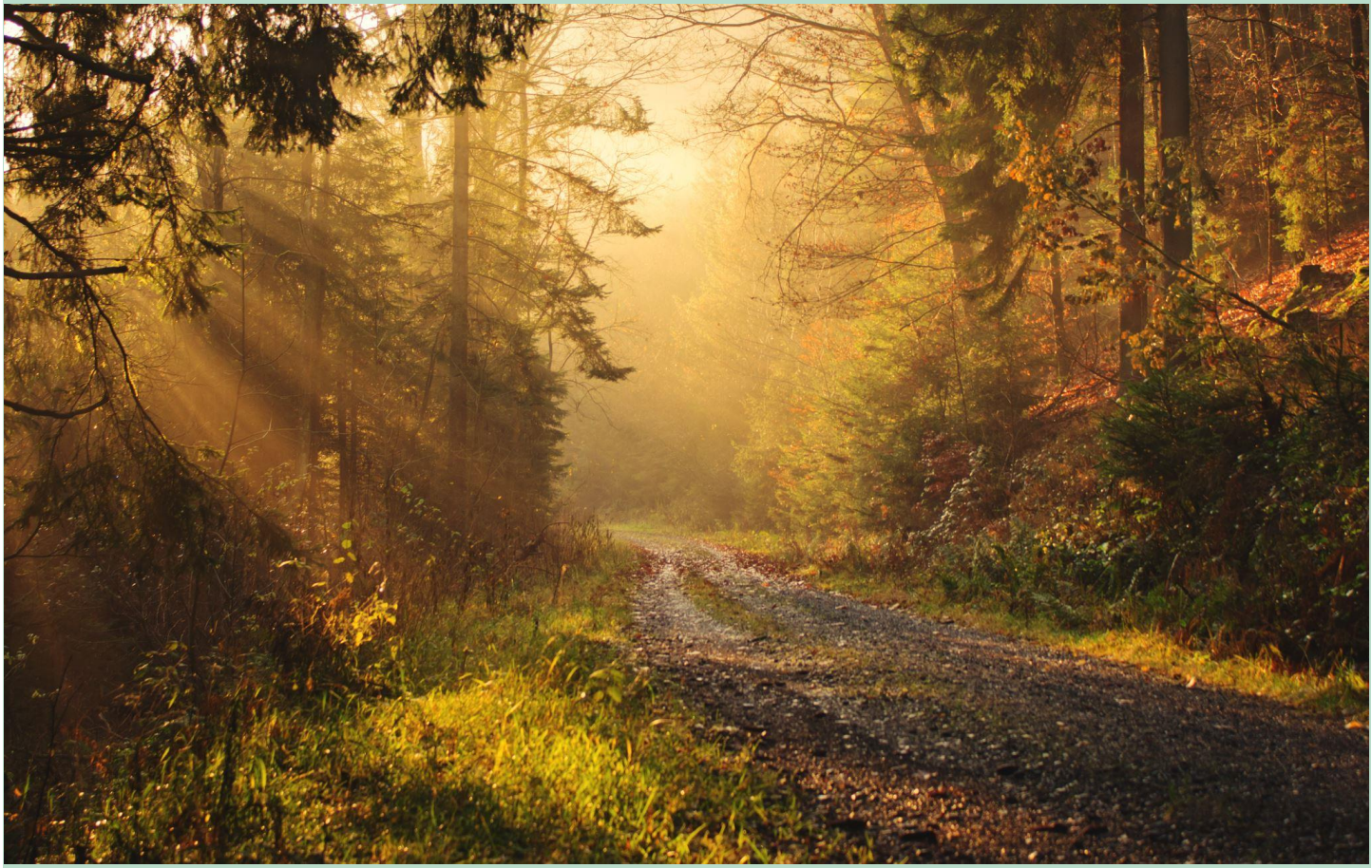
Botanical Representations in Middle English Romance



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INTRODUCTION

The Middle English romance genre is broad and variable, containing narratives that, in general, feature a central quest and revolve around such themes as social matters (such as family drama and rivalry), the otherworldly, love, loss, and pleasure.[1] These parameters allow various types of tales and poems to fit within the romance genre, including narratives that could belong within present-day historical or religious genres. The inclusion of a wide variety of subjects complicates the creation of an acceptable overarching definition of the genre.

Recent scholarship has moved away from defining the genre in itself and instead focusses on whether the Middle English romance should be viewed as a genre (suggesting a cohesive body of texts), proto-genre, mode, or register.[2] The revisions of the nature of the Middle English romances suggest an incohesive body of texts subject to change instead of the suggested cohesive body of texts that the word genre implies. Subsequently, scholarship from the last two decades has focused on exploring research topics that include (for example) the position of women in Middle English romance texts, post-colonial interpretations of Middle English romance, and representations of professions and contemporary economies within Middle English romances.[3]

The environment has also gained ground as a focus in research on Middle English. Although research on natural forces within textual environments already occurred in the twentieth century, [4] recent scholarship has become increasingly interested in applying ecocriticism to such research. Ecocriticism is a relatively new framework that explores the human-nature relationship

[1] Gail Ashton, ed., *Medieval English Romance in Context. Texts and Contexts* (London: Continuum, 2010), 1-3.
[2] Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance*. *Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (New Jersey, Princeton; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1979). Kenneth Eckert, "Introduction," in *Middle English romances in Translation* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2015), 14. Yin Liu, "Middle English Romances Prototype Genre," *The Chaucer Review* 40, no. 4 (2006): 335-53.
[3] Nancy Margaret Michael, "Motherhood and Power in Middle English Romance," (Doctoral Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 2020). Misty Urban, *Monstrous Women in Middle English romance Representations of Mysterious Female Power* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010). Helen Victoria Young, *Constructing 'England' in the Fourteenth Century A Postcolonial Interpretation of Middle English Romance* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010). Linda Marie Zaerr, *Performance and the Middle English Romance*, Studies in Medieval romance (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester (NY): D.S. Brewer, 2012). Andrew M. Richmond. "'The Broken Schippus He Ther Fonde': Shipwrecks and the Human Costs of Investment Capital in Middle English Romance," *Neophilologus* 99, no. 2 (2015): 315-33. Walter Wadiak, *Savage Economy: The Returns of Middle English Romance* (Indiana, Notre Dame: the University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).
[4] E.g., Bella Millett, "How Green is the Green Knight?," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 38 (1994): 138-151.

in literary environments and the effects of conceptions of nature throughout history.[5] An influential ecocritical reading of late medieval English literature, published by Gillian Rudd in 2007, stimulated ecocritical analyses of works of late medieval literature focusing on nature, landscapes, and ecologies in narrative environments.[6] Research on the representations of landscapes appeared in scholarship through, for instance, explorations of eco-theory and environmental realism within Middle English romance.[7]

Yet these newly emerging research fields do not often consider topics that concern specific trees, bushes, floral or herbal matters. Even though some studies focus on one particular species within romances (such as the hawthorn),[8] scholarship contains little to no research that includes representations of botanical matters in Middle English romances. Furthermore, no research includes the extent to which readers of the Middle English romances could have been familiar with those botanical mattes.

Although scholarship has partially explored botanical matters for their symbolic functions or values, botanical matters without a distinct symbolic function or value have gone largely untreated. In general, scholarship has accepted that indistinct botanical matters are part of in-text environments. It has not elaborated further on the subject, presumably since these botanical matters are unnecessary for understanding the text; they merely embellish the author's (or translator's) imaginative in-text environment. In contrast, this thesis demonstrates that these hitherto underexplored botanical matters are indeed relevant to understanding Middle English romances' complexity. It shows that they do carry weight for the poem's plot and interpretation.

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[5] Timothy Clark, ed. "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, 1-12. Cambridge Introductions to Literature (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4. Gillian Rudd, *Greenery Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*, Manchester Medieval Literature (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 5-10.

[6] Rudd, *Greenery*. Jane Suzanne Carroll, *Landscape in Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Kellie Robertson, *Nature Speaks: Medieval Literature and Aristotelian Philosophy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). Michael W. George, "Gawain's Struggle with Ecology: Attitudes toward the Natural World in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *Journal of Ecocriticism* 2.2 (2010): 30-44.

[7] Barbara Lee Bolt, "Of Wilderness, Forest, and Garden: An Eco-Theory of Genre in Middle English Literature" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2015). Laura L. Howes, "Inglewood Forest in Two Middle English romances," *Neophilologus* 97, no. 1 (2013): 185-89. Jodi Elisabeth Grimes, "Rhetorical Transformations of Trees in Medieval England: From Material Culture to Literary Representation" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2008). Brenda Deen Schildgen, "Reception, Elegy, and Eco-Awareness: Trees in Statius, Boccaccio, and Chaucer," *Comparative Literature* 65, no. 1 (2013): 85-100.

[8] Susan S. Eberly, "A Thorn among the Lilies: The Hawthorn in Medieval Love Allegory," *Folklore* 100, no. 1 (1989): 41-52.

This thesis's research on the Middle English readers' extent of familiarity with botanical matters connects these matters from daily life to their presence within the narrative—for instance, *Sir Thopas*. This poem includes several comical botanical matters. Saffron is a specific example. Although it functions in the poem to indicate Sir Thopas's yellow/orange hair colour, this spice was expensive and valuable during the late Middle Ages since it came from the yellow and red threads from the *Crocus Sativus*. Cooks used saffron in foodstuffs to provide flavour and colour.[9] Even though saffron was well-known in high-status circles, the Middle English Dictionary (MED) features only one other reference to saffron-coloured hair from the Middle English corpus.[10] The absence of other references to saffron-coloured physical properties suggests that comparing saffron to a character's hair colour rarely occurred. Furthermore, the example shows that the poem's readers must have been familiar with the spice to assign the correct colour to Sir Thopas's hair. The reference would miss the mark entirely had no one been familiar with saffron, resulting in the possibility that some readers would have interpreted Sir Thopas's hair as, for example, green.

The example demonstrates the value of including research on specific botanical matters within the Middle English romances. Moreover, it demonstrates that researching fictional narratives in relation to the contemporary presence and use of botanical matters can increase our understanding of late medieval English society.

This thesis answers the following overarching research question: to what extent could Middle English romances' readers have been familiar with the botanic matters referenced within these tales?

This question will be answered in three chapters based on the following sub-questions:

- What distinctions (symbolic, non-symbolic, or a combination of both) can be made within the references to botanical matters within Middle English romance texts? Are there any specific mentions that function purely as symbols (as opposed to instances where practical knowledge is required to interpret the symbol)? What does this show about the relevance of non-romance and non-textual sources of knowledge?

[9] The use of saffron will be further elaborated upon in chapter 2.
[10] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. 'saf(f)rŏun n.', accessed December 17, 2020, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED38255. This entry shows another hair-colour related reference in The Seven Sages MS Bal 354.

- How are the botanical matters referenced in the Middle English romance present in non-romance type genres such as other literary genres, practical manuals, and record type texts?
- How could research based on contemporary non-romance textual material shed light on the readers' possible familiarity with the discussed botanical matter? Furthermore, what can the botanical material from the non-romance texts convey about the readers of the Middle English romances?
- How do the referenced botanical matters from the Middle English romance appear in archaeobotanical contexts?
- In what way can interdisciplinary research with archaeology contribute to understanding the place of the botanical matter in the daily lives of contemporary readers? What could the archaeobotanical results discussed within this thesis indicate about the contemporary readers?
- To what extent can the botanical matter within the selected Middle English romance texts be deemed a realistic representation of the contemporary botanical and environmental situation? How does this relate to the familiarity of the reader with in-text references?

This thesis answers these questions based on a close reading of six Middle English romances: *Lay le Freine*, *Sir Thopas*, *The Knight's Tale*, *Athelston*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, and *The Romaunt of the Rose*. The poems and tales were selected from the corpus of Middle English romances using the Database of Middle English romances from the University of York.[11] The selection depended on whether the texts contained botanical matters. Further selection depended on whether the narratives contained more than one relevant botanical reference with a symbolic, non-symbolic, or combined function. Texts were not selected when the texts contained botanical matters without a function or relevance to the narrative. The selected texts were analysed using close reading. The results from the close reading can be found in the appendix. The final selection includes various narratives centred around different themes and settings, which allow for a broad exploration of botanical matter included within these different narratives. For instance, narratives that contain a garden are more likely to contain a great diversity of botanical matter such as fruits than an urban setting, as demonstrated by *The Romaunt of the Rose* and *Athelston*.

[11] "Database of Middle English Romances," University of York, accessed September 4, 2020, www.middleenglishromance.org.uk.

This subsection elucidates the variety between the narratives and explains the relevance of the selected texts' diversity for discussing the research question. The section contains a summary per selected text before the discussion.

Lay le Freine is a Breton Lay composed in Anglo-Norman by Marie de France in the twelfth century. It was translated into English by an unknown translator in the early fourteenth century.[12] The poem centres around its main character: le Freine. A woman gives birth to girl twins after rebuking another woman for giving birth to twins, which is supposedly a sign of adultery. The mother wrapped one baby a blanket and gave her a golden ring. After this, the midwife left one girl on convent grounds in an ash tree's branches to avoid a scandal. Known as le Freine, the abbess's raised the baby as her niece. Her beauty becomes of such renown that a wealthy knight (Sir Guroun) visits the convent, and they fall in love. Le Freine becomes his mistress and becomes well-loved among Sir Guroun's retainers. Sir Guroun's knight's usher him to marry someone of status and lineage, and they suggest Le Codre (the twin sister). As the wedding of le Codre and Sir Guroun approaches, le Freine acts willingly as a servant and makes up the marriage bed using her old blanket. When the mother enters the room, she recognises the blanket and admits to having given birth to twins. The mother's admittance reveals the truth, which enables le Freine to become Sir Guroun's spouse. Le Codre is said to marry another man of wealth.

The edited version of *The Awntyrs off Arthur* used in this thesis is from a manuscript dated to 1450-1475.[13] The poem centres around characters from the Arthurian legends and starts with Arthur calling for a hunt in Inglewood forest. Guinevere is present, and Gawain is there as her escort. As the hunt progresses, the two remain alone in the forest, where a ghostly figure confronts Guinevere. The figure reveals herself as Guinevere's mother. She warns Guinevere to remain virtuous — or else Guinevere will end up in torment like her mother. Following this warning, the mother entrusts Gawain with the knowledge that Arthur will fall. After recounting to Arthur what had happened, all return home. A knight (Galeron) enters the room during a banquet and claims to have been unjustly treated by Arthur (who had taken his lands and had gifted them to Gawain). After a challenge, Galeron and Gawain fight, and as Gawain is almost about the win, Guinevere

[12] Anne Laskaya, and Eve Salisbury, eds., "Lay le Freine: Introduction," in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).
[13] Thomas Hahn, ed., "The Awntyrs off Arthur: Introduction," in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

intercedes on Galeron's behalf (at the behest of his spouse). Gawain divides the land between himself and Galeron. Arthur knights Galeron as a member of the round table afterwards. Meanwhile, Guinevere contacts the clergy in Britain to ask them to perform masses on her mother's behalf to lift her torment.

The Knight's Tale is part of the *Canterbury Tales*, which was written by Chaucer in the second half of the fourteenth century. Even though the tale takes place in a Greek city, the tale contains many references to Roman mythology and practices. As survivors of the war between Thebes and Athens, Arcite and Palamon (both from royal blood) are condemned to perpetual imprisonment by Theseus duke of Athens. They see Emily (Theseus's sister-in-law), and both fall in love with her from their prison window. Arcite is released under the condition that he does not return to Athens. Nevertheless, he enters the Athenian court under an alias and serves the royal family. Palamon remains captive for many years until he escapes his cell. Encountering each other in the woodlands, they almost fight to the death when Theseus breaks them up and decides to end the dispute by hosting a tournament; the tournament winner shall win Emily's hand. In the days leading towards the tournament, each interested party visits the shrine of one of the gods to obtain their support in the tournament's outcome. Arcite wins the tournament, yet he succumbs to his wounds. After a time, Emily is given to Palamon in marriage.

Sir Thopas is another one of the *Canterbury Tales*. An untalented narrator tells his poem; it contains numerous clichés and courtly mistakes—so many that the reeve deems it a terrible poem and prohibits the narrator from continuing. Sir Thopas was a handsome knight in Flanders, who dressed well and was loved by many maidens. Since he was chaste and not a lecher, he righteously rejected these maidens. One day, he falls asleep under a tree and dreams of an elf-queen. He sets out on a quest to find her. In his search for her, he encounters a giant knight. They decide that they should fight before he could encounter his elf queen. Since Sir Thopas has no armour on, he returns to his estate. After first having an elaborate dinner, he dons his armour and rides away. The story is cut short by the host, who can no longer stand the poorly composed rhyme.

Scholars of *The Romaunt of the Rose* usually divide it into two fragments—the first 5811 lines containing the continuous translation of the first 5154 lines from the original poem.[14] The second fragment does not continue from the last line of the original and leaves about 5500 lines

[14] Olivia Robinson, "Re-Contextualising the Romaunt of the Rose: Glasgow, University Library MS Hunter 409 and the Roman De La Rose," *English (London)* 64, no. 244 (2015): 29.

out of the translation, starting again at line 10.680.[15] The narrative's first fragment revolves around the narrator's exploration of paradise and his discovery of the rose. The entire narrative is of such magnitude that a completely encompassing summary is too lengthy. The poem starts with the narrator recounts a dream of himself entering a walled garden. On this wall, there are portrayals of vices. After entering the garden (or rather a paradise), he meets personified virtues. The narrator encounters Cupid, who follows the narrator throughout the garden until he encounters the well of narcissus. In his explorations of the garden, the narrator encounters a rose that becomes the object of his desire.

After reaching the rose, one of the vices immediately creates an impenetrable fortress around it, keeping the narrator from his love. This first fragment contains critical notes on courting and religion. The second fragment mainly contains a confession by False-seeming on the dishonesty and misbehaviour of men. It functions as a didactic component within the poem as false-seeming answers the questions of Amour. He also focusses on the falseness of the clergy regarding their behaviour to their parishioners. At the start of this fragment, the god of love plans to attack the fortress surrounding the rose. At the end of the narrative, False-seeming absolves the vices of wicked-tongue when he chooses to confess.

Athelston is a late fourteenth-century text that revolves around themes of loyalty and justice.[16] Four messengers meet and become sworn brothers. As Athelston becomes king, he enhances his brothers' status. After many years, one brother travels to court and false names another a traitor to Athelston. Enraged, Athelston calls for the accused and his family, after which he throws them all into prison. His pregnant wife attempts to intervene, and he kicks her in the stomach, which causes her to lose the child. The last brother attempts to make Athelston see reason, and even though he initially fails, the prospect of ex-communication makes Athelston agree to a trial by fire. After the entire family passes the trail and the wife gives birth to a son, the real traitor is called to court under the guise that the falsely named brother was dead. After failing his trail, the traitor admits guilt. Athelston condemns him to be hanged at the gallows.

As shown above, there are similarities between the narratives; all explore themes of justice and revolve around truth, loyalty, and virtue. In addition, most poems also contain (to a certain

[15] Robinson, "Re-contextualising The Romaunt of the Rose," 29.
[16] Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, eds., "Athelston: Introduction," in Four *romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, eds. Graham Drake, Eve Salisbury, and Ronald B. Herzman (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

extent) similar religious and moral messages. However, there are also differences between the texts' themes and settings, which allow for the exploration of the Middle English romance readers' familiarity with a broad range of botanical material. The setting of *The Romaunt of the Rose*, for example, includes more botanical materials than the urban and courtly setting of *Athelston*.

