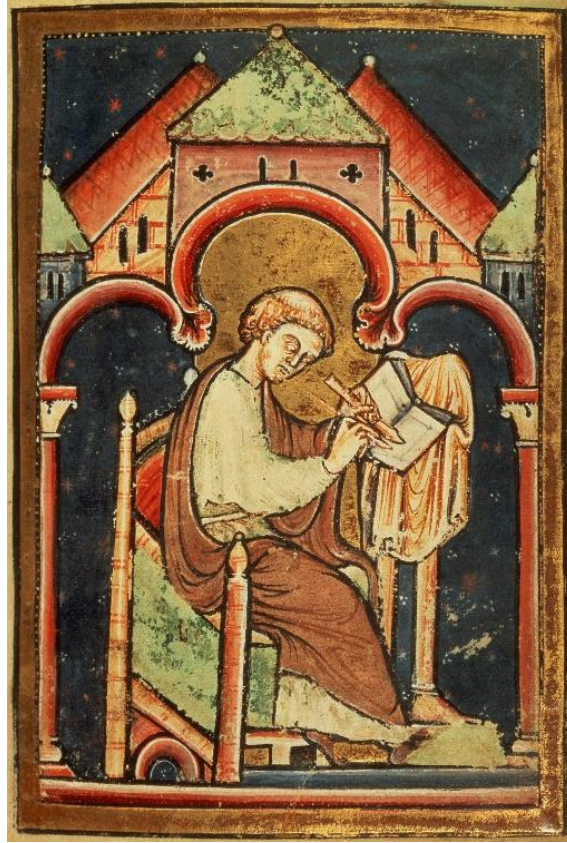


# *BELLARIA XXXV*



Beda Venerabilis

## *MEDIEVAL LATIN (3)*

This sequence of texts will be drawn from Keith Sidwell's *Reading Medieval Latin* (Cambridge, 1995). It is a teaching text, with 86 passages, prose and verse, from St Benedict (b. 480) to Nigel Whiteacre (b. 1130), a monk active at the time of Henry II and Richard Lionheart.

The texts are supported by full historical and cultural introductions and running vocabulary and grammatical help. It ends with a brief grammar (summarising the main differences from classical Latin), a note on orthography, and total vocabulary for the texts.

Professor Sidwell has kindly translated, as literally as possible, the passages selected for this series of *Bellaria*. You can find the Sidwell's *Reading Medieval Latin* online [here](#).

## ARCHBISHOP THOMAS BECKET

### **Introduction**

Becket was born c. 1120 into a London merchant family. After grammar school, he worked in Paris and from 1143 in London for a wealthy banker. He was then employed by Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, who sent him abroad to study law, made him an archdeacon with wide responsibilities, and introduced him into royal circles. When King Henry II became king (1154), Becket was made Lord Chancellor. Theobald died in 1161, and Henry ensured Becket, with whom he had worked up good relationship, took his place as Archbishop.

Becket immediately abandoned all his other offices to concentrate belligerently on extending the power of the church against that of the king, and the relationship with Henry soured. As a result of a clash about the authority that the king should hold over the clergy, Becket went into exile in France for six years (1164-1170), but eventually Pope Alexander III intervened to get him reinstated, without solving any of the problems.



The death of Thomas Becket (two angels above receive his soul) British c. 1400? (From the Metropolitan Art Museum, New York)

Matters came to a head when in 1170 Henry secured the succession by having his son crowned king in York Minster. Becket, arguing this was Canterbury's prerogative, got letters from the Pope suspending those involved in the ceremony, and announced the fact in a sermon on Christmas day. Henry ordered Becket to rein in his activities, in the course of which (according to tradition: the actual words are not recorded) he uttered the fatal words about ridding himself of 'this turbulent priest'.



Becket, Henry II and the four knights (14th C)

Edward Grim, who was not at that meeting but was present at Becket's death, reported his words differently and added an explanation:

[Henry exclaimed] 'I have nurtured and promoted useless wretches in my kingdom, who owe no loyalty to their lord whom they now allow to be mocked so offensively by a common cleric.'

