oath³ was only 'By St Loy!'⁴
And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.
5 And well she sang a service, with a fine
Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly⁵,
And she spoke daintily⁶ in French, extremely,
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe⁷;
French in the Paris style she did not know.
10 At meat her manners were well taught withal⁸;
No morsel⁹ from her lips did she let fall,
Nor dipped¹⁰ her fingers in the sauce too deep;
But she could carry a morsel up and keep
The smallest drop from falling on her breast.
15 For courtliness she had a special zest¹¹,
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean
That not a trace of grease was to be seen
Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,
She reached a hand sedately¹² for the meat.
20 She certainly was very entertaining,
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining
To counterfeit¹³ a courtly kind of grace,
A stately bearing fitting to her place,
And to seem dignified in all her dealings¹⁴.
25 As for her sympathies and tender feelings,
She was so charitably solicitous

She used to weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding¹⁵.
And she had little dogs she would be feeding
30 With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread.
And bitterly she wept¹⁶ if one were dead
Or someone took a stick and made it smart¹⁷;
She was all sentiment and tender heart.
Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,
35 Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;
Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,
Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread¹⁸,
Almost a span across the brows, I own¹⁹;
She was indeed by no means undergrown²⁰.
40 Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm.
She wore a coral trinket²¹ on her arm,
A set of beads²², the gaudies tricked in green²³,
Whence²⁴ hung a golden brooch²⁵ of brightest sheen
On which there first was graven²⁶ a crowned A,
45 And lower, *Amor vincit omnia*.