Furthermore, each tale contains botanical references that allow for comparisons. *Lay le Freine* and *The Romaunt of the Rose* allow comparison between translation and original. *The Knight's Tale* allows for a similar comparison with its inspirational texts. Lastly, *Sir Thopas*, *Athelston*, and *The Awntyrs off Arthur* all provide the opportunity to compare non-textual situations and environments to their textual representations. [17] The analyses that result from these comparisons enable discussions on the cultural adaptation and the representation of contemporary English natural reality in Middle English romances. This representation could lead to the conclusion that the Middle English romances reader could only understand some references to botanical matters because of the associations with particular matters in English society instead of French society.

This thesis consists of three chapters based on the sub-research questions presented earlier in this introduction.

Chapter 1 explores the botanical matters from the selected Middle English romances. This chapter starts with a compact introduction to Middle English romance in general, followed by a presentation of this thesis's theoretical foundation. The second part of the chapter contains a discussion of the selected texts' botanical material. This discussion focusses on instances of botanical matter that occur most frequently within all selected texts. It also aims to separate solely symbolic references from symbolic references that need an active knowledge of the matter to be fully understood.

[17] *Sir Thopas*, ed. Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 212-217. *The Knight's Tale*, ed. Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 37-66. *Lay le Freine*, eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1995). *The Romaunt of the Rose*, ed. Walter Skeat, in *Chaucer's Works, Volume 1 (of 7) -- Romaunt of the Rose; Minor Poems* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1899), Gutenberg Project. *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, ed. Thomas Hahn, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales* (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1995). *Athelston*, eds. Ronald B Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, in *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, eds. Graham Drake, Eve Salisbury and Ronald B. Herzman (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

Chapter 2 focusses on the non-symbolically functioning botanical matters from the selected texts. Comparisons between the non-symbolic references from the Middle English romances and entries from non-romance texts explore the familiarity of the Middle English romance reader with botanical matters in non-textual different life aspects. The first section discusses two instances of non-symbolically functioning botanical matters within the selected Middle English romances. Following this section, the chapter sets out to compare the results from the previous chapter's close reading to information from non-romance Middle English texts. Therefore, the second section discusses the position of botanical matter in daily life through four non-romance texts: *The Parliament of Fowls*, *The Forme of Cury*, *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*, and *The Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*.[18] These texts are of differing levels of fiction, and they include other literary genres, cooking recipes, medicinal recipes, and city records. They range from those heavily relying on imaginative events and characters (*The Parliament of Fowls*) to those not dependent on imagination and concern coeval events (the *Letter-Books*). Together, these texts shed light on the presence of botanical matter in different facets of daily life.

[18] *The Parliament of Fowls*, ed. Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 385-394. Hieatt, Constance Bartlett, and Sharon Butler, eds., "IV: *Forme of Cury*," in *Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (including the Forme of Cury)*, Early English Text Society Supplementary Series, no. 8 (London [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1985). *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: A, 1275-1298*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1899). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/vola. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: D, 1309-1314*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1902). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/vold. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: E, 1314-1337*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1903). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/vole. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: F, 1337-1352*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1904). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/volf. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: G, 1352-1374*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1905). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/volg. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H, 1375-1399*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1907). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/volh. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: I, 1400-1422*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1909). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/voli. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: K, Henry VI*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/volk. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: L, Edward IV-Henry VII*, ed. Reginald R Sharpe. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1912). *British History Online*, accessed October 17, 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/voll. "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* from Wellcome MS 537," ed. Faye M. Getz, in *Healing and Society in Medieval English. A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, Wisconsin Publications in the History of Science and Medicine, no. 8 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 1-369. London, Wellcome Library, MS537. Accessed October 10, 2020, www.wellcomelibrary.org/item/b19558193

The inclusion of the non-romance textual material also provides an overview of different uses for the botanical matters discussed within the Middle English romance. An example is Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, which contains a list of tree species and their uses for building and object production. Furthermore, *The Forme of Cury* and *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* provide different uses of botanical materials in professional business-related circumstances. The addition of these two texts demonstrates the contemporary connection between their two seemingly disconnected professions. Lastly, the *Letter-Books* demonstrate the economic and socio-political complications surrounding the presence of botanical matters in London. The discussion of the contents of the *Letter-Books* allows for the exploration of the role and influence of botanical matters in daily life.

Chapter 3 demonstrates the benefits and limitations of incorporating archaeobotanical research within studies of medieval literature. It starts with a short introduction to archaeobotanical research, including its benefits and limitations based on present-day economic and political factors.[19] The remainder of the chapter consists of two sections. The first section concerns fruits, herbs, and spices and discusses their presence through archaeobotanical results from several sites. The following subsection connects trees and bushes from the Middle English romances to their presence in archaeobotanical results, which enables a reflection on contemporary woodland and forest composition, and woodland management. This section's conclusion discusses environmental realism (or the realistic representation of the contemporary environment) within the romance environments based on the archaeobotanical results. The discussion sheds light on the familiarity with specific tree species and their functions as presented in daily life and in-text events.

In conclusion, this thesis will answer the research question by incorporating textual material and archaeological results. Subsequently, the conclusion reflects on the benefits and limitations of the incorporation of these research fields into one research project. This reflection will also focus on the benefits and limitations of including research on different text-types while the texts share similar topics.

It can be difficult to determine how familiar people in the past were with a given subject. Nevertheless, this thesis aims to shed light on the Middle English romances' readers familiarity with the botanical matters from the selected texts. Analysis of the realistic representation of

[19] The archaeobotanical results consulted for this chapter result from archaeological excavations located in England.

botanical matters is critical for understanding the concept of familiarity since an audience can only be familiar with a subject when it is recognisable to them. For instance, some botanical matters (such as *Sir Thopas*'s saffron) reflect what an English audience was familiar with, in contrast to depicting continental realities presented in inspirational or original texts. Such a reflection demonstrates the cultural adaptation of botanical matter in Middle English romances, which allows for further elaboration of the readers' familiarity with these texts' botanical matters.

Furthermore, this thesis contributes to discussions regarding the type of people who read Middle English romances. Scholarship argues that laypeople, including the lower aristocracy, were the Middle English romances' primary audience.[20] However, this thesis argues that its audience also included the higher aristocracy prior to the fifteenth century. Ultimately, this thesis explores a niche of literary scholarship that encompasses the role of botanical matters in the multiple facets of the lives of contemporary readers of Middle English romances.

[20] Eckert, "Introduction," 14-15.

CHAPTER 1 – ROMANCING NATURE: BOTANY IN MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

This chapter aims to establish which botanical matters are present within Middle English romance texts. In addition, it aims to categorise the mentioned botanical matters based on whether they are symbolic or non-symbolic in nature. Following this initial division, this chapter focusses on the symbolically functioning botanical matters, whereas chapter 2 discusses the non-symbolically functioning matters.

This chapter sets out by briefly discussing the Middle English romance genre in general. The following section presents this thesis's theoretical background. The final section of this chapter discusses several instances of botanical references collected through the close reading of the selected poems: *Lay le Freine, Sir Thopas, The Knight's Tale, The Romaunt of the Rose, The Awntyrs of Arthur* and *Athelston.* This section consists of two parts; the first discusses botanical references occurring in the works of 1 author. The second part discusses the different types of symbolic references; those that function independently versus those that require pre-existing knowledge for interpreting the symbol (extra-symbolic references). Ultimately, this section argues that Middle English romances reflect cultural adaptation regarding the botanical matters from these texts as some botanical matters and in-text situations are only relevant to an English audience.

The Middle English romance: a compact introduction

The term 'Middle English romance' suggests a firmly set, bound body of textual material, yet this is not the case. Instead, the Middle English romance genre consists of an extremely varied group of narratives containing many different elements.[21] Variation within this genre builds on the genre's inherent historical broadness and the considerable difference between modern understanding of romance in contrast to medieval associations with the genre.[22]

Associations of contemporary readers of Middle English romances determined the inherent historical broadness of the genre.[23] Whereas present-day readers associate romances with romantic

[21] Ashton, "Medieval English Romance in Context," 1-3. Ad Putter, and Jane Gilbert, *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.
[22] Liu, "Middle English Romances Prototype Genre," 335-337.
[23] Kathryn Hume, "The Formal Nature of Middle English Romance," *Philological Quarterly* 53 (1974): 158. However, the inherent broadness of the genre is expanded by the addition of texts that reflect the modern-day understanding of romance. This causes for works such as *The Knight's Tale* to be considered a romance, even though it was never named as such by its author or other contemporary reader as noted by Liu (Liu, "Middle English romance as Prototype Genre," 345).

love tales, medieval readers treated this association as one of many. Various contemporary works of medieval literature contain lists of contemporary narratives categorised as romances at the time. These lists contain narratives with a romantic plot and narratives with romance language (e.g., French) source material. Aside from subject and language-based assignments, other narratives on these lists concern historical or legendary figures (e.g., Octavian, Charlemagne, Achilles, and Hector), which (in a modern perspective) should reside in a historical genre.[24] The inclusion of topics that would seem to be outside of the romance sphere by present-day standards complicates the verification of what particular late medieval texts contemporary readers considered romances. Except for these lists in popular contemporary narratives, no source itemises all elements that make a late medieval romance.

The diversity of topics that appear within the Middle English romance genre suggests that these texts can contain a wide arrange of motifs and focus points, including consideration of position, family complications, realistic, supernatural, secrets and outward appearances, trajectories of exile (and return), love, and battle or crisis scenes.[25] To further complicate matters, specific motifs and focus points are altered or used depending on the narrative's subgenre, theme, or setting. For instance, not all romance narratives require the supernatural element, as seen when comparing *The Awntyrs off Arthur* and *Lay le Freine*. The evidence above demonstrates that the contemporary reader's associations with romances influence what works make a Middle English romance genre. Since their perception of the genre is key to understanding the genre's varied body of texts, it is valuable to elucidate on the readers' circumstances that, in turn, influence their interpretation of these texts.

The environment in Middle English romance

Included in the circumstances that would influence a reader's interpretation of a text is the environment. Even though scholars generally view environments depicted in Middle English romances as an idealised representation of natural reality, recent research proved that these environments have a realistic foundation.[26] For instance, although *The Knight's Tale* takes place

[24] Although Yin Liu discusses several of these texts, close reading also resulted in the discovery of such a small list within *Sir Thopas*. Liu, "Middle English romances Prototype Genre," 342-346.
[25] Ashton, "Medieval English Romance in Context," 1-3.
[26] E.g., Howes, "Inglewood Forest," 185-89.

in ancient Greece, it contains a scene that includes a medieval jousting tournament. Although not necessarily related to the environment, it exemplifies a reflection of reality within this poem.

Acceptance of realism within Middle English romance poems depends on the analysed elements within the environment – such as forest, woodlands, pastures, or gardens – and whether the research includes general descriptions of the environment. In addition, research on realism could also include depictions of possible cultural adaptation, as hinted at above in *The Knight's Tale* example. Furthermore, it also depends on which narratives the research includes to analyse the representation of realism.[27]

Scholars can use ecocriticism to explore the environment in textual sources. Ecocriticism explores the human/nature relationship by analysing (concepts of) nature and its effects on history and culture.[28] The relationship can concern perceptions of nature and the effects of these perceptions throughout history and cultures, including the perception of late medieval authors on their environment.[29] Although the medieval authors were no environmentalists, they were aware of their environments and ecological issues.[30] Although nature in historical texts often functioned as imagery or a symbol, nature could also "[…] function as a natural history, imply socio-political criticism, express nostalgia, or evoke an emotional response."[31] This function of nature frequently returns within the selected romances (as demonstrated later in this chapter and chapter 2).

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the application of ecocriticism to medieval literature is a relatively new development. This development has allowed for the application of an ecocritical lens to medieval Spanish literature and late medieval English literature.[32] For instance, Gillian Rudd explored the human-nature relationship in late medieval English literature, using an ecocritical lens to analyse terminology (such as 'feldes') used in representations of the environment in these texts.[33] In contrast, this thesis uses ecocriticism as a foundation to study

[27] Ryan Harper, "The Representation of Woodland Space in Middle English Popular Narrative" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rochester, 2012). Harper explored the differences between a poem of Chretien, and its Middle English Translation, and found that the latter was more generalized on the account of specific descriptions of natural scenes. However, Howes focused on a different narrative altogether, and did find elements of realism within such narratives.
[28] Connie Scarborough, "Introduction," in *Inscribing the Environment: Ecocritical Approaches to Medieval Spanish Literature*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, no.13 (De Gruyter, 2013), 1. Clark, "Introduction," 4. Rudd, *Greenery*, 5-10.
[29] Clark, "Introduction," 4.
[30] Scarborough, "Introduction," 1. Schildgen, "Reception, Elegy, and Eco-Awareness," 88-96.
[31] Schildgen, "Reception, Elegy, and Eco-Awareness," 86.
[32] Rudd, *Greenery*. Connie Scarborough, *Inscribing the Environment: Ecocritical Approaches to Medieval Spanish Literature*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, no.13 (De Gruyter, 2013).
[33] Rudd, *Greenery*, 13-15.

explicitly mentioned botanical matters in Middle English romances. This study allows constructing part of the human-nature relationship in the late Middle Ages concerning diet, woodland management, representations of the environment, and trade.

Barbara Bolt's proposed eco-theory of the Middle English romance genre is closely related to ecocriticism. She argues that natural settings (wilderness, forests, or gardens) are the connecting feature of the Middle English romance texts rather than the genres (e.g., romance or Breton Lai) within the romance genre.[34] Bolt explains this using (among other texts) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, noting that it should be considered a wilderness and forest poem due to its setting in different parts of the poem.[35] She explains that focus on the natural settings within the romance texts allows for the recognition of the complexities of the natural world and the influences of these settings on the characters within these texts.[36] Application of eco-theory on *The Knight's Tale* demonstrates that this is a wilderness, forest, and garden poem all in one. Aside from discussing eco-theory, Bolt poses that nature was an essential part of contemporary life, and the struggle to cope with it is reflected in the two visions of nature: one being safe and lawful (e.g., a royal forest as presented in *The Awntyrs off Arthur* or *The Knight's Tale*), the other being dangerous and possibly harmful (e.g., the description of Mars' forest in *The Knight's Tale*).[37] In contrast, Bolt describes a garden setting as being a relatively safe and controlled environment. However, the characters are more likely to indulge in matters of love because of the absence of forest or wilderness influences.[38]

Even though spaces such as woodlands, forests, pastures, and gardens are a product of the author's imagination, some narratives are more realistic in representing nature than others. For instance, research proved that representations of woodlands and forest changed during the translation of French romances into Middle English to more closely reflect the English contemporary reality.[39] In the translations, the woodland scenario often went from wild towards a combined setting including the old wilderness and newer tended, managed woodlands or forests of the fourteenth century and later.[40] Although scholars deem these later woodlands less realistic

[34] Bolt, "Of Wilderness, Forest, and Garden," 1-17.
[35] Bolt, "Of Wilderness, Forest, and Garden," 8.
[36] Bolt, "Of Wilderness, Forest, and Garden," 8.
[37] Bolt, "Of Wilderness, Forest, and Garden," 21-60.
[38] Bolt, "Of Wilderness, Forest, and Garden," 107-108.
[39] Bolt, "Of Wilderness, Forest, and Garden," 21-60. Harper, "The Representation of Woodland Space," 39-40. Howes, "Inglewood Forest," 185-89.
[40] Harper, "The Representation of Woodland Space," 38. Howes, "Inglewood Forest," 185-89.

and more generalistic than the earlier twelfth century described woodlands, from for instance Chretien de Troyes, the adaptations to these scenes do reflect the contemporary woodland scenario.[41] *The Knight's Tale* contains such an example of an adapted woodland scenario. After Palamon escapes from prison, he moves into the grove, where he comes upon Arcite. Their encounter results in a fight, which leads to the depiction of a dangerous and lawless wilderness enabled by this scene's wilderness setting. Continuation of the scene remedies the grove's lawlessness when duke Theseus interferes and halts the fight. His presence as a duke reflects the socio-political forest scenes of the fourteenth century. Theseus does not allow the fight to continue under unlawful circumstances; instead, he arranges for a tournament to determine the fight's winner.

Based on the previous discussion, there is precedence that for focussing on nature within Middle English romance.[42] This thesis uses an ecocritical lens to discuss the reflections of nature in Middle English romance in relation to botanical matters in contemporary readers' everyday lives. As this section demonstrates, there has been no research to date on specific botanical matters in the Middle English romances on the scale intended for this thesis. Since previous research proved the presence of the human-nature relationship in Middle English romance texts, this thesis contributes to this discussion through the in-depth discussion of the specifically mentioned botanical matters within these texts.

Occurrences of botany in selected Middle English romances

This section starts by first discussing Chaucer's works with a focus on their botanical references. Following this is a discussion regarding the symbolic function of the mentioned botanical matters. This discussion also allows contrasting botanical matters that have a solely symbolic function to those that require pre-existing non-symbolic knowledge of a species in order to interpret or understand it.

Additions and omissions: Chaucer's botanical references

Three texts contain considerably higher numbers of botanical references than the other texts under discussion: *Sir Thopas*, *The Knight's Tale* and *The Romaunt of the Rose*. Chaucer wrote these

[41] Harper, "The Representation of Woodland Space," 37-38. Eckert, "Introduction," 14.
[42] i.e., Joseph Taylor, "Arthurian Biopolitics: Sovereignty and Ecology in Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 59, no. 2 (2017): 182-208.

narratives; two are part of the Canterbury tales (*Sir Thopas* and *The Knight's Tale*), and one he (partly) translated (*The Romaunt of the Rose)*.[43] In contrast to the other texts, these three narratives show an abundance of botanical matters.

This section places considerable significance on one author's works because of Chaucer's alterations in the reinterpretation of *The Knight's Tale*'s inspirational text *Teseida*, and the translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose*'s original *Roman de la Rose*. Arguably, these alterations could result from the cultural adaptation discussed above; his changes reflect his contemporary environmental circumstances. The discussions below demonstrate the significance of these changes within the contexts of the poems, and the contemporary late medieval environmental circumstances in which Chaucer and his readers found themselves. Chapter 3 further elaborates on these environmental circumstances.

Comparisons between the Middle English *The Romaunt of The Rose* and the French *Roman de la Rose* indicated that Chaucer took the liberty to add different tree species (e.g., linden and poplar) to the already extensive list of trees in the *Roman de la Rose*. In addition, Chaucer omitted the hazel tree during the translation process, although it was present in the original poem. Chaucer was familiar with the hazel tree (as proven by its presence in *The Knight's Tale*), so the omission of this tree from Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose* was likely not caused by lack of knowledge; rather, this omission could be due to the tree species' cultural symbolic interpretations.