Hearing this sentiment, four knights of eminent birth and from the private household of the king understood it in a deadly way and absolutely differently from what [lit. by an intention entirely other than that which] had been meant by the king.

*'inertes ac miseros homines enutrivi et erexi in regno meo, qui nec fidem ferunt domino suo quem a plebeo quodam clerico tam probrose patiuntur illudi'.*

*quod verbum milites quatuor, genere quidem conspicui et de domestica regis familia, excipientes, funeste illud, et alia prorsus quam a rege prolatum fuerat intentione interpretati sunt.*



Henry Arguing With Becket. The hexametric inscription reads:

*Henricus natus Matildis regna tenebat. / Sub quo sacratus Thomas mucrone cadebat.*

'Henry the son of Matilda was holding the kingdom(s) / under whom the sanctified Thomas died by the sword.'

British Library Royal MS 20 A II Foo7V, detail/© British Library Board 2017)

Four knights with their retinue set out for Canterbury, perhaps to arrest him. The meeting in the palace did not go well, and the servants locked the inner palace doors. The knights left, collected their weapons, returned and broke in via the stairs to the Oriel (the upper gallery), and at the noise Becket was urged to leave his chamber and seek sanctuary in the cathedral where Vespers were being sung. The extract begins at this point.

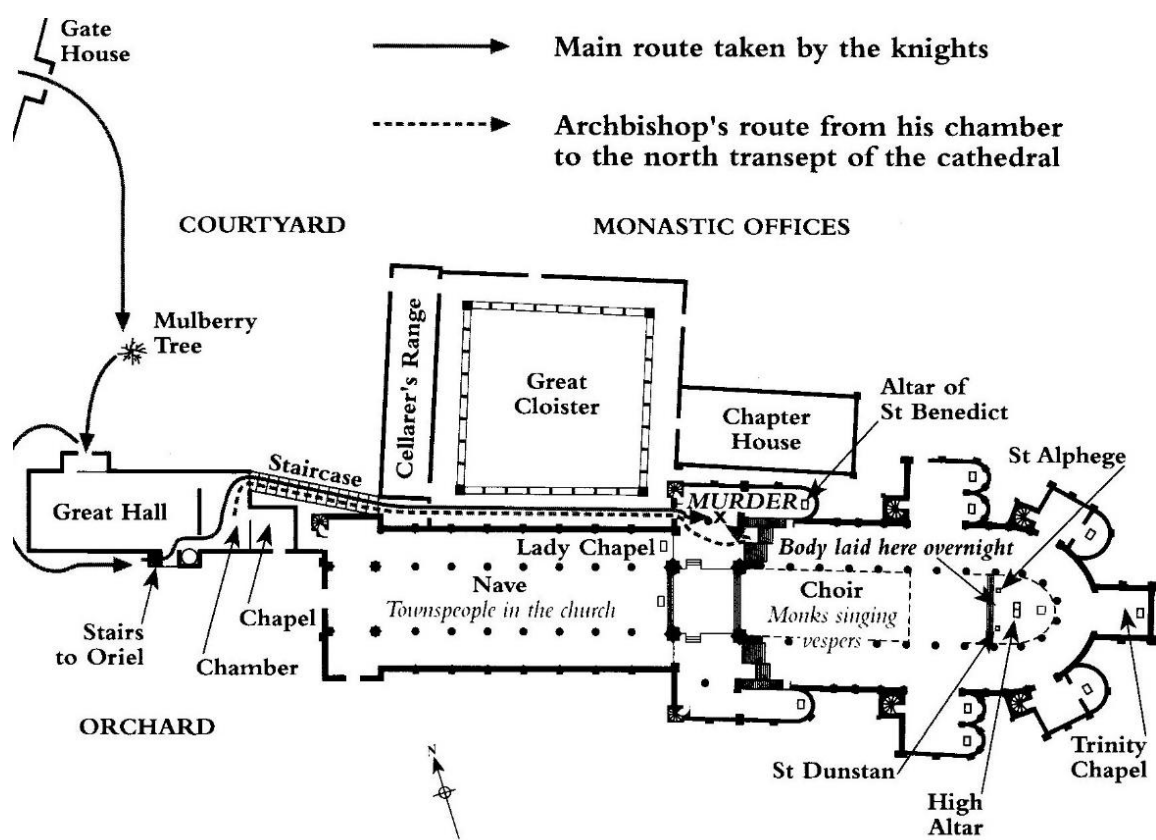
## THE DEATH OF THOMAS BECKET

**Thomas enters the church. The monks, terrified by the commotion, beg him to flee. He tells them to leave.**

*intratum est in ecclesiam ipsam. monachi ecclesiae pro tali et tanto tumultu tam pavidum quam attoniti, relictis et non percantatis vesperis, Domino archiepiscopo in ecclesiam intrante, a choro exeunt ei obviam, gaudentes et Deo gratiam habentes quod eum vivum cernunt et recipiunt, quem jam detruncatum audierant. et cum alii prae gaudio vel timore flerent, alii hoc, alii aliud suaderent, ut Petrus Domino dicens, 'propitius esto tibi', ille pro ecclesiae Dei libertate et causa non timidus mori jussit eos abire et a se recedere, utique ne impedirent passionem ejus, quam futuram praedixerat et imminere videbat.*

Entry was made into the church. The monks of the church, as frightened as they were astounded by such and so great a tumult, leaving off and not finishing the singing of Vespers, whilst the Archbishop was entering the church, came out from the Choir to meet him, rejoicing and giving (lit: 'having') thanks to God that they were seeing and welcoming him alive whom they had heard had already been killed (lit: 'beheaded'). And when some were weeping through joy or fear, some were making one suggestion and others another, saying, as Peter said to the Lord, '[sc. God] be merciful unto you', † he, not afraid to die for the freedom and the cause of the church, ordered them to leave and go back away from him, assuredly so that they might not prevent his martyrdom, which he had prophesied would come about and saw was imminent.