As noted in the introduction, *The Romaunt of the Rose*'s setting is a walled garden. As discussed through Bolt's eco-theory, garden settings are places of relative control in which characters often indulge in matters of love. This interpretation is the case in *The Romaunt of the Rose*. The significance of cultural interpretation arises when attempting to elucidate the hazel's replacement with the linden tree. While representations of love settings in Northern French culture include the hazel tree, the linden tree is present in similar settings within late medieval cultures in Germany and the Netherlands. Therefore, the hazel's substitution with the linden tree could

[43] Laura J. Campbell, "Reinterpretation and Resignification: A Study of the English Translation of Le Roman De La Rose," *Neophilologus* 93, no. 2 (2009): 325-38. Xingzhong Li, "Metrical Evidence: Did Chaucer Translate The Romaunt of the Rose?," in *Studies in the History of the English Language IV: Empirical and Analytical Advances in Studies in the History of the English Language Change IV*, eds. Susan M. Fitzmaurice and Donka Minkova (Berlin, New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 2008), 155-180.

indicate an instance of cultural adaptation of *The Romaunt of the Rose* since the English audience could have had different associations with either tree compared to a French audience.[44]

Similar additions of botanical species are present in the listing of trees that make the grove and funeral pyre in *The Knight's Tale*. The main body of this pyre consists of the same trees mentioned in Boccaccio's *Teseida*. However, Chaucer adds birch, chestnut, thorn, and cornel/dogwood to the trees from the grove that make the funeral pyre. Recent scholarship argues that Chaucer used the grove's expanded composition to highlight the needless felling of the entire grove and stress the environmental devastation left after the funeral.[45] The addition of emotional attachment and compassion issued through the grove's expansion arguably presents different cultural values and reflects coeval socio-political changes. The management of royal forests was an important political issue in the thirteenth century, and due to population growth, matters concerning reallocation of the forests lands continued into the fourteenth century.[46] Changes such as the shift in, or rather leniency towards, forest management from the late fourteenth century might have caused Chaucer to insert the expansion to create a sense of lament.[47] Even though further exploration of the lament in Chaucer's work is outside the scope of this thesis, Chaucer's depiction of the different botanical species proves valuable for further research combined with non-romance textual material (chapter 2) and archaeobotanical results (chapter 3).

Although *Sir Thopas* has no original or inspirational text, its the seemingly useless mentions of botanical matters (e.g., saffron, liquorice, or cumin) are significantly informative concerning contemporary known and used herbs and spices in culinary practices. Most importantly, these botanical matters are mainly associated with royal cuisine. The culinary relation between herbs and spices is more elaborately explored further in chapter 2. However, not all matters are related to culinary activities, yet these applications of botanical matter are not less critical in comparison and are beneficial for the understanding of the value of some botanical matters in late medieval English society. The poem names nutmeg, for instance, as put into a

[44] A. T. Hatto, "The Lime-Tree and Early German, Goliard and English Lyric Poetry," *The Modern Language Review* 49, no. 2 (1954): 193-209.
[45] Piero Boitani, "Chaucer and Lists of Trees," *Reading Medieval Studies* 2 (1976): 28-44. Grimes, "Arboreal Politics in *The Knight's Tale,*" 360.
[46] Charles R. Young, *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 66, 117-122. John Langton, "Forest Fences: Enclosures in a Pre-enclosure Landscape," *Landscape History* 35, no. 1 (2014): 5-7. DOI: 10.1080/01433768.2014.916902.
[47] Eric Weiskott, "Chaucer the Forester: The Friar's Tale, Forest History, and Officialdom," *The Chaucer Review* 47, no. 3 (2013): 324.

clothing press or storage trunk—possibly for its scent. Although a low-status household was unlikely to use nutmeg in such a manner, such use could indicate why – during the fourteenth century – a high-status individual was more likely to be familiar with the spice than a lower-status individual.

The poem also contains other species such as liquorice, zedoary, and clove. However, readers of the poem must have been familiar with these matters for the references to make sense. The example of nutmeg indicates that familiarity also depends on whether an individual had access to the matter. Aspects of material and availability are explored further in the following chapters. Although the poem appears to contain many empty references without relevance to the plot, these references are significant in understanding fourteenth-century English society.

Understanding the symbol: symbolic and extra-symbolic botanical references

As already addressed, the botanical references that serve as a dataset for this thesis stem from six different Middle English romance texts. During the close reading, each specific botanical matter (e.g., oak tree, sage, and rose) encountered in the texts was individually documented in excel per text. The excel sheet further includes, per botanical matter per text, the Middle English name, modern name, scientific name, context and the line number(s) that include the mention. The list excluded unspecified terms such as ‘flowers’ and ‘trees’. The entire list can be found in the appendix.

As can be seen in table 1.1, 22 botanical references are present in more than one source. The list contains a combination of (fruit) trees, bushes, flowers, and spices. The trees are most abundantly present in table 1.1 and the extensive list in the appendix. Following the tree species in frequency and diversity are the herbs, spices, and lastly flowers. Flowers are least diverse in presence possibly due to the motifs and symbolism involved in the usage of flowers in late medieval literature, as further elaborated upon below. Even though a flower is sometimes assigned a colour, the specific plant to which it belongs is often not mentioned, or remains considerably vague (e.g., blossom on a branch). The following section uses the most frequently occurring species from table 1.1 to discuss the references’ symbolic function.

In some cases, understanding the botanical matters as symbols or imagery does not require any knowledge or prior familiarity with the matter at hand. These references will be treated here as symbolic references. For instance, one would not necessarily need to know what a laurel tree looks like in real life in order to understand a text that uses this tree as an indicator of a character’s

virtues. However, other botanical symbols require additional knowledge or personal familiarity with the material to successfully interpret the symbol. These symbols are described here as extra-symbolic references. The reader cannot succeed in interpreting these references without applying non-symbolic knowledge. For instance, if a text depicts a cherry tree's bloom in winter as a miracle, this miraculous event can only be understood if the reader is familiar with a cherry tree's life cycle.

Table 1-1: Botanical references from more than one source

Middle English	**Modern English**	**Poem**
Lily/lylie/lylye/lelé/lilie	Lily	*Sir Thopas*, *The Knight's Tale*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*
Rose	Rose	*Sir Thopas*, *The Knight's Tale*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*
Laurer/lorer/lorre/loreres	Laurel	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Ash/ashe/assh(e)/ashshen	Ash	*Lay le Freine*, *Sir Thopas*, *The Romaunt of the*
Ook/oke	Oak	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Lynde/lindes	Linden	*The Knight's Tale*, *Athelston*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Hawethorn/Hawe	Hawthorn	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Elm(es)	Elm	*The Knight's Tale*, *Athelston*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Mazelyn/maples/mapul	Maple	*The Knight's Tale*, *Sir Thopas*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Chyryes/cheryse	Cherry	*Athelston*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Hazle/hasel	Hazel	*Lay le Freine*, *The Knight's Tale*
Lyrcoryce/licoryce	Liquorice	*Sir Thopas*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Cetewale/Setewale	Zedoary	*Sir Thopas*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Clowe-gylofre/clow-gelofre	Clove	*Sir Thopas*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Notemuge/notemigges	Nutmeg	*Sir Thopas*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Ciprees/cipres	Cypress	*Sir Thopas*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Asp(e)	Trembling asp	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Popler	Poplar	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Plane	Plane	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Chasteyn/chesteynes	Chestnut	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Ew	Yew	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*
Boxtree/box	Box	*The Knight's Tale*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*

Symbolic botanical references

As introduced above, some botanical matters function as a symbol. These botanical matters with a purely symbolic function often stem from Greek and Roman literature, as a part of

metamorphoses, before becoming adopted by the medieval church as symbols of Christianity.[48] Most of the Antique associations and flower personifications became linked to (female) virtues and abstract qualities in the Middle Ages.[49] These virtues (or qualities) became connected to the flowers' qualities and appearances.[50] For instance, the rose became the symbol of passion and joy and was often associated with beauty, youth, and love.[51] Those associations appear in all selected romances, in which the author or translator applies a rose-coloured skin to characters who are considered beautiful and young or are the subject of love. Table 1.1 also shows that lily and laurel symbolism frequently occur within the selected texts. Since interpreting these plants is more complicated than the rose, the paragraphs below discuss their symbolic value in more detail.

The lily often represents chastity and purity. [52] In literary works, it functions as an indicator of a virtuous character.[53] This function applies to, for instance, Guinevere's mother's account in *The Awntyrs off Arthur*. In it, she recounts that her face looked like a lily in bloom before her corruption by vices.[54] Such a comparison indicates that lily imagery was primarily applied to connect a character to Christian virtues rather than attribute colour to a recipient. *The Awntyrs of Arthur* demonstrates that non-botanical matters assign colour when religious implications are unnecessary, as demonstrated by Guinevere's mule described as milky white. Compared to the explanation above, the lily-coloured surcoat in *Sir Thopas* supports this poem's satirical nature. Since a surcoat cannot have human virtues of chastity and purity, the reference only enhances the faulty use of reference material in this poem. In contrast, the application of lily to the surcoat could be a pun on its own, indicating that the surcoat was yet unsoiled and unused, which would reflect poorly on Sir Thopas's knightly character. Chapter 2 further discusses similar faulty comparisons concerning Sir Thopas's armour.

[48] Beverly Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification," *Poetics Today* 10, no. 4 (1989): 683-688.
[49] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics," 685-686. Sara Ritchey, *Holy Matter: Changing Perceptions of the Material World in Late Medieval Christianity* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 45-46.
[50] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics," 686.
[51] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics," 686.
[52] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics," 686.
[53] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics," 686.
[54] *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, ed. Thomas Hahn, l. 162. All quotations from this text are from *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, ed. Thomas Hahn, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven romances and tales* (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

In a fourteenth-century French text (known as the *Ovide Moralisé*), the laurel tree functions as a symbol for holiness and chastity.[55] Instead of metamorphosing into a laurel tree, the translator of *Ovide Moralisé* poses that Daphne dies beneath a laurel tree's protection to retain her chastity.[56] This medieval symbolic value of the laurel tree is present in *The Awntyrs off Arthur*. In this poem, Guinevere and Gawain remain underneath a laurel tree in Inglewood forest on two occasions. Since the laurel tree is not native to England, these characters' placement underneath a laurel tree has a symbolic value that arguable indicates their chaste character. This placement can arguably be another indicator that sets Guinevere apart from her tormented mother.

In contrast, *The Knight's Tale* presents another symbolic interpretation of the laurel tree. Although the poem is in some instances subject to change according to cultural adaptation and socio-political events (as can be seen in the previous section), the text retains the classical association with the laurel as a symbol for a victorious return. Use of the laurel in such fashion applies to when duke Theseus wears a laurel garland upon returning from war. Chapter 2 further elaborates on the symbolic value of the laurel.

Extra-symbolic botanical references

As presented above, the botanical matters that function as indicators of character in Middle English romances often appear in pre-Christian literature. Interpretation of these symbols requires no familiarity with the botanical matter itself. However, some botanical matters that function as symbols benefit from additional knowledge to construct the proper interpretation. Two instances of such references to botanical matters are the hawthorn and the cherry tree.

The hawthorn frequently appears in love allegories. In such romance texts, it often functions as a symbol of carnal love or ironic intent rather than fertility and divinity.[57] According to contemporary medieval interpretation, the presence of hawthorn could also suggest carnal desire and spiritual barrenness.[58] This carnal desire appears in, for instance, *The Knight's Tale*, when Arcite rides into the forest and creates a garland of woodbine or hawthorn leaves whilst thinking

[55] Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), 134.
[56] Saunders, "Rape and Ravishment," 134.
[57] Eberly, "A Thorn Among the Lilies," 41-52.
[58] Eberly, "A Thorn Among the Lilies," 41-52.

about the one he desires.[59] In order to recognise the symbol as such an indicator, it is necessary to be familiar with the plant's bloom and fruit baring characteristics.

The hawthorn also functions as an indicator of a place. For instance, in *The Romaunt of the Rose*, the hawthorn indicates where a character consummated carnal love.[60] However, complications arise with this interpretation of this hawthorn reference in *The Romaunt of the Rose*. The original text also contained a reference to hawthorn. However, it is possible that in *Roman de la Rose* the hawthorn functioned as an indicator of a setting ideal for a love encounter.[61] These contrasting results in two readings of the same botanical species demonstrate that the reader's socio-cultural background is highly influential in interpreting a reference to a botanical species.

In addition to these symbolic interpretations, there is another one. Due to its thorns, hawthorn bushes and trees functioned as hedge material, which created a precinct closed off from intruders. This function returns in *The Romaunt of the Rose*. Within the poem, the narrator eventually comes upon a part of the garden that contains a rose. It is of such beauty that he wants to possess it. However, the hawthorn bushes create a boundary between the narrator and the object of his worship or desire.[62] The narrator is unable to reach the rose without crossing the boundary.[63]

Even though the cherry tree occurs within the selected texts only in Athelston, the reference is of particular interest. Within the poem, Athelston's child baring wife carries a garland made of cherries. When confronting her husband after he arrested his sworn brother and that man's family, she casts off this garland. As a result, Athelston reacts in anger and kicks her in the stomach, which causes a miscarriage.

Research supports two readings concerning the cherry garland and the miscarriage. Both argue that the scene creates the chance to present a political critique and reflects on contemporary political strife.[64] The contrast lies between the significance of the cherry garland. Treharne does not treat the casting off of the garland as relevant, whereas Rowe does. She argues that Athelston

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[59] *The Knight's Tale*, ed. Larry D. Benson, ll. 1503-1508. All quotations from this text are from *The Knight's Tale*, ed. Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 37-66.
[60] *The Romaunt of the Rose*, ed. Walter Skeat, ll. 4001-4002. All quotations from this text are from *The Romaunt of the Rose*, ed. Walter Skeat, in *Chaucer's Works, Volume 1 (of 7) -- Romaunt of the Rose; Minor Poems* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1899), Gutenberg Project.
[61] Hatto, "The Lime-Tree," 13.
[62] Eberly, "A Thorn Among the Lilies," 46-47. *The Romaunt of the Rose*, l. 1712, 1830-1840.
[63] *The Romaunt of the Rose*, ll. 1706-1714.
[64] Elaine M. Treharne, "Romanticizing the Past in the Middle English Athelston," *The Review of English Studies* 50, no. 197 (1999): 1-21. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, "The Female Body Politic and the Miscarriage of Justice in Athelston," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995): 79-98. DOI:10.1353/sac.1995.0004

miscarried justice, which makes the miscarriage a symbol of the miscarriage of justice rather than the queen's disobedience.[65] Rowe argues that, in casting away the garland, the queen character temporarily does away with the romance genre. The break allows for political reality to appear within the poem, reflecting the concerns of Richard II's succession in the fourteenth century.[66]

Although the cherry garland's relevance to political factors remains uncertain, there is a direct connection between the garland and pregnancy. No matter the reading, the queen loses the child after casting off the garland. This relation between cherry trees and pregnancy is present throughout the later Middle Ages in other (non) romance texts such as N-town play 15, the *Cherry-tree Carol* and Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*.[67] The connection between the cherry tree and pregnancy in these texts show that the cherry could function as a symbolic reference. Readers of Athelston would arguably have understood this relation without requiring non-symbolic knowledge.

However, another poem containing a reference to the cherry tree demonstrates the value of having pre-existing knowledge on botanical matters during the interpretation process. Although not present among the selected poems, Middle English romance *Sir Cleges* is essential for understanding the difference between extra-symbolic and symbolic references. [68] In addition, it also demonstrates cultural adaptation within Middle English romance. The particular scene in *Sir Cleges* reflects a Mary and Joseph scene which uses a date palm to represent Mary's virtue and divinity. Since the English readers did not know palm trees, the cherry tree substituted the palm tree from the source text. This substitution enables the author to clarify – based on the cherry tree's bloom – that a miracle occurred. Consequently, having pre-existing knowledge of the cherry tree's cycle is essential for understanding the symbolic value. The miracle from the scene is recognised because they know that cherry trees do not bloom in winter.[69]

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[65] Rowe, "The Female Body," 79-98.
[66] Rowe, "The Female Body," 94, 97.
[67] Douglas Sugano, "Play 15, Nativity," in *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo (MI): The Medieval Institute Publications, 2007). In this play, Mary askes Joseph to pick cherries for her. Joseph rebukes and says that he who impregnated her should get the cherries for her. As a result, God makes the cherry tree bow before Mary, thus showing her divine pregnancy and possibly her holiness. Bruce A. Rosenberg, "The "Cherry-Tree Carol" and the "Merchant's Tale"," *The Chaucer Review* 5, no. 4 (1971): 264-76.
[68] Anne Laskaya, and Eve Salisbury, eds., "Sir Cleges: Introduction," in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).
[69] Both trees bloom by the touch of the main character. In one case it is Mary who touches a date tree that mysteriously starts to bloom due to her virtue. The case in *Sir Cleges* depicts the same, however, with a cherry tree instead of a date. George Shuffelton, "Item 24, Sir Cleges: Introduction," in *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffelton (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 2008). P.

This chapter shows that the environment depicted in Middle English romances represents contemporary reality, but it also demonstrates a reflection of and on historical (imagined) landscapes (e.g., *The Knight's Tale*). There is a sense of cultural adaptation; a shift in focus, and a presentation of what contemporaries viewed as lawful and common. Overall, this chapter provides reasons to focus on the details present within the environment of the Middle English romances.

This chapter has established a distinction between symbolic references and extra-symbolic references. This distinction relies on whether additional information is required, from contemporary environmental circumstances, to understand the extra-symbolic references. In contrast, symbolic references require no such additional information.

Moreover, this chapter embarks on mapping the interrelation between readers and their environments, which are no longer limited to specific forest scenes or woodlands. These environments include herbs and spices in natural and household environments. Since personal knowledge on botanical matters was vital in understanding Middle English romances, this chapter demonstrated that it is essential to explore the familiarity of the Middle English romance reader with specific botanical matters. It also proved that present-day scholarship on this type of research is yet mostly absent. Chapter 2 will further explore the aspects of daily life through which people might have become familiar with botanical matters.

Carr, and T. Sherwyn, "The Middle English Nativity Cherry Tree the Dissemination of a Popular Motif," *Modern Language Quarterly* (Seattle) 36, no. 2 (1975): 134.

CHAPTER 2 – THE OTHER SIDE OF ROMANCE: BOTANICAL REFERENCES IN ROMANCE AND NON-ROMANCE TEXTS

Chapter 2 aims to explore the non-symbolic use and presence of the botanical matter within textual material. The first part of this chapter discusses the non-symbolically applied botanical matters within the Middle English romance texts. The second part of this chapter researches botanical matters in non-romance texts in order to address the Middle English romance's readers' familiarity with botanical matters. This part of the chapter focusses on botanical matters in four non-romance genre-related texts: Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls,* Middle English cookbook *The Forme of Cury,* medical manual *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus,* and *The Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London*. These texts represent various text types, from literary texts, culinary and medicinal recipes, to official city council records. This chapter proves that exploration of these texts is valuable in understanding the role of botanical matters in late medieval English society.

The second part of the chapter discusses the non-romance sources according to their fiction level, which depends on whether the text contains imaginary events or portraitures of imaginary characters. [70] *The Parliament of Fowls* is a dream poem that has a high level of fiction. *The Forme of Cury* and *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* are not necessarily works of fiction. However, they are products of a level of fiction because both strive towards presenting their crafts in idealised circumstances where all necessary products are available and purchasable. The *Letter-Books* are official city-council records and therefore contain the least amount of fiction. Each non-romance texts reflects on the botanical matters that contemporary readers of the Middle English romances could have recognised.

The Parliament of Fowls contains a stanza that presents coeval purposes for specific tree species. It enables a comparison between the botanical matters from the selected texts to their mentions in another fictional text.

The results from the close readings show that several of the botanical references from the Middle English romances served culinary or medicinal purposes. The section on these purposes contains a short introduction to the interdisciplinarity of cookery and medicine. Following this introduction, the section discusses the background and entries from *The Forme of Cury* and the

[70] A work of fiction is often a novel or tale that contains imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'fiction, n.', sense 4, last modified September 2020, accessed December 03, 2020, https://www.oedcom.view/Entry/69828.

Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus. Subsequently, a comparison between the data gathered from *The Forme of Cury* and the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* enables a discussion regarding the reflection of the interdisciplinary nature of cookery and medicine in the Middle English romances. Both these sources shed light on the increasing availability and use of exotic botanical material during the fourteenth century within the two separate professions. A comparison between pre-conquest *The Old English Herbarium* and post-conquest *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* demonstrates the increasing diversity and use of botanical matter in the field of medicine following the Norman Conquest. The comparisons from this section shed light on the connection between social position and the ability to be familiar with particular botanical matters.

Lastly, the *Letter-Books* provide an objective record of the occurrence and use of some of the botanical material within London daily life. Even though the details of these records are relatively restricted, they provide insight into the coeval increase of use and availability of particular imported spices and fruits. These records predominantly concern the purchase and consumption of those matters in daily life.

This chapter will provide an overview of the place of botanical matter within contemporary society. Rather than merely presenting the botanical material within one literary context, this chapter uses different textual sources to explore how the Middle English romance readers could have become familiar with botanical matters.

Non-symbolic and de-symbolised botanical matter in Middle English romance

As already discussed in the previous chapter, several botanical matters within the selected texts have symbolic value. Although the interpretations of some of these matters require no familiarity with the actual matter (e.g., rose, lily and laurel), for others, the interpretation requires a level of familiarity (e.g., hawthorn and cherry).

However, some botanical matters have no symbolic function altogether; these are non-symbolic references. The linden tree, which functions as an indicator of a meeting place, is an example of such a non-symbolic functioning botanical matter.[71] Recognition of this function would

[71] This function is presented among the selected texts within *Athelston* (ll.13-18). Outside the selected texts, however, this function is also present in *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle* (ll. 112-114), *The Knightly Tale of Gologras and Gawain* (l.123), and *The Jeaste of Sir Gawain* (ll.405-406). All instances agree with a gathering of sorts. The first and latter two concern the gathering of messengers or a scene in which someone is waiting (or expected to be waiting) underneath a linden tree. In *Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle*, there is a gathering of 500 dead deer which are placed in a row beneath this tree. All quotations from *Athelston* are from *Athelston*, eds. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, in *Four romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis*

only be possible when readers of the narrative are familiar enough with the tree to identify it in the landscape, and if the tree already functioned as a place marker in daily life. Evidence supports such a notion on identification and recognition because of the tree's sparse distribution – in close association with monastic activities –throughout the Middle Ages compared to pre-history (see chapter 3).[72]

Whereas the next section continues with the discussion of non-symbolic functioning botanical matters, the remainder of this section focusses on a small section from these non-symbolic botanical matters. In slight contrast to most non-symbolic botanical matters, some of these matters historically had a symbolic function. However, in time they lost this function through socio-cultural circumstances. These botanical matters have become de-symbolised, a process that causes the once symbolically significant matter to become symbolically insignificant. As demonstrated below, both societal developments and cultural differences can influence this process. This section explores two instances of de-symbolised botanical matters from the selected Middle English romances: the pomegranate and the ash tree.

The pomegranate in late medieval *The Romaunt of the Rose* has an explicit purpose: being helpful to the sick. Even though the pomegranate is not native to the British Isles, (early) medieval texts suggest that it was a known fruit in the medieval period.[73] The earlier texts that refer to the pomegranate mainly focus on its function in literature as a sign of fertility—symbolism from *The Song of Songs*.[74] As visualised in *The Romaunt of the Rose*, the later scientific use of the pomegranate strongly contrasts the earlier symbolic association with fertility. The scientific inclination with the pomegranate results from the increasing interest in scientific and botanical research during the fourteenth century. Henry Daniel was an expert from thirteenth-century Norwich whose research resulted from the increasing interest in science and the international

of Hampton, Athelston, eds. Graham Drake, Eve Salisbury, and Ronald B. Herzman (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1999). For the other poems in this footnote: Hahn, Thomas, ed., *Sir Gawain: Eleven romances and tales* (Kalamazoo (MI): The Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

[72] C. Donald Pigott, "Biological Flora of the British Isles: Tilia Platyphyllos," *The Journal of Ecology* 108, no. 6 (2020): 2670.

[73] George Hardin Brown, "Patristic Pomegranates, from Ambrose and Apponius to Bede," in *Latin Learning and English Lore (Volumes I and II): Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, eds. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 132-149. John H. Harvey, "Henry Daniel: A Scientific Gardener of the Fourteenth Century," *Garden History* 15, no. 2 (1987): 81-93.

[74] Brown, "Patristic Pomegranates," 133-134.

transference of scientific information through the translation of foreign texts.[75] Besides translating scientific texts, Daniel also created original work (Arundel MS 42) that included personal observations of plants in which he took an interest.[76] Among these plants was the pomegranate, a fruit tree Daniel documented as an introduced species in need of special attention that could not bear fruit on English soil.[77]

Even though this failed attempt to grow the fruit on English soil might appear to oppose this thesis's claim on familiarity, the situation is more complicated than that. Individuals could have become familiar with the pomegranate through trade and import, as seen in non-fictional textual material containing culinary or medicinal recipes. Considering the pomegranate's presence in late medieval society, it is unsurprising that Chaucer preserved the reference to it during the translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose*. The culinary and medicinal application of botanical matters returns later in this chapter, and they are explored further in chapter 3.

As demonstrated above, increasing scientific explorations influenced the pomegranate's de-symbolisation over time. In contrast to the pomegranate, the ash tree's de-symbolisation could result from the cultural influences of a temporary nature.

The ash tree's frequent reappearance in the selected texts makes it likely that readers of the Middle English romances would have been familiar with this tree in daily life. Within the original Anglo-Norman poem, the ash tree functioned as a symbol for a protecting type of love (e.g., when it contains the baby in its branches). The Anglo-Norman poem also connected it to bearing fruit (e.g., having children), which enabled the contrasts between the personified hazel and ash within the poem.[78]

In contrast, the translator of *Lay le Freine* altered the ash tree's function in the poem to represent natural reality rather than maintaining its symbolic functions.[79] The contrast between the sisters remains within the Middle English translation. However, the translator attributes this contrast to its original presence in the Anglo-Norman poem, not to any symbolic motivations of

[75] Harvey, "Henry Daniel," 81-93.
[76] Harvey, "Henry Daniel," 82, 87-88.
[77] Harvey, "Henry Daniel," 82, 88.
[78] A. C. Spearing, "Marie de France and Her Middle English Adapters," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 12 (1990): 124-125. DOI:10.1353/sac.1990.0004.
[79] Spearing, "Marie de France and Her Middle English Adapters," 132. Spearing does note here that this statement is based on an unpublished paper read by Richard Axton during a course in 1979.

his own.[80] The translation only contains the ash tree's description for the readers' understanding of how and why the midwife placed the baby on its branches.[81] Consequently, its description creates a direct connection between the in-text environment and the environment outside of the poem.[82] Therefore, the description creates a representation with which the poem's readers could have been familiar. The ash tree's naturalisation is a form of de-symbolisation that caused the ash tree to lose its original symbolic function. However, as discussed later, the ash tree in *Lay le Freine* is not entirely without value.

The ash tree example demonstrates the value of understanding the readers' familiarity with this tree in a non-textual context. As its function within the poem is no longer of symbolic relevance, it now represents the tree in a natural environment, which is similar within the poem and outside of it. Therefore, its representation demonstrates the value of exploring familiarity and non-symbolic usage of botanical matters. In addition, the example demonstrates that the cultural background of the translator of *Lay le Freine* could also have influenced the de-symbolisation of the ash tree. However, the next section demonstrates that, although the tree became de-symbolised, its relevance to the narrative continued.

Although the examples from this section appeared in fictional narratives, both demonstrate a relation between in-text and non-textual circumstances and environments. In addition, the examples demonstrate the influence of the coeval socio-cultural circumstances of the Middle English romances' translators and readers. Furthermore, the examples also demonstrate a decline in the symbolic use of botanical matters resulting from the de-symbolisation process. This process creates connections between in-text environments and contemporary economic or environmental circumstances, enabling Middle English romance readers to recognise the botanical matters in relation to everyday life situations instead of as a symbol.

A poet's perspective: Chaucer's trees

As indicated earlier, this section discusses non-symbolically functioning botanical matters in connection to Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. In addition, this section also discusses one

[80] *Lay le Freine*, eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, ll. 230-234, 346-348. All quotations from this text are from *Lay le Freine*, eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo (MI): Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).
[81] Spearing, "Marie de France and Her Middle English Adapters," 132. Spearing does note here that this statement is based on an unpublished paper read by Richard Axton during a course in 1979.
[82] Spearing, "Marie de France and Her Middle English Adapters," 132.

symbolically functioning botanical matter: laurel. The poem has a stanza (lines 176-183) containing a shortlist of tree species and their known functions or associations by his contemporaries:

> The bilder ook, and eek the hardy asshe;
> The piler elm, the cofre unto careyne;
> The boxtree piper; holm to whippes lasshe;
> The sayling firr; the cipres, deth to pleyne;
> The sheter ew, the asp for shaftes playne;
> The olyve of pees, and eek the drunken vyne,
> The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.[83]

The stanza provides functions for the oak, elm, box, holm, the fir, the yew, and the asp. In addition, some species are associated with a specific purpose (cypress, the olive, the palm, and the laurel). Only the ash tree is associated with the intrinsic value of the wood. This list enables an analysis of these tree species' use within the selected Middle English romances compared to their functions and associations within this stanza. As a result of connecting the botanical matters from the Middle English romances to *The Parliament of Fowl*'s entries, this section demonstrates the value of incorporating different text types to shed light on one research topic. Furthermore, the comparison also contributes to understanding the extent to which contemporary readers could have been familiar with particular species.

The remainder of this section consists of two parts. The first part discusses the laurel tree and the ash tree, and the second part elaborates on the remaining non-symbolically functioning botanical matters from the selected texts. Overall, this section does not contain discussions on references that are not present in the selected texts or in which the Middle English romance references are without clear or pressing function (such as its presence in a list of tree species or as part of a funeral pyre). As a result, discussions on box, holm, fir, yew, asp, olive, and palm are absent from this section.

[83] *The Parliament of Fowls*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 385-394. All quotations from this text are from *The Parliament of Fowls*, ed. Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 385-394.

Symbolism and intrinsic values

The previous chapter already discussed the symbolism of the laurel tree's indication of holiness, chastity, and virtue. However, this symbol is explored in greater depth in this section due to its added relevance in *The Parliament of Fowls*. The poem indicates that the laurel tree is a symbol of divination, which the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) relates to foretelling and discovering what is hidden by supernatural or magical means.[84] Although *The Knight's Tale* contains other elements to express foreshadowing,[85] one can interpret Arcite's laurel garland in two ways. Since he wears it during his cremation following the tournament, its presence could refer to his victory in the tournament. However, it could also be a sign of the gods' divine, supernatural interference that caused his death. Whereas the previous chapter already discussed the former interpretation of the laurel garland related to its Antique heritage, consultation of Chaucer's list enabled the latter interpretation. Although the contemporary reader might have recognised the laurel garlands accentuation of supernatural influence, it is possible that, without using *The Parliament of Fowls*, the present-day reader might not have the symbol as such.

The Parliament of Fowls does not depict the ash tree as a symbol. Instead, the tree's description refers to the intrinsic value associated with this species. The previous section discussed the ash tree's de-symbolisation in *Lay le Freine*. Nevertheless, the ash tree's non-symbolic presence is not without value. Aside from the description of its natural state, which enables the midwife to place the baby in its branches, another factor closely relates it to the character of le Freine. Comparisons between the description of the ash in *The Parliament of Fowls* and the character of le Freine suggests that the ash tree's intrinsic value from the dream-poem mirrors le Freine's character in the lay. *The Parliament of Fowls* uses the adjective 'hardy' to describe the ash tree. This adjective means strong, enduring, and vigorous when used for trees.[86] In contrast, other terms reflect someone's 'hardy' character, deposition, or actions, such as courageous, daring, bold, resolute.[87]

Le Freine becomes Sir Guroun's mistress after leaving the convent. They had lived together for a time until Sir Guroun's retainers urge him to marry another. On the night of his wedding, le

[84] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'divination, n.,' last modified September 2020, accessed October 01, 2020, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/56121.
[85] For instance, Arcite is related to looking ashen cold, *The Knight's Tale*, l. 1364.
[86] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. 'hardy, adj. and n.1,' last modified September 2020, accessed October 01, 2020, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/84203.
[87] 'hardy', *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Freine maintains her character throughout her ordeal. She does not become resolute or bold by resuming her relationship with him. Neither does she remain quiet or inconsolable in a room. Instead, she remains strong and actively involved in the events; she even prepares his marital bed.[88] It is because of her activity that her birth mother recognises her, thus revealing her true lineage. In essence, le Freine's reward for remaining true to her 'natural character' (which mirrors the ash tree's intrinsic value) is her wedding to Sir Guroun. She would have had no reward had she acted against her 'natural character'.

The analysis above demonstrates that the ash tree's representation in *Lay le Freine* has a purpose. This example demonstrates that inter-textual analysis using different text-types provides insight into different interpretations of botanical matters by Middle English romance readers. The ash tree example demonstrates that different socio-cultural associations with particular botanical species could influence the interpretation of a non-symbolically functioning botanical matter.

Trees with a non-symbolic function

As delineated in the introduction to this section, the list in *The Parliament of Fowls* contains only trees. Some of which people used for building practices and woodworking. This part of the section explores the non-symbolic functions of such tree species combined with their use in the selected texts. The tree species appear in order of their appearance in *The Parliament of Fowls*.

The oak tree frequently appears within the selected texts. Firstly, it appears once in *The Knight's Tale* in close relation to construction practices. Here, it is part of Arcite's funeral pyre. As required for building or construction, the material needs to be strong and enduring. *The Knight's Tale* comments directly on the oak's strength; the weakest blow cast between Arcite and Palamon was strong enough to fall an oak during their fight in the grove.[89] Unlike the previous occasions, the oak in *The Awntyrs off Arthur* functions as a strategic position where Arthur positions couples of men and hounds during the hunt. This place marker is unrelated to the strength or endurance of the oak wood itself. However, the reference to it is valuable when considering the possible audience familiar with this function. Comparison between the scene in *The Awntyrs off Arthur* and

[88] *Lay le Freine*, ll. 360-368.
[89] *The Knight's Tale*, l. 1702. Another, more direct, connection between oak and weaponry is presented in *Bevis of Hampton*, where Bevis's club is said to be made of oak (ll. 2511-2512). *Bevis of Hampton*, eds. Ronald B Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, in *Four romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, eds. Graham Drake, Eve Salisbury and Ronald B. Herzman (Kalamazoo (MI): The Medieval institute Publications, 1997).

the late medieval hunting manual The Master of Game reveals the oak's function within the poem to hunting boar and tree-posting, a common practice when hunting in the company of a king.[90] The association of oak with royal hunting practices is not at all peculiar. After the Norman conquest, 'forest' was a status kings assigned to a plot of land – rather than a description of the landscape – which made 'forests' symbols of status than anything else.[91] The relations between forests, oaks, and hunting practices would make it likely that a higher status reader would have been familiar with the oak's function in *The Awntyrs off Arthur* compared to a lower-status reader.

The Parliament of Fowls shows that the elm tree was associated with building structures and burying the dead. Although its use for building practices only occurs once – as part of Arcite's funeral pyre – in the selected Middle English romances, the elm's relation to death is distinctly present in these texts. Firstly, *Athelston* directly connects the tree to justice, punishment, and death. Its reference to 'the elms' is arguably interpretable as a street or location in London.[92] However, another link connects *Athelston*'s elms to Tyburn; the historical execution site of London. Alfred Marks already extensively researched the Tyburn tree and its historical value in the early twentieth century, who noted its use for execution to be as early as the twelfth century.[93] Another link between the elm and justice (or death) is present in the Old French expression: to do justice by the elms.[94] There may be a connection between Athelston's proper execution of justice at the end of the narrative, in contrast to his earlier miscarriage of justice (as discussed in the previous chapter). Although the selected texts do not connect elmwood to coffin production, its relations to justice, punishment, and death are unequivocal.

Whereas the cypress occurs within the Middle English romance references, it is not associated with the lamentation of the dead. As previously indicated, *Sir Thopas* is a parody filled with mistakes from the main character and numerous clichés. One such example could be the

[90] Edward of Norwich, *The Master of Game*, eds William A. Baillie-Grohman, F. N. Baillie-Grohman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 144, 198.
[91] Oliver Rackham, "Forest and Upland," in *A Social History of England, 900–1200,* eds. Julia Crick and Elisabeth van Houts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 49-50.
[92] Herzman, Drake, and Salisbury, *Athelston*, note 805.
[93] Alfred Marks, *Tyburn Tree Its History And Annals* (London: Brown, Langham and Company, 1908), 59.
[94] Trounce in *Athelston,* eds. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury in *Four romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, edited by Drake Graham, Eve Salisbury, and Ronald B. Herzman (Michigan, Kalamazoo: The Medieval institute Publications, 1997), note 805.

reference to a spear made of cypress wood.[95] One possible explanation for its presence in the poem is that cypress was suitable for the next sentence's end rhyme: His spere was of fine ciprees / that bodeth werre, and nothyng pees (ll. 881-882). Another possible explanation for its presence could be the association of readers' association with cypress wood in general. Consultation of the MED shows that cypress wood was well-known in the (late) Middle Ages and valued for its fragrance and durability as a building material.[96] Both explanations suggest that the cypress spear reference functions inadequately in the poem (similar to the lily surcoat reference discussed in the previous chapter).[97] The fact that ash wood made most spears since the early medieval period, not cypress wood, further attests the inadequacy of its presence in its context.[98]

This part explored how non-symbolic functioning botanical matters from the selected Middle English romances compare to non-symbolic uses of these matters as presented in a non-romance poem. It demonstrates that most associations with these matters as laid out by *The Parliament of Fowls* are present in the romance narrative; be it severe or parodical.

A delicate balance: medicinal and cookery supplies in Middle English romance

As touched upon earlier in this chapter, there are botanical matters from the selected texts with culinary and medicinal purposes. In some cases, the narrative already connects those matters to these purposes. This section further explores the relation between the botanical matters from the selected texts and the culinary and medicinal purposes for those matters expressed in two fifteenth-century texts; one being a recipe scroll and one being a medicinal manual.