†cf. *Luke* 18.13 and 28



As he goes to the altar, armed soldiers appear

*iturus ad aram superius, ubi missas familiares et horas solebat audire, jam quatuor gradus ascenderat cum ecce ad ostium claustrum, quo veneramus, primus adest Raginaldus Ursonis loricated, ense evaginato, et vociferans, 'nunc huc ad me, homines regis!' nec multo post adduntur ei tres praedicti socii ejus, similiter loricated, contecti corpora et capita, praeterquam oculos solos, et ensibus nudatis. plurimi etiam alii sine loricated, armati, de sequela et sociis suis, et aliqui de urbe Cantuariae, quos coactos secum illi venire compulerant.*

As he was about to go up to the altar, where he was accustomed to hear private masses and the [sc. canonical] hours, he had already climbed four steps when, lo!, at the door of the cloister whither we had come first Reginald FitzUrse was at hand, his sword drawn from its scabbard, and shouting aloud, 'Now hither to me, men of the King!', and not long afterwards there joined him (lit: 'were added to him') his three aforementioned comrades, likewise covered with chain-mail, body and head, except the eyes alone, and with their swords bared. [sc. There were] very many others also, without chain-mail, [sc. but] armed, from among their retinue and their comrades, and some from the city of Canterbury, whom they had compelled to come with them to him under duress.



Where Thomas Becket was murdered

## Thomas refuses to have the doors closed. All but three clerics seek protection.

When they saw those armed men, [sc. as] I was saying, the monks wanted to bar the door of the church, but the good man [i.e. Becket], having faith in the Lord and having no fear from the sudden terror of the powers of the impious that were bursting in, turning back descended from the steps, forbidding that the door of the church be shut and saying 'Let it not be [lit: 'let it be absent'] that we should make a fortress from the church of God. Allow to enter the church of God all those wishing to enter [sc. it]. Let the will of God be done'. While he was then descending from the steps towards the door so that it might not be closed, John of Salisbury and all of his other clerics, except Robert the Canon and William FitzStephen and Edward Grim, who had recently come to him, taking precautions and having a care to place themselves in a safe location, leaving him, sought some the altars, others hiding-places.