Publications from as early as the eighteenth century attributed *The Forme of Cury* to King Richard II's court and dated it to about 1390.[99] However, late-twentieth-century research of the author's hand attests to an early fifteenth-century composition, which resulted in the belief that the

[95] R. Maslen, "Armour That Doesn't Work: An Anti-meme in Medieval and Renaissance Romance," in *Medieval into Renaissance: Essays for Helen Cooper*, eds. Andrew King and Matthew Woodcock (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), 40.
[96] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Cipres(se n.,' accessed October 11, 2020, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED7750.
[97] Sir Thopas's tendency of not hitting the mark was also discussed in Tessa Cernik, "Parody in Chaucer's "The Tale of *Sir Thopas*,"" *Verso: An Undergraduate Journal of Literary Criticism* (2013): 43, and Maslen, "Armour that doesn't Work."
[98] Kristof Haneca, and Koen Deforce, "Wood Use in Early Medieval Weapon Production," *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* 12 (2020): 8.
[99] Samuel Pegge, ed., *The Forme of Cury, a Roll of Ancient English Cookery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
DOI:10.1017/CBO9781107707276

copy of *The Forme of Cury* researched today is a copy of an older scroll that possibly did stem from the 1390s.[100] Although the recipes in this cookbook probably circulated among the high-status households, they remain valuable for shedding light on the dietary habits of the late Middle Ages. Chapter 3 discusses comparisons between the dietary preferences reflected in *The Forme of Cury* and archaeobotanical results. This chapter will also shed light on the dietary distinctions between the diets of different status households.

The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus is a fifteenth-century translation of the late thirteenth century Latin compendium by Gilbertus Anglicus.[101] Translated as a popularised version of its Latin original, the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* indicates what botanical matters with medicinal purposes circulated in fifteenth-century society.[102]

This section begins with a brief discussion of the relations between late medieval cookery and medicine. The subsection that follows compares entries from *The Forme of Cury* and the botanical matter from the selected texts. Subsequently, the next subsection compares entries from *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* and the botanical matters from the selected texts. This subsection also briefly compares the botanical matter from *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* and *The Old English Herbarium.*[103] As a result of the comparisons delineated above, the factors that influence the interpretation of botanical matters become understandable. The final part of this section explores the similarities and differences between *The Forme* and *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*, which enables reflection on the interdisciplinarity between cookery and medicine manifested in these texts.

Everybody loves food: the foodstuffs behind health

Late medieval attitudes towards medicine and cookery find their roots in Antiquity.[104] Medicine and food supplemented each other through humoral theory. As with humors (bodily fluids),

[100] Constance Bartlett Hieatt, and Sharon Butler, eds., *Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (including the Forme of Cury)*. Early English Text Society. Supplementary Series, no. 8 (London [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1985), 24.
[101] Faye M. Getz, ed., *Healing and Society in Medieval England A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*. Wisconsin Publications in the History of Science and Medicine, no.8. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), LIII.
[102] Getz, "Healing and Society in Medieval England," XV.
[103] Anne van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies: The Old English Herbarium and Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (New York; London: Routledge, 2002).
[104] Terence Scully, "A Cook's Therapeutic use of Garden Herbs," in Dendle, Peter, and Alain Touwaide, eds. *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015), 63.

everything edible had humoral qualities that reflected the matter's temperament (hot, cold, dry, and moist).[105] The meal was adjusted depending on one's health and constitution, which their humors reflected. Regimen offered a guide in the interrelation between foodstuffs and health, and they included professional advice concerning diet and health similar to present-day diet manuals.[106] An example of the interrelation is present in *The Romaunt of the Rose,* which mentions the pomegranate as incredibly beneficial to the sick. The next section further elaborates on the medicinal relevance of botanical matters.

Following the Norman conquest, exotic spices and fruits became increasingly available to the higher-class individuals, and tastes in seasoning and spicing changed because of this.[107] Research suggests that such changes appeared due to French nobles' emergence in English high-status circles, who brought their customs and enticed the English nobles to adapt their behaviour and consumption patterns.[108]

The Forme of Cury demonstrates the interrelation between the two seemingly separate fields of cookery and medicine. Although it is severely questionable that commoners used its recipes in everyday life, its contents prove that individuals paid close attention to their health through their diet whenever possible.

Since *The Forme of Cury* contains recipes used at court, its beneficiaries had wealth and status, which enabled them to purchase a wide variety of valuable foodstuffs. Its aristocratic alignment makes the scroll unrepresentative for the recipes used among the general populace, who presumably had fewer consummation options and were more dependent on seasonal produce and general availability. Whether or not the aristocracy was aware of what they ate, *The Forme of Cury* sheds light on the use and availability of the botanical matters from the selected texts. At least to those who could afford to buy these matters.

Analysis of the scroll shows that numerous botanical matters from the Middle English romance had culinary applications. Comparisons between the results from the selected texts and

[105] Scully, "A Cook's Therapeutic use of Garden Herbs," 60-65.
[106] Irma Taavitsainen, "Middle English Recipes: Genre Characteristics, Text Type Features and Underlying Traditions of Writing," *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 2, no.1 (2001): 96.
[107] Ben Jervis, Fiona Whelan, and Alexandra Livarda, "Cuisine And Conquest: Interdisciplinary Perspectives On Food, Continuity And Change In 11th Century England and Beyond," in *The Archaeology Of The Eleventh Century: Continuities And Transformations*, eds. Dawn M. Hadley, Christopher Dyer. Society For Medieval Archaeology Monograph, no. 38 (London: Routledge, 2017), 342.
[108] Jervis, Whelan and Livarda, "Cuisine and Conquest," 349-350.

the recipes in *The Forme of Cury* show a significant overlap that indicates a culinary purpose for 29 of the 72 different botanical species occurring in the selected Middle English romances.[109] Even though these mentions do not indicate any amount, they can provide insight into how often recipes used these matters. Their use can, in turn, relate to their popularity within the (higher status) English kitchen.

Some entries from the overlap are present in relatively high frequency (>4 mentions) within *The Forme of Cury* compared to the Middle English romances, including saffron, cumin, leek, fennel, apple, olive, almonds, dates, ginger, cinnamon, plums (prunes), raisins, and pepper. Saffron has the most references within this scroll due to its variable use as an ingredient, colouring element, and garnish. Following saffron, there is a significant presence of almonds, ginger, and pepper with over 30 mentions. Some matters occur less frequently (<4 mentions) within *The Forme of Cury* compared to the Middle English romances, including clove, nutmeg, laurel, hawthorn, cherries, mint, violet, pomegranate, figs, grains of paradise, pears, barley, grapes, sage, wild plum, and finally hazel. Unlike the other botanical matters discussed here, hazel has no use within a dish; it only occurs when the cooking process requires its branches (or sticks of hazelwood) for roasting.

As previously noted, the recipes contain no additional information concerning the use of these products, which makes the mentions of the botanical matters quantitative as opposed to qualitative information. The entries can only indicate that the botanical matters in question occurred in the late fourteenth century's aristocratic culinary scene. In addition, the entries indicate that the aristocracy had access to both local (e.g., leek) and imported matters (e.g., pepper, pomegranate, and ginger). Interestingly, a comparison between *The Forme of Cury* and *Sir Thopas* shows that most of the botanical matters from *Sir Thopas* also occur in *The Forme of Cury*. The overlap demonstrates a probable familiarity of the author, and an equally probable familiarity of the narrative's readers, with those matters. Another comparison, between *The Forme of Cury* and *The Romaunt of the Rose*, demonstrates that ginger's addition to *The Romaunt of the Rose* could well reflect contemporary cuisine in England compared to its absence in *Roman de la Rose*.

The botany of fourteenth-century medicine

This subsection provides a brief introduction to the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*. It also introduces the overlap between the botanical matters from the selected texts, *The Forme of Cury*,

[109] The appendix also contains this overlap.

and the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*. The part that follows contains a discussion regarding the use of tree species in medicinal contexts. These species receive additional consideration because of their prominent presence in the selected texts. The exploration of these species in medicinal practices also makes the contemporary readers' familiarity with these species more tangible than when such practices remain unconsidered. This part also discusses the lily in relation to its medicinal use compared to its function as a symbol in the selected texts, which demonstrates the different facets of life that would enable readers to be familiar with botanical matters. Finally, this section concludes with a brief comparison between pre-conquest and post-conquest medicinally applied botanical matters, which visualises the increasing diversity of botanical matters used for medicinal purposes following the Norman conquest.

The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus

The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus is a popularized version of the Latin original, with adaptations made according to what the translator viewed as necessary information.[110] Its relations with regimen and cookery are visible in its dietary advice related to specific illnesses or complaints. For example, its advice to consume food that makes one constipate (such as barley bread and roasted meat) when one has taken with the flue.[111] Such moments make the text a valuable source for researching the possible medicinal functions and uses of the botanical material from the selected Middle English romances. This section's research on the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* builds on Faye M. Getz's edition of the Wellcome manuscript's copy of the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*.[112]

Comparisons between *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* and the botanical matters from the Middle English romances shows that 49 species from the 72 botanical species from the Middle English romances are present in *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*. This considerable overlap demonstrates that over half of the Middle English romances' botanical matters had medicinal purposes. Of the 49 species with medicinal purposes 26 return used for culinary purposes in *The Forme of Cury*. A comparison between the overlap from the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* and *The Forme of Cury* demonstrates that the *Middle English Gilbertus*

[110] Getz, "Healing and Society in Medieval England," XV-XVI.
[111] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* from Wellcome MS 537", in *Healing and Society in Medieval English. A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, ed. Faye M. Getz. Wisconsin Publications in the History of Science and Medicine, no.8 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 174.
[112] London, Wellcome Library, MS537. https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b19558193.

Anglicus shows a more frequent use of clove, nutmeg, laurel, cumin, mint, fennel, violet, pomegranate, figs, grains of paradise and sage compared to *The Forme of Cury*. Consequently, the overlap between the texts demonstrates that cooks were presumably (made) familiar with botanical matters to improve and maintain their employers' health.

Some species that appear in *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* and the selected texts were not present in *The Forme of Cury*; these include rose, liquorice, lilies, chestnut, ivy, pine, quince, and nettles. This variation proves that some botanical materials were of medical value, yet not used in cookery (e.g., chestnuts or nettles), which could relate to dinner preferences (as already touched upon in the previous section), conflicting health issues (e.g., some botanical matters are poisonous when consumed), or availability. Regarding the latter, some species could have become more common in England during the fifteenth century, such as liquorice and quince.

On the matter of healing in the realm of medicine: some examples of the unexpected

The analysis of *The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* yielded several botanical species with unexpected medicinal functions.

Firstly, the use of trees (e.g., bark, leaves, fruits) within medicine is striking (see table 2.1 for examples). The entries for these trees demonstrate an extended use of tree matter that was unrelated to wood quality, woodworking, or other daily life uses as presented in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls*. The examples presented in table 2.1 shed light on the full range of roles botanical matters occupied in late medieval society. The oak tree exemplifies the contemporary range of roles of botanical matters. Aside from its use in building or construction, the oak entry shows that other parts of the tree were also valued and used for medicinal purposes. The use of tree material in medicine demonstrates the value of recognising specific tree species. For instance, mistaking birch for beech – though not harmful – results in an ineffective deworming. The Middle English romance readers' familiarity with these species in non-textual circumstances could result in recognition of such species in a textual environment (be it for different purposes). An example of this is the hazel, which only provides tools instead of medicinal or culinary benefits (as seen in both *The Forme of Cury* and the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*).

Table 2-1: Medicinal trees from the Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus

Species	Part	Usage	Illness
Ash	Bark	As a powder or oil	Powder to heal peritoneum in case of a wound in chest or stomach area. Oil to treat the spleen when the liver causes pain.[113]
Beech	Leaves	On its own or in a paste	They were an ingredient in deworming medication.[114]
Birch	Bark and or leaves	As a whole or oil	Bark or leaves were put into wine to cleanse the mouth when there is no rotting. Oil, in combination with other matters, treated the spleen when the liver causes pain.[115]
Elm	Bark	In a poultice	Was used when matters concerning the liver cause nosebleeds.[116]
Hazel	Nut, Stick/twig	Measure quantity by hazelnut or stir lead.	No medical usage.[117]
Oak	Bark and nuts	Bark, nut, or nut bark	The tree's bark remedied stomach pain caused by warm humours or to halt flue caused by dysentery. The nut was an ingredient in remedies for prolapse and bladder issues—the nuts' outer bark to prevent hardening of the peritoneum.[118]
Willow	leaves	Leaves or as oil	In case of pain to the spleen, heart issues, syncope, kidney stones, and satyriasis, leaves were an ingredient in bathwater or were placed around the body.[119]

Secondly, the lily has unexpected medicinal functions. Analysis of *The Forme of Cury* showed that late medieval diets did not include lilies. In contrast, these plants had an extensive range of medicinal functions. Lily-water was an ingredient in remedies concerning the eyes, roots in remedies concerning the swelling and or inflammation of the stomach, haemorrhoids or throat swelling, and leaves when dealing with pimples and swellings, and flowers against morphea.[120] The *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* explicitly separates lilies and water lilies. The latter formed an ingredient in remedies dealing with toothache, [old] liver issues, coughing, phthisic, heart issues, kidney stones, diabetes, and satyriasis.[121]

Even though the lily's medicinal applications do not alter its symbolic interpretation within the Middle English romance narratives, its medicinal use demonstrates that the role of botanical

[113] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus,*" ed. Faye M. Getz, 240, 271. All quotations from this text are from "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* from Wellcome MS 537", in *Healing and Society in Medieval English. A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, ed. Faye M. Getz. Wisconsin Publications in the History of Science and Medicine, no.8 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991)
[114] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 174-175, 194, 214, 266, 269.
[115] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 89.
[116] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 85.
[117] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 53, 141, 293.
[118] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 174-175, 194, 214, 266, 269.
[119] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 146, 151, 238, 251, 272.
[120] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 43, 103, 186, 275, 283-284.
[121] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 93, 217-218, 114, 136, 146, 253, 262, 272.

matter could differ outside of the textual environment. Not only did readers recognise the lily as a symbol, but they could also visualise the flower in comparative situations that, for instance, describes the face of Guinevere's mother compared to a lily in bloom.

Pre-Norman versus Post-Norman medicine: a brief comparison between the Old English Herbal and The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus

Comparison between the botanical matters from the Middle English romances with entries from *The Old English Herbal* shows an overlap between the dataset for this thesis and the entries from the *Old English Herbal*, consisting of liquorice, lily, saffron, cumin, ivy, marigolds, leek (houseleek), mint, fennel, violet, periwinkle, hemp, nettle, (St. Mary's) thistle, sage and (white) poppy.[122] Most of these matters – except for periwinkle – remain used in the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*. The overlap shows a continuation of the use of pre-conquest available botanical matter within the medicinal field. Among the frequently used pre-conquest matters, cumin, mint, fennel, violet, and sage remain used in post-conquest contexts. The continuative use of these matters could result from their long-term use in general or their medicinal effectiveness. Further comparisons between the *Old English Herbarium* and the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* demonstrate that the medicinal practice gained an immense addition of herbal mattes after the ninth century due to the Norman conquest.

Healing through eating: herbs and spices in dishes to counter illnesses and complaints

This section discusses the herbs and spices used in culinary and medicinal practices with respect to their presence in the Middle English romances.

Compared to *The Forme of Cury*, mint, fennel, sage, and cumin also occur abundantly within the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*. These high numbers may be unsurprising to the present-day herb user since these herbs are still often (though perhaps unwittingly) used to counter headaches, sore stomachs/intestines, and colds/the flue.[123] Historical use, however, surpasses such relatively simple ailments that these herbs and spices could help to remedy. For instance, the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* describes mint as useful against mania (e.g., an issue within the brain), lethargy, sight, earache, head-cold, bad breath (and worms in the teeth), and other ailments.[124] Fennel also

[122] Van Arsdall, "Medieval Herbal Remedies," 246.
[123] Personal trial and errors mainly concern usage of mint and sage. Getz, "Healing and Society," XVIIII-XX
[124] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 15, 16, 19, 61, 67, 81, 89, 96.

has a wide range of uses from bettering sight and remedying swelling in the lungs to fixing stomach-ache, diarrhoea, liver issues, and more.[125]

Sage has its uses in remedies for epilepsy, earache, eye issues, teeth ache, the cough, and other issues.[126] It is the example that advocates the contemporaries had a common knowledge of its medicinal applications. Not only is it present in the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* (as visualised in the pre-conquest post-conquest comparison), it already had a historical use in medicine, which also returns in *The Knight's Tale*. The *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* even validates sage in cookery which proves the interrelation between culinary and medicinal practices.[127] At the least, these uses make sage a multi-functional herb.

Cumin is another multi-functional herb that contemporaries used in both cookery and medicine. Medicinal uses include the remedy of ailments such as dizziness, aching joints, stomach swellings, spleen issues and haemorrhoids.[128] It is noteworthy that the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* explicitly notes that someone should not eat cumin when the ailment is a headache caused by humour imbalance.[129] This disclaimer of sorts demonstrates the perceived interrelation between the fields of cookery and medicine. Since the cook would be obligated to know how to counter humoral imbalance, he should know and be familiar with what to avoid under what circumstances. In medicine and food, familiarity was critical.

Spicing up the record

An interest in medicine increased as material became increasingly available, and so did the amount of (criminal) activities related to the distribution of raw materials and powders consisting of herbs and spices. The *Letter-Books* contain "a record of the proceedings of the court of common council and court of aldermen before the fifteenth century" from London.[130] Standing in contrast to the texts analysed earlier in this chapter, the *Letter-Books* provide a factual account of spices and fruits available for purchase in London between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although the records provide information about only a small number of botanical matters, they also provide

[125] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 9, 43-44, 48, 51, 60-61, 126, 182, 186, 200, 218, 220, 230.
[126] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 24-26, 30, 56, 67, 94, 107.
[127] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 100-101.
[128] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 9, 186, 236, 283.
[129] "*The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*," 5.
[130] Reginald R. Sharpe, "Introduction," in *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: A, 1275-1298*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1899), i-xii, accessed September 30, 2020, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/vola/i-xii

background information on the taxes and socio-political complexities related to the availability of botanical material. A case surrounding ginger illustrates the socio-political complexities that involve botanical matters. Ginger was a valuable good used in both cookery and medicine. Based on the record, it was of such value, and available is such good quality in London, that authorities discovered and dealt with imitation and falsification of ginger powder.[131]

Aside from the taxes and socio-political complexities, the records provide a background for available fruits and spices, which allows the assessment of the familiarity of London's citizens with botanical matters. Zedoary is an example that illustrates the factors of availability and use. Although zedoary often occurs together with other chargeable goods such as ginger, pepper, cinnamon, and other spices, it seems that personal preference influences whether one is familiar with this spice.[132] Although it was present on the fourteenth-century market (book H from 1375-1399), its absence from *The Forme of Cury* demonstrates that dietary preferences could differ from market availability and medicinal use.[133] If a product is unpopular, it is unlikely that zedoary was widely known or that people were commonly familiar with it.

Intrigue, increase, and indifference: becoming a common good

The *Letter-Books* contain spices from the start (from 1275) onwards. These spices include ginger, pepper, cumin, liquorice, almonds, and figs.[134] From this list, pepper, cumin, and figs are of primary interest due to contemporary relevance.

Pepper is present on every tax-list noted within the *Letter-Books* and was considered an expensive good. In an impersonation case (20 February 1319/1320), three men lifted a merchant from his goods, including almonds and pepper.[135] As time progressed, pepper became commonly used throughout the city. The demand drastically increased in the early fifteenth century. It caused a temporary shortage of product, which led to a rising pepper price, and the price became standardized for all those who wanted to acquire it until fresh pepper arrives from abroad before it would become cheaper again (22 December 1411).[136]

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[131] Getz, "Healing and Society," XXVIII. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H, 1375-1399*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folios CCLXXXIV, CCXC, CCXCII B.
[132] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H, 1375-1399*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio CCXII.
[133] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: H, 1375-1399*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio CCXII.
[134] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: A, 1275-1298*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio 132.
[135] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: E, 1314-1337*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio CI B.
[136] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: I, 1400-1422*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio CVIII.