*visis, inquam, illis armatis, voluerunt monachi ostium ecclesiae obfirmare, sed bonus homo, fiduciam habens in Domino et non expavescens repentino terrore irruentes potentias impiorum, e gradibus descendit regressus, prohibens ne ostium ecclesiae clauderetur et dicens, 'absit ut de ecclesia Dei castellum faciamus. permittite intrare omnes ecclesiam Dei intrare volentes. fiat voluntas Dei.' eo tunc a gradibus descendente versus ostium ne clauderetur, Johannes Saresberiensis et alii ejus clerici omnes, praeter Robertum canonicum et Willelmum filium Stephani et Edwardum Grim, qui novus ad eum venerat, praesidia captantes et se in tuto collocare curantes, relicto ipso, petiverunt alii altaria, alii latibula.*

## The killers enter, hesitate and Thomas identifies himself

Behold! already those assassins, borne along by rage, seeing against their expectations that the door of the church [i.e. the chapel of St Benedict] was open entered it at a run. 'Whither, whither do you wicked men rush?' † 'What madness [sc. 'is this'], you miserable wretches? What so great licence for the sword?' ‡ But one of them said to the monks, who were standing there with him, 'Do not move'. And indeed, as though confused and astounded, out of reverence for his visage those murderers at first stepped back, when they saw the Archbishop. Afterwards someone shouted 'Where is the traitor?' The Archbishop, keeping his soul in patience, did not reply to that utterance. Someone again [sc. shouted]: 'Where is the Archbishop?' He [sc. 'replied']: 'Behold! It is I, not a traitor, but a priest of God, and I wonder that you have entered the church of God in such clothing. What do you want? [lit: 'What pleases you?']'.

† Horace, *Epodes* 7.1

‡ Lucan, *De Bello Civili* 1.8

*ecce jam illi spiculatores, furia investiti, praeter spem apertum cernentes cursim ostium intrant ecclesiae. 'quo, quo scelesti ruitis?' 'quis furor, o miseri? quae tanta licentia ferri?' quidam autem illorum monachis dixit, qui cum eo astabant, 'ne vos moveatis.' et quidem quasi confusi et attoniti, a reverentia vultus ejus illi grassatores primo retulerunt pedem, viso archiepiscopo. clamavit aliquis, 'ubi est ille proditor?' archiepiscopus, suam in patientia animam possidens, ad verbum illud non respondit. aliquis item: 'ubi est archiepiscopus?' ille: 'ecce ego, non proditor,*

*sed presbyter Dei, et miror quod in tali habitu ecclesiam Dei ingressi estis. quid placet vobis?*



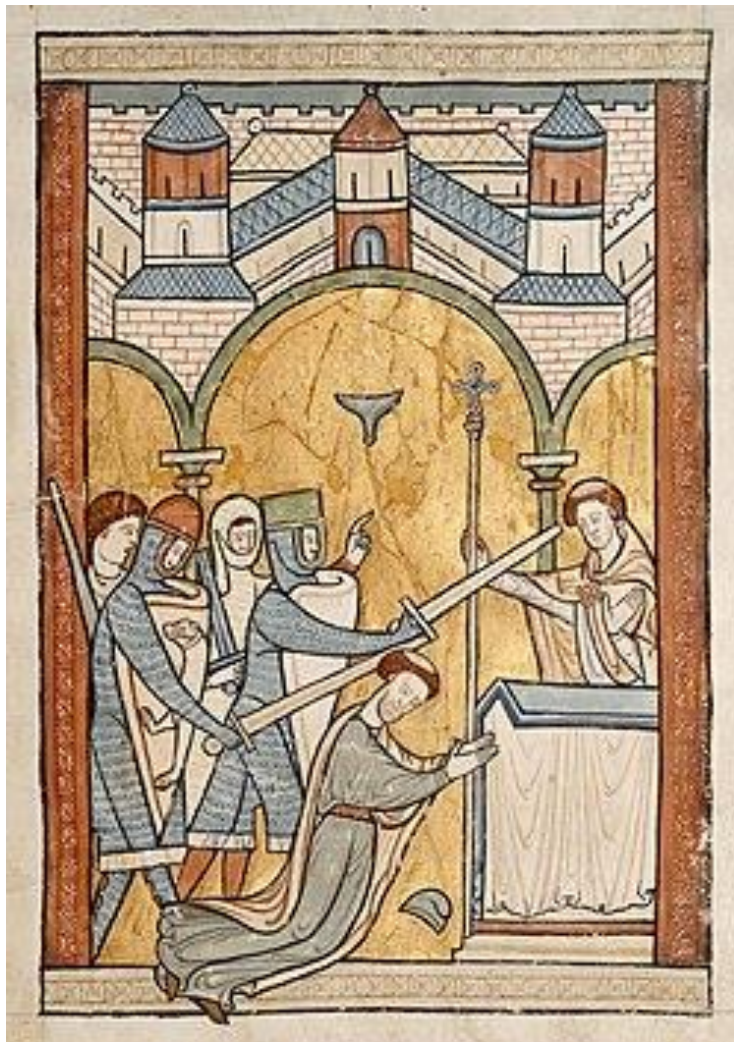
Reliquary, Limoges, c. 1200.

The image on the front panel shows the murder of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral

### Thomas orders the killers to hurt none of his followers

One murderer [sc. said]: 'That you should die. It is impossible that you should live any longer.' But he [i.e. Thomas] [sc. replied]: 'And I in the name of the Lord take death upon myself, and I commend my soul and the cause of the church to God and the Blessed Mary and the holy patrons of this church. Let it not be that I should flee from your swords: but by the authority of God I forbid you from touching any of my people.' One of them had both a twibill and a sword, so that by means of axe and twibill they might break down the door of the church, if it were barred against them. But keeping hold of his sword, he laid aside the twibill which was still there.

*unus grassator: 'ut moriaris. impossibile est ut vivas ulterius.' at ille: 'et ego in nomine Domini mortem suscipio et animam meam et ecclesiae causam Deo et beatae Mariae et sanctis hujus ecclesiae patronis commendo. absit ut propter gladios vestros fugiam: sed auctoritate Dei interdico ne quempiam meorum tangatis.'* aliquis eorum bisacutam et gladium simul habuit, ut in securi et bisacuta, si eis obfirmaretur, ostium dejicerent ecclesiae. sed retento gladio, bisacutam, quae adhuc ibi est, deposuit.



Edward Grim takes a blow to the arm (c. 1200)

### Thomas refuses to leave the church. Edward Grim is wounded trying to protect him

One [sc. of them] struck him with the flat of his sword between the shoulder-blades, saying, 'Flee, you are dead'. He stood unmoved and offering his neck commended himself to the Lord, and had upon his lips the holy archbishop martyrs, Saint Dionysius and Saint Aelfege of Canterbury. Some [sc. of them], saying 'You are taken, you will come with us', clapping their hands upon him, were wanting to drag him out of the church, had they not been fearful that the common people would snatch him from their hands. He, replying 'I shall go nowhere. You shall do here what you wish to do and what you have been ordered [sc. to do]', resisted as far as he was able. And the monks were holding him back, with whom [sc. was] also master Edward Grim, who both received the first blow of the sword wielded by William de Tracy at his [sc. Becket's] head by thrusting his arm in the way, and by the same blow both the Archbishop and he were gravely wounded, [sc. the Archbishop] on his bowed head, he himself on his arm.

*quidam eum cum plano ense caedebat inter scapulas dicens, 'fuge, mortuus es.' ille immotus perstitit et cervicem praebens se Domino commendabat, et sanctos archiepiscopos martyres in ore habebat, beatum Dionysium et sanctum Aelfegum Cantuariensem. aliqui dicentes, 'captus es, venies nobiscum', injectis manibus eum ab ecclesia extrahere volebant, nisi timerent quod populus eum esset erepturus de manibus eorum. ille respondens, 'nusquam ibo. hic facietis quod facere vultis et quod vobis praeceptum est', quod poterat, renitebatur. et monachi eum retinebant, cum quibus et magister Edwardus Grim, qui et*



*primum a Willelmo de Traci in caput ejus vibratum gladii ictum brachio objecto excepit, eodemque ictu et archiepiscopus in capite inclinato, et ipse in brachio, graviter est vulneratus.*