There are two documented instances of cumin use unrelated to cookery or medicinal use that have financial implications. On these occasions, cumin was part of rental agreements and tenement regulations between the second half of the thirteenth century (2 February 1287-1288) and the first half of the fourteenth century (24 June 1344).[137] In both cases, cumin stood for part of the rent, which gives cause to believe that cumin stood for a large sum in the late Middle Ages. Chapter 3 further explores its presence in archaeobotanical results or rather the absence of cumin in these results.

Tax lists from the *Letter-Books* also contain figs. They are of such value that they became the subject of a fifteenth-century fraud case (9 April 1459).[138] In contrast to their common status from roughly 1465 onwards (31 January 1465-1466), the fraud case illustrates the product's exclusive nature until the 1460s as the buyers paid 200 pounds for a small number of figs.[139]

Ongoing issues with the distribution of herbs, spices, and fruits mainly existed of pricing and meddling with the scales. Book D (1309-1314) describes these issues and states that goods of weight (such as wax, almond, and rice) weighed with a balance should be weighed evenly—with all hands off the scales. It also notes that spices such as ginger or saffron should be sold per specific weight only.[140] Further issues include false bargaining and meddling with assigned brokers in the fourteenth century (volume G, 1352-1374). Among the now fixed prices for botanical matters are almonds, cumin, anis, dates, liquorice, ginger, cinnamon (powder), nutmeg, grains of paradise, saffron, and clove-gillofre.[141] Finally, book L (1461-1497) abstains from an interest in grocers' concerns, and aligned brokers and their wares concerning legislation. The final decision related to the issues above concerns the statement that made figs and raisins common goods from that point onwards.[142]

Some clear statements can be made based on these *Letter-Books*. Firstly, the import of exotic spices (e.g., pepper and zedoary) and dried fruits (e.g., figs) increased between the thirteenth and fifteenth century. As a result of this import, some botanical matters became more commonly used than others, which in one case led a shortage of this spice (pepper). Furthermore, several of

[137] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: A, 1275-1298*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio 79 B. *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: F, 1337-1352*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio LXXXIX B.
[138] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: K, Henry VI*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio 308 B.
[139] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: L, Edward IV-Henry VII*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio 40 B.
[140] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: D, 1309-1314*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio XCVII.
[141] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: G, 1352-1374*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio CLXXX B.
[142] *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London: L, Edward IV-Henry VII*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, folio 40 B.

the available spices (such as cinnamon and cumin) were in high demand and even functioned as a partial payment method (cumin). Some of the spices or fruits were of such value that impersonation and illicit practices became increasingly common during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Subsequently, comparisons between the entries from the records and those from *The Forme of Cury* and the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* demonstrate an overlap of spices, herbs, and fruits. This section demonstrated that the demand, availability, and value of botanical matters fluctuated in the late Middle Ages. These fluctuations suggest that some botanical matters became increasingly more commonly used, and therefore readers were more likely to recognise these matters in a textual environment. *Sir Thopas* is a narrative that combines the recognition of spices from everyday life to their presence in a literary context (e.g., nutmeg and cumin). Finally, this section suggests that higher status households, and those who resided within city bounds, were more likely to recognise such material than the lower-status or rural residing households.

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated the different uses of botanical matter in late medieval daily life, including object production, cooking, and medicine, often related to household or business activities. This chapter examined the extent to which people could be familiar with botanical matters based on non-romance textual material. The exploration of different activities related to using botanical matters shed light on this familiarity because it requires knowledge of a product before one can safely use it. In addition, this chapter demonstrates that exotic material became more available following the Norman Conquest. Therefore, familiarity with previously uncommon products would become more likely as time progressed, which would simultaneously allow a broader audience to be familiar with botanical matters.

The gathered evidence also shows that not all botanical matters from the selected texts reappear in the non-romance texts; for instance, serviceberries, barberries, linden, or box do not occur in contexts other than the Middle English romances. However, evident from the matters that do reoccur in non-romance texts *The Forme of Cury* and the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* is the dominant medicinal function of many of these matters. The *Letter-Books* provided the opportunity to comment on the availability of botanical matters, such as the increasing use of pepper, and the apparent increasing availability of figs. In addition, they shed light on the fact that, even when a product (e.g., zedoary) is available, availability is not necessarily equal to common use and familiarity with a product. Moreover, the *Letter-Books* provide evidence for the economic

value of many botanical matters, which makes it likely that some botanical matters were expensive or unavailable to the lower-status individual.

The results above show that peculiar spices (such as zedoary) might only be familiar to a selected group of people with a taste for such spices. Furthermore, the discussion shows that a high-status or urban-centred readership is more likely to be familiar with the botanical material than an overall lower-status readership. Finally, the discussions demonstrate that one could become familiar with a product through different activities concerning household or business practices.

CHAPTER 3 – THE RETURN OF BOTANICAL MATTERS: AN ARCHAEOBOTANICAL EDITION

Thus far, romance and non-romance texts provided the background for the discussion of the botanical matters from the selected Middle English romances. Even though the textual material provided many different applications of the botanical matters, overrepresentation or underrepresentation of matter always occurs when examining various source materials. The analysis of such various source materials can consist of texts belonging to different text-types (as demonstrated in chapter 2), but it can also compare textual material and non-textual material such as botanical remains.[143] When a specific matter is underrepresented in textual material, it could be beneficial to include material sources that might more realistically reflect the contemporary presence of botanical material. For instance, fennel occurs only once, as a herb found near a path in *The Romaunt of the Rose*. However, the analysis in chapter 2 shows that both cookery and medicine often made use of fennel. Even though the comparison with non-romance texts already demonstrates an underrepresentation of fennel in fictional textual material, research on botanical remains could also prove beneficial in understanding the extent to which the audience of Middle English romances could be familiar with fennel in daily life.

Even though material evidence can be scarce, the absence of material evidence (i.e., artefacts/archaeological remains) does not inevitably indicate a historical absence altogether. However, when material evidence is present, it can aid in understanding the familiarity of people with specific botanical material from textual environments.

This chapter analyses archaeological results on botanical remains (archaeobotanical results) to create a sketch of the contemporary situation as seen in archaeological contexts. This analysis allows further exploration of the extent to which readers of the Middle English romances could have been familiar with botanical matters from textual environments.

First, a short introduction to archaeobotanical research discusses the opportunities, limitations, and biases within this type of research. The remainder of the chapter exists two main sections. Section one focusses on the occurrence of herbs and spices within archaeobotanical

[143] An example of underrepresentation that has been seen thus far is the representation of saffron for instance. Although it is known that saffron was frequently used in different professions and available on the market, it is only referred to once within a romance literary context. Further examples of representation will be provided throughout this chapter in relation to the material availability.

contexts. Consequently, this section also sheds light on the possible type of readers of the Middle English romances that could have been familiar with these botanical references based on the botanical remains' archaeological contexts. Section two contains a discussion regarding the medieval landscape and woodlands. This section's analysis includes research on the forest composition, woodland management, and use of the raw material from these landscapes. The results from the close reading will be compared to the archaeobotanical results from different contexts in order to elaborate on the realistic representation of medieval woodlands in the selected Middle English romances.

A short introduction to archaeobotanical research

Archaeologists often use archaeobotanical research to create reconstructions of past environments. These reconstructions allow archaeologists to deduce what botanical matter people encountered locally or through trade at a specific place and time.[144] As a result, archaeobotanical research sheds light on the availability of raw material for the production of objects and structures, consummation of foodstuffs, agricultural practices, environmental compositions, and climatological circumstances.[145]

Unfortunately, archaeobotanical results (e.g., the determination of specific species) are highly dependent on the preservation of the botanical matter within its context. Such preservation only occurs for matter deposited in waterlogged, mineralized, or charred conditions. The level of preservation greatly influences the possibility of dating and further analyses. Archaeological research uses dendrochronology (tree ring analysis) to establish the tree's felling-date, which can also provide insight into woodland management strategies (such as coppicing).[146] Furthermore, the preservation level also influences the recognition of consumed or available botanical material from the archaeobotanical contexts (e.g., cesspits). Archaeobotanical research examines the contents of soil samples taken from archaeological contexts. This research includes the examination of grains, seeds, or fruits and wood (i.e., macro-fossils), but also of pollen and even particles of plant cells (i.e., microfossils).[147]

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[144] Colin Renfrew and Paul G. Bahn, *Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice*, 7th edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 2016), 249.
[145] Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology*, 249.
[146] Martin Bridge, "Tree Rings and Time: Recent Historical Studies in England," *Archaeology International* 4 (2000): 17-20. Martin Bridge, "Progress in British Dendrochronology," *Archaeology International* 19 (2016): 58-62.
[147] Marijke Van der Veen, Alistair Hill, and Alexandra Livarda, "The Archaeobotany of Medieval Britain (c 450–1500): Identifying Research Priorities for the 21st Century," *Medieval Archaeology* 57, no. 1 (2013): 151-182.

Present-day political and social agendas strongly influence archaeological research – and with it, the chance to perform archaeobotanical analyses – due to the increasing development led urban-centred archaeology of the last 50 years.[148] Because of that bias, the archaeobotanical results predominantly concern urban archaeology in contrast to rural contexts, which has led to a dominant body of late medieval urban research contexts. In addition, the limited number of samples gathered and researched in the last twenty years visualize another effect of the development-led archaeological bias.[149] In general, the sampling strategy varies depending on the research questions of an excavation. Therefore, the applied strategy greatly influences the acquisition of archaeobotanical results. Even though most archaeological research contains clauses that sampling in case of deposits with environmental potential improve sampling odds (with regards to environmental reconstruction),[150] these clauses would probably never include full range archaeobotanical research of for instance a monastic garden. Such restrictions severely limit the contribution rate of archaeobotanical results from such sites.

Although archaeobotanical research is dependent on external influences, the incorporation of this research allows for an in-depth understanding of acquisition, production, and import possibilities of botanical matter during the Middle Ages. As will be demonstrated below, incorporation of archaeobotanical results is not only beneficial for the overall understanding of the Middle Ages, but also for understanding the literature from the Middle Ages.

Beyond the treeline: botanical matter for cookery and medicine

Chapter 2 already discussed the use of botanical matters in culinary, medicinal, and professional environments. This chapter aims to explore such uses from an archaeological perspective. While this thesis explores the relations between fictional literature and reality, a recent study from Poland performed similar comparisons by connecting non-fictional textual material and archaeobotanical results to discuss useful plants in medieval Gdansk.[151] This study identifies the mismatches (over/underrepresentation) between the textual material and archaeobotanical results, and it

151. Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology*, 249-256.
[148] Van der Veen, Hill, and Livarda, "The Archaeobotany of Medieval Britain (c 450–1500)," 154-156, 168.
[149] Van der Veen, Hill, and Livarda, "The Archaeobotany of Medieval Britain (c 450–1500)," 166-170.
[150] Jonathan Orellana, "Lidl, Bishop's Cleeve Tewkesbury Gloucestershire," *CA Report* 18717. Cotswold Archaeology (2019): 7.
[151] Monika Badura, Beata Możejko, Joanna Święta-Musznicka, and Małgorzata Latałowa, "The Comparison of Archaeobotanical Data and the Oldest Documentary Records (14th–15th Century) of Useful Plants in Medieval Gdańsk, Northern Poland," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 24, no. 3 (2014): 441-54.

attributes those mismatches to the properties of several plant materials and their usage in culinary activities.[152] It also discusses plants (such as saffron) that served as payment (or tribute) rather than culinary or medicinal purposes.[153] As presented in chapter 2, cumin served a purpose in London.

Consequently, the study confirms the expected underrepresentation of matter from material contexts. Even though transactions using spices would make the record, soil composition would not preserve the botanical material due to its fragile nature. Nonetheless, the study also demonstrates that academia recognises the benefits of combining literary and archaeobotanical research.

As demonstrated above, herbs and spices are difficult to detect and identify in archaeobotanical samples due to their scarcity, preservation, and deposition. [154] The scarcity of matter could be related to the expensive nature of most botanical matters, which would ensure little deposited waste material. As previously noted, the preservation depends on the deposition location. However, studies also demonstrate that preservation depends on how the matter is used, for instance, in culinary practices, which more likely preserve grains than leaves. [155] The complications with the remains of herbs and spices increase the chance of mismatches when comparing textual and material datasets.

In contrast, fruit seeds often survive due to their strong composition and are easy to identify. Since these fruit seeds are often not used in cooking, they are more likely to appear intact in, for instance, cesspit contexts.

The following subsection discusses several fruits, spices, and herbs in relation to excavation contexts. This section will elaborate on the benefits of incorporating archaeobotanical research in literary discussions. In addition, it provides examples of limitations of archaeobotanical research within English archaeological contexts in specific. Whereas chapter 2 already provided some insight into the type of reader that would have been familiar with the botanical matters from the selected romances, this section's analysis will explore the matter in more depth using archaeobotanical results and contexts.

[152] Badura, Możejko, Święta-Musznicka, and Latałowa, "Useful Plants in Medieval Gdansk," 450.
[153] Badura, Możejko, Święta-Musznicka, and Latałowa, "Useful Plants in Medieval Gdansk," 450.
[154] Alexandra Livarda, "Spicing up Life in Northwestern Europe: Exotic Food Plant Imports in the Roman and Medieval World," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 20, no. 2 (2010): 143-64. Jervis, Whelan, and Livarda. "Cuisine and Conquest," 340-341.
[155] Jervis, Whelan, and Livarda. "Cuisine and Conquest," 340-341.

Fruits, herbs and spices: increasing import and diversity in botanical matters related to cookery and medicine

As previously noted, waterlogged or charred contexts often yield remains of fruits, herbs, and spices. Examples of such contexts stem from, for instance, ditches, but also from cesspits in which (urban) inhabitants deposed of their waste (e.g., kitchen debris, human excrements and possibly artefacts).[156] Though disconcerting, the deposition circumstances make cesspits highly informative regarding consummated material by both higher and lower-status individuals. Depending on their usage, maintenance, and preservation, they could reflect the diversity of botanical material available to their owners. The cesspits contexts mainly reflect on urban residents, since cesspits are excavated primarily in urban contexts due to the preservation circumstances.

A site from Winchester presents an example of ample preservation of fruit remains from cesspit contexts.[157] Cesspits from this site yielded evidence of figs, grapes, apples, cherries, and plums/bullace from two contexts, of which the earliest dates to the late tenth to eleventh centuries, and the later to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[158] Comparison between these contexts shows that both figs and grapes became increasingly available during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In addition to an increased number of fig and grape remains, the later context also yielded remains of fennel, coriander, sloe, hazelnut, black pepper, and laurel leaf. These remains demonstrate the availability and usage of imported (e.g., coriander and black pepper) and locally available material (such as hazelnut and sloe).

Another cesspit context from the same site, dating from the tenth to the eleventh century, showed evidence of (probably) leek and low numbers of indigenous fruit remains such as strawberries.[159] The predominant presence of native material from this context could indicate two scenarios. The first scenario is that the residents had access to imported material, yet this material was unpreserved in the context. The second scenario is more likely and could indicate that the residents did not have the means to acquire the material, and thus they left nothing for preservation.

Two more samples were taken from a fourteenth to fifteenth-century context during the same excavation. The first sample yielded an abundance of fig remains and small amounts of apple,

[156] Daniel Sosna and Lenka Brunclíková, *Archaeologies of Waste* (Havertown: Oxbow Books, 2016), 42.
[157] John Carrott, Michael Issitt, H. Kenward, and F. Large, "Medieval Plant and Invertebrate Remains Principally Preserved by Anoxic Waterlogging at The Brooks, Winchester, Hampshire (site code: BRI and BRII)," *Reports from the Environmental Archaeology Unit, York* 96, no. 20 (1996).
[158] Carrott, Issitt, Kenward, Large, "The Brooks, Winchester," 4.
[159] Carrott, Issitt, Kenward, and Large, "The Brooks, Winchester," 4, 10.

sloe, coriander, fennel, blackberry, raspberry, grape, hazelnut and walnut. The second sample from the same context also showed amounts of nettle, and possibly poppy. The substantial diversity of botanical material from these two samples shows that higher status individuals owning the cesspit had access to imported, or limitedly available, botanical materials such as figs, grapes, and coriander. In addition, these samples also contained native vegetation (nettle, poppy, apple, sloe, blackberry and hazelnut), which indicates that the diet included both native and imported material.

The Winchester site allows for a distinction between higher and lower-status households based on several trends. Firstly, whereas both lower and higher status cesspits contain remains of native vegetation, the lower-status cesspits do not contain imported or limitedly available remains. Secondly, the higher status cesspits show a dominant increase of exotic material and increasing diversity within this material as time progresses. These results related to demand and availability conclude that, based on the presence of exotic materials, higher status individuals are more likely to enjoy a diverse diet.

The type of increase noted above shows that several fruits, herbs, and spices become stable products as time progresses (e.g. apples, cherries, and plums),[160] and they become home-grown as horticultural practices expand during the later Middle Ages.[161] In addition, there is also an increasing import of exotic fruits consisting of figs, dates, grapes, medlar, and peach.[162] Furthermore, research concerning multiple sites demonstrates that the specific import and demand could also relate to personal dietary preference.[163]

Research on archaeobotanical results from multiple excavations from Leicester provides further insight into the availability of exotic products. Aside from the increasing availability of figs from 1400 onwards,[164] this study shows a continuative use of native vegetation, including leeks and hazelnuts from 1100-1500. In addition, dietary preference also changed with the increase

[160] Van der Veen, Hill, and Livarda, "The Archaeobotany of Medieval Britain (c 450–1500)," 173.
[161] Van der Veen, Hill, and Livarda, "The Archaeobotany of Medieval Britain (c 450–1500)," 173.
[162] James Greig," Archaeobotanical and Historical Records Compared: a New Look at the Taphonomy of Edible and Other Useful Plants from the 11th to the 18th Centuries AD," *Circaea* 12, no. 2 (1996): 214. L. Moffett, "The Archaeology of Medieval Plant Foods" in *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition*, eds. C.M. Woolgar, D. Serjeantson, and T. Waldron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 46.
[163] Moffett, "The Archaeology of Medieval Plant Foods," 54.
[164] A. Monkton, "Food for the People of Medieval Leicester: the Evidence from Environmental Archaeology," *Medieval Leicestershire: Recent Research on the Medieval Archaeology of Leicestershire* 3 (2015): 245-262. L.C. Moffett L, "Macrofossil Plant Remains from The Shires Excavation, Leicester," *Ancient Monuments Laboratory Report* 31/93, English Heritage (1993).

of fruit variety during the late Middle Ages,[165] as shown by the replacement of apples with more delicate fruits (blackberries and raspberries for instance), or figs from 1400 onwards. The results also suggest that (compared to the Winchester site) figs could have become more available at a later stage. The Leicester excavations also contained medicinally applied botanical matters such as marigold (1100-1250), poppy (1250-1400), and violets.[166]

Overall, the review of the Leicester excavations sheds light on the increasing availability of specific botanical material. Although these results do not compare higher and lower-status individuals, they demonstrate an expansion of botanical material diversity following the Norman Conquest. Such an expansion arguably leads to dietary expansions and further changes within the diet. Moreover, these results have proven valuable because they include botanical material applied in medicinal contexts, and therefore demonstrate the distinction between foodstuffs and medicinally applied botanical matter.