The death of Thomas Becket from the Carrow Psalter

### Thomas commends himself to God and falls. His head is mutilated.

The Archbishop, having wiped the downpour from his head with his arm and seeing the blood, began giving thanks to God, saying: 'Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit'. † A second blow was made [lit: given] at his head, as a result of which he also fell upon his face, placing his knees down first, joining together and holding out his hands to God, near to the altar which was there of Saint Benedict, and he had the care or the grace to fall honourably, covered down to his ankles by his cloak, as though he was about to adore and about to pray. He fell on his right hand, on his way to the right hand of God ... A certain Hugo de Horsea, ‡ surnamed Mauclerk, pressing with his foot upon the neck of the prostrate holy martyr, withdrew from the hollow of his severed crown along with his sword-point blood and brains.

† *Luke 23.46*

‡ a subdeacon, working with the knights

*archiepiscopus a capite defluum cum brachio detergens et videns cruorem gratias Deo agebat, dicens: 'in manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum.' datur in caput ejus ictus secundus, quo et ille in faciem concidit, positus primo genibus, conjunctis et extensis ad Deum manibus, secus aram quae ibi erat sancti Benedicti, et curam habuit vel gratiam ut honeste caderet, pallio suo coopertus usque ad talos, quasi adoraturus et oraturus. Super dextram cecidit, ad dextram Dei iturus ... quidam Hugo de Horsea, cognomento Malus Clericus, sancti martyris procumbentis collum pede comprimens, a concavitate coronae amputatae cum mucrone cruorem et cerebrum extrahebat.*



Chasuble of St. Thomas Becket, an ornate sleeveless outer vestment used during the mass, thought to have been worn by Thomas Becket and venerated as a contact relic (Sens Cathedral)

### The writer reflects on Thomas's murder and describes how nature responds

O sad spectacle! O cruelty unheard of of those who ought to have been Christians! But they are worse who, under the name of Christians, do the works of pagans than those who openly and because of the error of their inherited traditions are infidels. O truly happy and constant holy martyr of God Thomas! He could be killed, but he could not be turned. And indeed, just as once while Christ suffered in his own body, so while the same person was suffering in his own soldier Thomas, the sun turned aside its eyes, hid its rays, [and] darkened the day, so that this crime should not be seen, and a fearful storm made the sky smaller, † sudden rain-showers rumbled in, [and] there was thunder from the heavens. Afterwards a great redness of the air shone forth as a sign of the blood that had been spilt, in horror at the crime, [and] looking forward to the swiftness of the vengeance to come upon those who raised themselves up so fiercely and depraved themselves through this sin, and who were the cause of this man's death, when all the mildness of human nature had been eroded and discarded.

† Horace, *Epodes* 13.1

*o triste spectaculum! o crudelitas inaudita eorum qui Christiani esse debuerant! sed peiores sunt qui sub nomine Christiano opera agunt paganorum, quam qui aperte et ex errore paternarum traditionum sunt infideles. o vere felicem et constantem sanctum Dei martyrem Thomam! occidi potuit sed flecti non potuit. et quidem, sicut quondam Christo patiente in proprio corpore, ita et eodem nunc patiente in milite suo Thoma, avertit sol oculos, abscondit radios, obtenebravit diem, ne videret scelus hoc, et horrida tempestas caelum contraxit, subiti ruerunt imbres, intonuit de caelo. postea rubor aeris magnus emicuit in effusi sanguinis signum, in flagitii horrorem, in ultionis celeritatem superventurae his qui ita immane se efferarunt, et hoc piaculari se depravaverunt et qui mortis hujus causa exstiterunt, exesa et exuta omni naturae humanae mansuetudine.*

## The legacy

The battle between church and state was already a *cause célèbre* in Becket's time, and his martyrdom struck a particular powerful chord, not only in England but also across Europe. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* bear witness to the phenomenon, the cathedral becoming the focus of a vast pilgrimage industry, with people coming from 'every shire's end/of Engelande.../the hooly blisful martir for to seke/that hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.'

Note: the magnificent Cotton manuscripts (below) which contain important accounts and illustrations of Becket's murder, have been digitised by the Polonsky Foundation, a generous supporter of *Classics for All*. You can find them online [here](#).



This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website [classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/](https://classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/)