In contrast to fruit remains, many herbs and spices – although frequently present in literary sources – are scarcely preserved in archaeological contexts. In contrast to their near absence in the archaeological results, many herbs and spices were available under the right circumstances, which mainly concerns import and expense. The absence of grain of paradise (*Aframomum Melegueta*) is an example of this combined influence on archaeobotanical presence. Even though *The Romaunt of the Rose* mentions the spice, and research notes that it already occurred in the thirteenth century,[167] its remains are rarely excavated and can only be dated back to the fifteenth century.[168]

Other spices and herbs – such as sage or cumin – are almost altogether absent from archaeobotanical results. This absence is likely due to lack of preservation, or to the difficulties concerning their determination.[169] For example, practitioners often used sage leaves in food or medicine production. In contrast to spices that consist of seeds (such as fennel or pepper), leaves often disintegrate when used in cooking, which leaves little chance of preservation or

[165] Monkton, "Food for the People," 3.
[166] Greig," Archaeobotanical and Historical Records Compared," 221-222. Moffett, "The Archaeology of Medieval Plant Foods," 54.
[167] C. Anne Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain. From the Stone Age to the 19th Century* (Chicago (Illinois): Academy Chicago Publishers, 2003), 284.
[168] Greig," Archaeobotanical and Historical Records Compared," 226. James Greig, "The Investigation of a Medieval Barrel-latrine from Worcester," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 8, no. 3 (1981): 265-82.
[169] Jervis, Whelan, and Livarda, "Cuisine and Conquest," 340-341.

determination.[170] Even though spices occur relatively more frequently in the archaeobotanical results than herbs, ground spices such as cumin are also unlikely to be encountered in archaeobotanical samples. Aside from sage and cumin, other examples of spices underrepresented in English archaeological contexts are ginger, liquorice, cinnamon, nutmeg, saffron, and zedoary.[171] Similar to cumin, they were also predominantly used as powder or shaving, which leaves no determinable remains. Archaeobotanists can only identify spices when the remains are at least large enough to be identified. For example, nutmeg was a valuable spice; its powder or shavings still used in cookery practices today. A similar use of nutmeg occurred in the Middle Ages, which left only one identifiable specimen for the entire region of north-west Europe.[172]

Overall, botanical matters became more widely available throughout the Middle Ages.[173] Although some spices were imported at first, horticultural practices considerably increased the availability of home-grown materials such as fennel.[174] Unfortunately, this chapter is unable to present further conclusions concerning nationwide use of specific herbs and spices due to development-led archaeology in urban contexts.

This first half of the chapter proves that excavations of urban contexts appear more regularly due to the development-led archaeological bias. This bias results in a strong presence of exotic herbs and spices prone to be preserved in waterlogged urban circumstances. Even though research on the presence of herbs and spices in Medieval England is currently part of ongoing research,[175] the results discussed within this chapter thus far show that higher status individuals would indeed be more likely to be familiar with the botanical material from the Middle English romance.[176] This conclusion shows that exotic material – noted through contemporary sources to become more common towards the end of the fifteenth century – was already available to those of means before

[170] Jervis, Whelan, and Livarda, "Cuisine and Conquest," 340-341.
[171] Greig, "Archaeobotanical and Historical Records Compared," 228.
[172] Livarda, "Spicing up Life in Northwestern Europe," 146, 155.
[173] Alexandra Livarda and Marijke van der Veen, "Social Access and Dispersal of Condiments in North-West Europe from the Roman to the Medieval Period," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 17 (2008), 204-206. Notes to be in prep: The food plant trade network in medieval Britain: a network analysis-based approach.
[174] Livarda and van der Veen, "Social Access and Dispersal of Condiments in North-West Europe," 205-207. Van der Veen, Hill, and Livarda, "The Archaeobotany of Medieval Britain (c 450–1500)," 173.
[175] Van der Veen, Hill, and Livarda, "The Archaeobotany of Medieval Britain (c 450–1500)," 173.
[176] Note that higher class includes all peoples of means who can afford to purchase specific spices and herbs. In addition, it is worthwhile to revisit the fact that most specific mentions of spices and herbs are made in relation to those of means. This association with higher status individuals also occurs in the selected romance texts. Arcite is treated with a remedy including sage, and Sir Thopas enjoys a dinner that includes spices fit for royalty.

the end of the fifteenth century.[177] This availability is most visible in the results from the Winchester site, which enables a contrast between cesspits from lower and higher status individuals based on their waste through either the lack of exotic material or great diversity of that material. This chapter shows that the archaeobotanical results support the suggestion that higher status individuals, and possibly urban residents, would be more familiar with the botanical references from the Middle English romances than the (rural) lower-status individuals. This conclusion is similar to the one drawn in the conclusion of chapter 2.

Since non-urban sites often lack waterlogged (or mineralized) material required for such results, it is impossible to compare material availability in terms of urban versus rural settlements and in terms of elite versus non-elite contexts.[178] Furthermore, monastic environments too are underrepresented or only partially excavated.[179] A case of the latter is research on the Carthusian priory Mount Grace.[180] Except for ash wood utilitarian objects, no other archaeobotanical results remain from these excavations. In essence, this section shows that collaborative research that includes available archaeobotanical results is beneficial in researching complex cases. The inclusion is most beneficial when multiple facets of life require analysis to present an as complete as possible visualization of the contemporary situation. This section also highlights that archaeobotanical results from non-urban contexts could also prove insightful when incorporated into this type of interdisciplinary research. To conclude, this section showed that interdisciplinary research can not only be used in the literature on the Middle Ages but can also benefit research on literature from the Middle Ages.

Medieval landscape

Similar to remains of fruits, herbs, and spices, wood is also subject to preservation in waterlogged and charred conditions. Analysis concerning wood species and dendrochronological results are often present in archaeological reports.

[177] Moffett, "The Archaeology of Medieval Plant Foods", 44-46. Carrott, Issitt, Kenward and Large, "The Brooks, Winchester," 4, 10
[178] Moffett, "The Archaeology of medieval Plant Foods", 53. Van der Veen, Hill, and Livarda, "The Archaeobotany of Medieval Britain (c 450–1500)," 174.
[179] An example of such excavated contexts can be found in Nick Holder, "Precincts and the Use of Space," in *The Friaries of Medieval London: From Foundation to Dissolution*, eds. Nick Holder, Ian Betts, Jens Röhrkasten, Mark Samuel and Christian Steer (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2017), 191-210. DOI:10.1017/9781787440623.012
[180] Glyn Coppack, and Laurence Keen, *Mount Grace Priory: Excavations of 1957-1992* (Havertown: Oxbow, 2019).

Woodlands frequently appear in medieval texts. In daily life, artisans used wood from particular tree species in these woodlands to produce structures or objects (see footnote for examples). [181] However, within the selected poems, most references concern trees and woodlands in a narrative environment. Therefore, this section includes archaeobotanical research in the discussion of environmental reality, and interaction with the environment, in the selected Middle English romances. This section contains an analysis of the aspects of woodland management presented within the Middle English romances and elaborates on the different environments created within these poems. Finally, this section will discuss whether these environments are a reflection of contemporary reality. This discussion will shed light on the extent of the familiarity of the Middle English romance reader with in-text representations of these environments.

Reflection of reality: the presence of trees and bushes as part of an environmental reconstruction analysis

Some archaeological sites contain diverse archaeobotanical material that reflects the local diversity in woodland composition, enabling a reflection on the acquisition, management, and usage of material from the surrounding area. The following sections visualize the possibility of such reflections of local diversity in local diets or production processes using results from four archaeological excavations.

[181] Oak for instance, though often used in the production of buildings, structures, and small artefacts, was also of importance for the maintenance of constant temperatures in furnaces. Elmwood, for instance, was also used in constructions in addition to oak. Due to its characteristics, this tree was preferred for the production of underwater constructions, as well as waterpipes (see Science Museum Group Collection), and even bows. Boxwood was used for the production of combs and knife handles yet is in textual material also used to make musical instruments as can be seen in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. J.M. Fletcher, and M.C. Tapper, M. C, "Medieval artefacts and structures dated by dendrochronology," *Medieval archaeology* 28, no.1 (1984): 112-132. Jane Wheeler, "Charcoal Analysis of Industrial Fuelwood from Medieval and Early Modern Iron-working Sites in Bilsdale and Rievaulx, North Yorkshire, UK: Evidence for Species Selection and Woodland Management," *Environmental Archaeology: The Journal of Human Palaeoecology* 16, no. 1 (2011): 16-35. Kate Orr, "An archaeological watching brief at St. Michael's Church, Kirby-le-soken, Essex Juli and October 2007," *Colchester archaeological Trust Report* 441 (2007): 6. P. J. Huggins, K. N. Bascombe, R. M. Huggins, "Excavations of the Collegiate and Augustinian Churches, Waltham Abbey, Essex, 1984–87," *Archaeological Journal* 146, no. 1 (1989): 476-537. Gustav Milne, and Chrissie Milne, "Medieval Waterfront Development at Trig Lane, London," *London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*. Special paper, no. 5 (1982): 25. Linda Hurcombe, *Archaeological Artefacts as Material Culture* (London [etc.]: Routledge, 2007), 127. Kristof Haneca, and Koen Deforce, "Wood Use in Early Medieval Weapon Production," *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* 12 (2020): 1-16. Clifford J. Rogers, "The Development of the Longbow in Late Medieval England and 'Technological Determinism'," *Journal of Medieval History* 37, no. 3 (2012): 321-41. Science Museum Group, "Part of an Elm Water Pipe, England, 1401-1600," A643605 Science Museum Group Collection Online, accessed October 22, 2020, https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co85760/part-of-an-elm-water-pipe-england-1401-1600-water-pipe. John S. Lee, "Piped Water Supplies Managed by Civic Bodies in Medieval English Towns," *Urban History* 41, no. 3 (2014): 388. Della Hooke, "Groves in Anglo-Saxon England," *Landscape History* 38, no. 1 (2017): 11, DOI: 10.1080/01433768.2017.1322264.

Excavation of land at Castlethorpe Road in Hanslope (Buckinghamshire) yielded evidence of woodland diversity and woodland management.[182] Charcoal analysis proved that fuelwood consisted of wood from apple trees and bushes, including sloe, and hawthorn.[183] Continuous use of these fruit-bearing trees and bushes as fuelwood suggests that these wood species were consistently available since they most likely grew in the vicinity of the site. Further charcoal analysis of other samples proved that oak and hazel also functioned as fuelwood resources. The analyses show that oak was explicitly used for this purpose from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, probably since hardwood species allow for sustained and consistent fires.[184] The fuelwood samples also contained roundwood (i.e., branches). Based on this round wood's age range, it is highly likely that fuelwood consisted mostly of coppiced wood.[185]

As mentioned above, wood from different trees and bushes functioned as firewood. However, macro-fossil evidence indicates that hazelnut and hawthorn were part of the inhabitant's diets during the eleventh century to the thirteenth century.[186] A dietary expansion occurred with the additional consummation of sloes and apples in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[187] The results contained no remains of exotic fruit or tree species, indicating that such foodstuffs were probably unavailable on site. Other local vegetation includes field maples and birch. The combination of all species referred to above demonstrates a typical hedgerow/woodland edge environment.[188]

The excavation at kiln site Burgess Hill (West Sussex) yielded evidence to reflect on the woodland composition and the wood selection from the environment for production purposes.[189] Macro-fossil evidence from the site includes beech and hornbeam nuts and a sloe-type thorn.[190] The charcoal analyses also show the local presence of holly, oak, and birch.[191] Comparisons between the Roman and late medieval archaeobotanical results lead to the belief that the kilns

[182] Anna Moosbauer, "Land at Castlethorpe Road, Hanslope, Milton Keynes. Archaeological excavation," *Cotswold Archaeology Report* MK0054_1 (2019): 68-70.
[183] Moosbauer, "Land at Castlethorpe," 27.
[184] Moosbauer, "Land at Castlethorpe," 27, 69-70.
[185] Moosbauer, "Land at Castlethorpe," 27, 69-70.
[186] Moosbauer, "Land at Castlethorpe," 58-61.
[187] Moosbauer, "Land at Castlethorpe," 58-61.
[188] Moosbauer, "Land at Castlethorpe," 60-61, 68.
[189] Andrew Whelan, "Goddards' Green Solar, Burgess Hill, West Sussex. Archaeological Strip, Map and Sample Excavation," *Cotswold Archaeology, CA Report* 17047 (2017).
[190] Whelan, "Burgess Hill," 36-37.
[191] Whelan, "Burgess Hill," 46.

functioned for the production of ash used for lye and potash production. [192] While the Roman results also show remains of alder, willow/poplar, field maple, and elder, these taxa do not reoccur in the late medieval results. The variation between the identified wood species could indicate either a shift in used wood taxa for production purposes or that the environmental composition became less diverse.

Even though hornbeam itself does not occur in the selected Middle English romances, the inclusion of the species is relevant to the discussion regarding woodland composition and environment. Hornbeam is rare in the British Isles. It exists mainly in south/south-east England, and it is more likely to be found in continental climates than in the British maritime climate.[193] Its presence in the archaeobotanical results from Burgess Hill shows the importance of environmental conditions in which certain species thrive and occur. It also demonstrates how these conditions influence someone's natural environment that, in turn, affects an individual's chance of being familiar with particular species.

The excavation at ironworking sites from Bilsdale and Rievaulx (North Yorkshire) provides evidence for the selection of particular wood species for fuelwood from the immediate environment with regards to woodland management.[194] The sites occupy a large area, which results in a variation of archaeobotanical results depending on the specific site within this large area. Overall, present species were oak, birch, ash, willow/poplar, alder, maple, hazel, rose species, and holly.[195] Oak was present on all sites; however, birch is the most attested wood species in general.[196] Most fuelwood stemmed from woodlands through coppicing or was acquired from open (un)managed environments. The woodlands' tending level depended on local availability and accessibility in order to preserve fuelwood stocks for iron-production. These sites demonstrate how the local environment influenced wood species used for fuelwood stock. It also demonstrates that the exploitation of local environments did not result in exhaustion of the woodland, instead woodland management differed depending on the state of the woodland itself.

[192] Whelan, "Burgess Hill," 39-41.
[193] Whelan, "Burgess Hill," 41.
[194] Jane Wheeler, "Charcoal Analysis of Industrial Fuelwood from Medieval and Early Modern Iron-working Sites in Bilsdale and Rievaulx, North Yorkshire, UK: Evidence for Species Selection and Woodland Management," *Environmental Archaeology: The Journal of Human Palaeoecology* 16, no. 1 (2011): 16-35.
[195] Wheeler, "Bilsdale and Rievaulx," 20-21.
[196] Wheeler, "Bilsdale and Rievaulx," 25.

Even though the excavation at Mount Grace did not include in-depth archaeobotanical research, the excavations did yield many wooden bowls, plates, and other utilitarian objects made of ash wood. Since these objects are not present in the priory records, they were possibly produced on-site instead of bought.[197] Such production could mean that ash wood was readily available in the local environment and that the inhabitants of the site were familiar with the qualities of the wood.

Extensive research on the late medieval woodland composition based on archaeobotanical results is outside the scope of this thesis. However, this section attempts to demonstrate the effect of incorporating archaeobotanical research on late medieval woodlands to analyse the environment within the selected Middle English romances. Differing regional woodland compositions could, for instance, account for instances when an individual is unfamiliar with a particular species when encountered in a textual environment.

As demonstrated above, species such as oak and hazel frequently appear within English woodland sites. However, regions are prone to having local environmental varieties in woodland composition (most probably due to local climatological circumstances and soil composition). Beech, hornbeam, birch and ash are examples of such a regional diversity. This diversity is most visible when comparing highland zones and lowland zones. For example, woodlands from highland zones such as Cornwall and the Welsh border (the setting for *The Awntyrs off Arthur*) predominantly consist of oak. In contrast, woodlands from lowland zones like the midlands are more diverse in composition.

Unfortunately, the archaeobotanical results do not entirely reflect the diversity in lowland woodland composition. For instance, the sites discussed above did not yield chestnut remains although the species returned in the textual material in *The Romaunt of the Rose*, *The Knight's Tale*, and the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*. Chapter 1 already contains a discussion of the addition of chestnut to Chaucer's works. Even though the absence of chestnut in the records is not remarkable since research notes that both chestnut and beech were even less widespread then than they are today,[198] it is clear that late medieval society was familiar with the species. In contrast to

[197] Laurence Keen, "7.6 Small Finds," in *Mount Grace Priory: Excavations of 1957-1992*, eds. Glyn Coppack and Laurence Keen (Havertown: Oxbow, 2019), 346-347.
[198] Rackham, "Forest and Upland," 46.

the chestnut tree, the hornbeam is not at all mentioned within the selected romances. Perhaps, its absence in the romances results from its absence in local environments other than south/south-east England.

The absence of chestnut and the presence of hornbeam in either the archaeological record or textual sources stress the need to include regional variations of woodland composition in the interpretation of the realistic representation of contemporary woodlands in the selected Middle English romances. For instance, similar to chestnut Chaucer also added birch to the list of trees in *The Knight's Tale*. Based on the presence of birch in the archaeological results, birch was a well-known species in the late medieval English landscape. An example is the immense birch presence in the archaeological results of the Bilsdale/Rievaulx sites, which could be due to the moor-type landscape contexts of these sites.[199] Although environmental variety mainly depends on climatological influences and soil composition, pre-medieval woodland management equally influenced the environmental diversity. Woodlands initially included alder and linden; however, Prehistoric woodland management increased the presence of hazel and oak trees.[200] The ash, maple, aspen, and birch also became more frequent in the landscape as time progressed.[201] The exact composition depended on the research area, as shown above.

Medieval woodland management

Similar to woodland composition, the representation of the environment in the selected Middle English romances also reflects the medieval woodland and forest management and preservation. During the later Middle Ages, forests mainly existed on mid-southern England's lowland grounds because of their relation to the king.[202] The relation between the monarchy and their claimed forests is present in *The Awntyrs of Arthur*. As discussed in chapter 2, this poem connects the oak's presence to coeval royal hunting practices. Furthermore, oaks from such royal forests served building purposes for the higher-class.[203]

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[199] Woodland Trust, "Birch, downy," accessed October 23, 2020, https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/downy-birch/
[200] M. Jane Bunting, and Michelle Farrell, "Seeing the Wood for the Trees: Recent Advances in the Reconstruction of Woodland in Archaeological Landscapes Using Pollen Data," *Environmental Archaeology* 23, no. 3 (2018): 236.
[201] B.R. Gearey, A.R. Hall, Harry Kenward, M. Jane Bunting, M.C. Lillie, and J. Carrott, "Recent Palaeoenvironmental Evidence for the Processing of Hemp (Cannabis sativa L.) in Eastern England During the Medieval Period," *Medieval Archaeology* (2005): 317-322.
[202] Rackham, "Forest and Upland," 50.
[203] Rackham, "Forest and Upland," 51.

The archaeobotanical results from the previous section demonstrate that *The Awntyrs of Arthur* provides an insight into possible late Medieval woodlands and forest composition in England.[204] In addition, the archaeobotanical results also show that one's local environment influences the possibility of being familiar with botanical matter from a textual environment. Connections between local and in-texts environments allow for recognition and a sense of reality within the poems as can also be seen in *Athelston*. For instance, even though the presence of the linden tree diminished from prehistory onwards, its presence in lowland woodlands such as Winchester was slightly more likely opposed to its presence in – for instance – *The Awntyrs off Arthur*. The same applies to the linden tree in *The Romaunt of the Rose*.

The connection between one's local environment and one's ability to recognise botanical matters is also apparent in the ash tree's depiction in *Lay le Freine*. The widespread presence of this tree throughout the country ensures the understanding of its naturalistic depiction within the poem. A similar claim can be made concerning the bow from black sloe wood mentioned in *The Romaunt of the Rose*. The cypress spear presents a contrasting image in *Sir Thopas*. Although there is no exact reason for this wood choice, it is clear that this tree was not native to England (the only native coniferous species were yew and juniper).[205] Since it is not part of the native vegetation, this wood choice may emphasize Sir Thopas's foreign background (coming from Belgium). Another option is that the cypress spear functions as an indicator of Sir Thopas's flaws since ash was often the preferred material for spear production (as already touched upon in chapter 1).

The archaeobotanical results also demonstrated different types of woodland or forest management. As demonstrated by the archaeological results from the Bilsdale/Rievaulx sites, some woodlands were actively maintained, whereas others were only partially subject to management, or not at all. Nonetheless, most dendrochronological results of the roundwood attested coppicing practices. The practice is of great importance since it allows for the renewal of the woodlands and maintains a stable supply of raw material.[206]

In addition to its use as a dating method, dendrochronology can also help determine the provenance of wood used in, for instance, structures and artefacts.[207] This type of research is

[204] It is also suggested by Howes that *The Awntyrs off Arthur*'s mention of 'felle' related to coppicing practices. Howes, "Inglewood Forest', 187.
[205] Rackham, "Forest and Upland," 46.
[206] Rackham, "Forest and Upland," 47.
[207] Bridge, "Progress in British Dendrochronology," 58-62.

known as dendroprovenance, and it can help establish the composition of the woodland hinterland or resource area. Although dendroprovenance mainly applies to material remains, it is also relevant with regards to textual sources.

An example of in-text dendroprovenance is present in *The Knight's Tale*. As discussed in chapter 2, Chaucer added chestnut, birch, cornel/dogwood and thorn to Boccaccio's original list in *Teseida*. Since all these species were present in (parts) of England or were present in England through import, Chaucer created a partially recognisable representation of the English woodlands.[208] Research of the Flanders Heritage Agency proves the relevance of a recognisable environment. This research analysed a Roman settlement and funerary site in Northern Gaul. Charcoal analyses from these sites conclude that the Roman funeral pyres consisted of wood from trees available near the cremation site.[209] Although *The Knight's Tale* takes place in ancient Greece, research shows that Boccaccio relied on Roman authors and classical themes instead of Greek writings.[210] In his *Teseida*, the grove in which the funeral took place was undamaged, since wood for the funeral pyre stemmed from the hinterland.

Combining the aforementioned archaeobotanical results, and the representation of historical reality within the Middle English romances, Chaucer's alterations to the cremation scene are historically justified. In contrast to Boccaccio's *Teseida*, Chaucer's grove fuelled the funeral pyre rather than a hinterland resource area. Arguably, the impact of using the grove as fuel increases because of its recognisable composition. Although Chaucer's motivations for using the grove as a source for Archite's funeral pyre are unlikely to be determined, the alterations to his source material reflect historical reality when comparing archaeobotanical results and textual documentation of historical forest representations in Middle English romances.

Although not altogether found in one place, most wood species – especially those with an in-text purpose – mentioned in the Middle English romances were present within the archaeobotanical results. Whether native or not, the botanical matters from the selected romances were present in

[208] Martyn Allen, Tim Allen, and James Kenny, "Excavations of a Chichester entrenchment at Lower Graylingwell, Chichester, West Sussex," *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 156 (2018): 19. Rob Jarman, Z. Hazell, Gill Campbell, Julia Webb, and Frank M. Chambers, "Sweet Chestnut (Castanea Sativa Mill.) in Britain: Re-assessment of Its Status as a Roman Archaeophyte," *Britannia (Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies)* 50 (2019): 49-74.
[209] Koen Deforce, and Kristof Haneca. "Ashes to Ashes. Fuelwood Selection in Roman Cremation Rituals in Northern Gaul," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39, no. 5 (2012): 1338-1348.
[210] James H. McGregor, "Boccaccio's Athenian Theater: Form and Function of an Ancient Monument in Teseida," *MLN* 99, no. 1 (1984): 4.

England at the time of composition. The archaeobotanical results from this chapter demonstrated that environmental realism within the selected Middle English romances is of considerable relevance. Not only did the contemporary reader know of the specific species, but the reader was probably familiar with these species when encountered in a textual environment. Similarities exist between the results from fruits, herbs and spices, and the wood remains. Although some wood species were not present in the archaeobotanical results, absence of matter does not represent the absence of presence in the contemporary context. An example of this is the cherry tree. Although this chapter did not discuss cherry tree wood, its absence does not indicate that the tree species was not present in some local environments (as is the case for the discussed hornbeam).[211] In essence, this chapter demonstrated that an individual's sense of familiarity with a specific botanical matter depends on multiple facets of daily life, including social status and local environmental compositions.

[211] Cherry type stones were discovered in a 13th/14th century cesspit in Leicester for instance. The size of these stones suggests that these were either wild specimens, or those that stem from wild specimens yet are cultivated in an orchard. See: A. Monkton, and Anita Radini, "The Medieval Plant Remains," in *An Archaeological Excavation on Land at 52, Grange Lane, Leicester* (Unpublished ULAS Report No. 2010-226, University of Leicester Archaeological Services), 89-98.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to elucidate the extent to which readers of the Middle English romances could have been familiar with the botanic material referenced within these narratives.

Although the corpus of Middle English romance texts used in this thesis consists of an extremely diverse group of narratives, centred around many different possible subjects, settings and themes, nature plays a role in most of them. By incorporating ecocriticism (and allied theories such as eco-theory) as a theoretical foundation, this thesis explored the specified botanical matters within selected Middle English romances: *Lay le Freine*, *Sir Thopas*, *The Knight's Tale*, *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, *The Romaunt of the Rose* and *Athelston*. Secondary scholarship had already established the reflection of a natural reality within *Lay le Freine* and *The Awntyrs off Arthur*. Comparative research between the close reading of the selected texts, non-romance texts, and non-literary material shed light on the application of naturalization, cultural adaptation, and the reflection of contemporary natural elements within the Middle English romances.

Analysis of the material revealed a distinction between symbolically functioning and non-symbolically functioning botanical matters within the selected Middle English romances. The former concern references to which prior knowledge of the matter does not influence the interpretation, such as the rose, lily, and laurel. The latter involved botanical matters that function as, for instance, colour indicators (e.g., saffron) and those with explicit functions such as place markers (e.g., linden or oak). Further analysis of the symbolic references demonstrated that these references consist of symbolic and extra-symbolic references. Unlike the symbolic references, the extra-symbolic references require prior familiarity with a particular species. Discussions of the function of the hawthorn (*The Romaunt of the Rose*) and the cherry tree (*Athelston*) visualised the distinction between symbolically functioning botanical matters.

Further elaboration on the works of Chaucer showed that many of his additions and omissions reflect a cultural adaptation of the Middle English romances when comparing the works to his source material. These adaptations create a reflection of his contemporary environment, and therefore present relatable environments, as visualized by the grove in *The Knight's Tale*. Furthermore, Chaucer's works reflect the coeval availability and popularity of botanical matter, as is shown by the addition of ginger in *The Romaunt of the Rose*. *Sir Thopas* also provides insight into the availability and usage of botanical material through its unusual comparison between Sir

Thopas's hair colour and saffron, and references to cumin and liquorice. Cultural and natural elements also occurred in *The Awntyrs off Arthur*. This thesis was able to explore these elements further, and it demonstrated that naturalization occurred with regards to the ash tree in *Lay le Freine*. Although the translation abandoned the tree's original symbolic function, engagement with *The Parliament of Fowls* demonstrates how contemporaries could have linked intrinsic values connected to the ash tree in general to le Freine's character.

This thesis explored the role of botanical matters in daily life by incorporating non-romance textual material to analyse the primary dataset. The extent of the familiarity of the Middle English romance audience with those matters was established by investigating different facets of daily life. These include economic circumstances, contemporary associations with and applications of botanical material, and its usage in cookery and medicine. Many of the botanical materials extracted from the selected texts reoccurred within non-romance texts. Comparisons of the entries from the selected texts with the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* demonstrated a significant overlap in terms of between botanical matters. Over half of these overlapping entries had medicinal purposes. The comparison was vital in confirming the purely symbolic function of some botanical matters from the selected romances. An example of this is the lily used to visualize how Guinevere's mother's face appeared similar to a lily in bloom in *The Awntyrs of Arthur*. This example demonstrates that, in this context, the readers would not have connected the lily with medicinal remedies, and instead would have connected the symbol to her once chaste and pure character.

Furthermore, the relatively high number of trees featuring within the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus* suggests that it would be likely that contemporary readers would have been able to identify specific trees within their natural environment. Such familiarity would also have enabled them to recognize specific trees mentioned within the Middle English romances. An example already demonstrated this recognition using the ash tree, but it also applies to (for instance) hazel, birch, oak, willow, and elm. Even though a continuation was present in the use of some botanical matters, comparisons between the botanical matters within the selected texts, the *Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus*, and *The Old English Herbarium* also showed that the availability of exotic material drastically increases following the Norman Conquest. This increase demonstrates that familiarity with exotic material becomes more likely as time progresses. The inclusion of non-romance sources (e.g., the *Letter-Books* and *The Forme of Cury*) further specified

the audience that would have been familiar with the exotic botanical materials. The intertextual analysis showed that the audience likely had access to such botanical matters contained high-status individuals, urban residents of modest means, and individuals with a professional interest.

This thesis incorporates both literary material and non-literary material. Archaeobotanical results provided the means to explore contemporary availability and usage of the botanical matters from the selected texts. In addition, the archaeobotanical results allowed for an in-depth analysis of the reflection of the contemporary environment within the environments of the Middle English romances. Although biased regarding location and sampling strategies, the archaeobotanical research from English sites demonstrates that incorporation of this research benefits the understanding of the contemporary presence of the botanical matter from the selected texts. For instance, fruit remains are often easily identified, and as time progresses, the increase of remains suggest an increase in the availability of exotic products (e.g., figs or grapes). Although locally available products are still in use, such remains show that dietary preferences changed or expanded over time. Although herbs and spices are more difficult to identify than fruit remains, it is the combination of all these remains that contributes to understanding the contemporary availability and usage of these botanical matters. For example, the comparisons of the contents of high- and low-status cesspits from Winchester shows that not everyone had the means to purchase these exotic materials. Although the matters were available, the low-status cesspit contains considerably less exotic material than the high-status cesspit which contains a greater diversity of local and exotic material.

Archaeobotanical results also help shed light on the audience Middle English romances' familiarity with particular tree species. Although many specified trees or bushes occur within seemingly empty contexts (such as the probable sloe bow featuring in *The Romaunt of the Rose*), the reader might not have missed those particular references. Many different types of trees and bushes – ranging from fruit-bearing species such as apple or sloe to species such as linden or maple – are common in many areas. The regional variation under the influence of climate and soil composition could mean that someone from the lowlands would be unfamiliar with some species from the highlands, or vice versa. Such distribution patterns, influenced by human interaction with nature, also indicate that some species would stand out in the countryside as exemplified by the linden tree which functions as an indicator of a meeting place in Athelston and other romances. These trees have become scarcer over time through prehistoric woodland management, and in the

late Middle Ages mainly occurred in lowland environments, often in association with monastic sites. Such influences and associations make it likely that the readers of Middle English romances would have recognised the tree species when specified in a narrative.

In addition to woodland composition, archaeobotanical results also demonstrate the reflection of contemporary woodland management in the Middle English romances. In *The Awntyrs off Arthur*, the royal forest contains several landscapes that reflect the contemporary situation. This narrative's references to coppicing, a practice of woodland management, is also highly apparent within the archaeological contexts. Although seemingly unimportant within the narrative, these reflections of woodland composition and management demonstrate an active representation of the contemporary environmental situation.

This thesis explored the extent to which readers of Middle English romances could have been familiar with the botanical material referenced within these romances. It also evaluated the benefits of combining multiple research fields (literary studies and archaeobotanical research) in one study. Although archaeobotanical research has well-documented limitations, its benefits allow for reconstructions of the contemporary environment at the time of deposition. These reconstructions allow for an in-depth discussion of the reflection of realistic representation of the contemporary environment within the Middle English romances. In addition, this combined research also allowed for further exploration of the type of reader who would have recognised the botanical matters depicted within these texts. Recent research has shown that the Middle English romances' audience consisted of laypeople, including the lower aristocracy. However, this thesis shows that the pre-fifteenth century audience would likely consist of higher status individuals and urban residents of considerable means. In contrast to most laypeople, this audience would have the means to acquire the botanical matters mentioned within the Middle English romances.

Even though archaeobotanical research is of extreme importance in producing (a piece of) environmental realism, research opportunities highly depend on archaeological demand and bias. This thesis emphasizes that archaeological and archaeobotanical results – when relevant and available – are beneficial in further understanding the complex contexts surrounding the authors and readers of the texts studied within the present-day literature departments. This thesis proves that the environment and the availability of botanical matters were of considerable influence on medieval romances.

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APPENDIX: OVERVIEW BOTANICAL MATTER FROM MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

Poem	Middle English Name	Modern Name	(Probable) Latin Name	Context	Line numbers and additional details	Within Forme Of Cury	Within ME Gilbertus Anglicus
Lay Le Freine	Ash/Ashe	Ash	*Fraxinus*	Symbol and name of the lead female character in contrast to the hazel.	There is a description of the ash tree that the child was placed in, ll. 174-176. The author also notes that he keeps the name Freine because it is ash in French. Freine is the main character's name.	No	Yes
	Hazle	Hazel	*Corylus*	Symbol and name of the lead character's twin.	It is noted that the hazel is better than the ash (l. 346). Other than that, there are few details, except that the hazel always went with them (l. 404).	Yes	Yes
Sir Thopas	Rose	Rose	*Rosa*	To compare the colour of sir Thopas's lips to the rose.	Ll. 726.	Yes	Yes
	Saffroun	Saffron	*Crocus Sativus*	To compare the colour of sir Thopas's beard to saffron.	Ll. 730.	Yes	Yes
	Brembel Flour	Dog Rose	*Rosa Canina*	His character is as sweet as [the smell] of the dog rose.	Ll. 746.	No	No
	Lycoryce	Liquorice	*Glycyrrhiza Glabra*	A herb that suddenly appeared. It is also part of the royal spices used in Sir Thopas's dinner.	L. 761 and l. 855.	Yes	Yes
	Cetewale	Zedoary	*Curcuma Zedoaria*	A herb that suddenly appears.	L. 761.	No	Yes
	Clowe-Gylofre	Clove	*Syzygium Aromaticum*	A herb that suddenly appears.	Ll. 762.	Yes	No
	Notemuge	Nutmeg	*Myristica Fragrans*	A herb that suddenly appears.	Ll. 763-765. It is noted that nutmeg can be put into ale 'whether old or new', possibly to improve the taste of beer. It can also be placed in a clothing press.	Yes	Yes
	Mazelyn	Maple	*Acer*	A maple wood drinking bowl.	Ll. 852.	No	No
	Comyn	Cumin	*Cuminum Cyminum*	A spice that it brought to him as part of royal spices.	Ll. 855.	Yes	Yes

	Lily Flour	Lily	*Lilium*	His surcoat is as white as a lily. As he mounts his horse to go to battle (l.907), he has a lily on his helmet.	Ll. 867. Ll. 907.	No	Yes
	Ciprees	Cypress	*Cupressus*	His spear was made from cypress wood.	Ll. 881.	No	No
The Knight's Tale	Laurer	Laurel	*Laurus Nobilis*	Theseus was welcomed home as a conqueror with a crown of laurel. King Emetreus also wears a garland made of laurel. Finally, Arcite also wears a laurel garland on his head during the funeral.	L. 1027, l. 2175, and l. 2875.	Yes	Yes
	Lylie	Lily	*Lilium*	Is used to describe Emelye, who was fairer to be seen than a lily on its green stalk. It also describes the tame eagle brought by king Emetreus.	Ll. 1035-1036 and l. 2178.	No	Yes
	Rose	Rose	*Rosa*	Emelye her hue has the colour of a rose. Venus's statue wears a garland of roses.	L. 1038 and L. 1960-1961.	Yes	Yes
	Boxtree	Box	*Buxus Sempervirens*	Used to describe that Palamon should be looked upon like as one would look upon this tree due to the jealousy that overtook him.	L. 1302.	No	No
	Ash(shen)	Ash	*Fraxinus*	Is used to describe that Palamon should be looked upon like as one would look upon this tree due to the jealousy that overtook him. Arcite is described as "asshen" cold twice: first, after suffering emotional	L. 1302, l. 1364, and l. 2957.	No	Yes

				turmoil, second after he is cremated.			
	Opie	Opium	*Papaver Somniferum*	Opium is used to drug the wine that Palamon gives his jailer to escape.	L. 1472.	No	Yes
	Wodebynde	Woodbine	*Parthenocissus Vitaceae*	Something Arcite creates a garland from.	L. 1508.	No	No
	Hawethorn	Hawthorn	*Crataegus*	Something Arcite creates a garland from.	L. 1508.	Yes	Yes
	Ook	Oak	*Quercus*	The softest blow struck between Palamon and Arcite in the grove was strong enough to fell an oak. An evergreen oak garland is also placed on Emelye's head during her visit to Diana's temple. Old oaks from the grove also form the foundation of the funeral fires.	L. 1702, l. 2290, and l. 2866.	No	Yes
	Yvy	Ivy Leaf	*Hedera*	Part of a proverb; whistle in an ivy leaf.	L. 1838.	No	Yes
	Gooldes	Marigolds	*Tagetes*	Venus wears a garland made of marigolds.	L. 1929.	No	No
	Citryn	Lemon	*Citrus Limon*	The eyes of king Emetreus of India are described as being lemon yellow	L. 2167.	No	Yes
	Save	Sage	*Salvia Officinalis*	Is mentioned as being used as one of the herbs for medicine used for Arcite's recovery.	L. 2713.	Yes	Yes
	Firre	Fir	*Abies*	Fir to dogwood are used for Arcite's the funeral pyre.	Ll. 2921-2923. These trees were all present in the grove.	No	No
	Birch	Birch	*Betula*			No	Yes
	Aspe	Aspen	*Populus Tremula*			No	No
	Alder	Alder	*Alnus*			No	No
	Holm	Holm Oak	*Quercus Ilex*			No	No

	Popler	Poplar	*Populus*			No	Yes
	Wylugh	Willow	*Salix*			No	Yes
	Elm	Elm	*Ulmus*			No	Yes
	Plane	Plane	*Plantae*			No	No
	Assh	Ash	*Fraxinus*			No	Yes
	Box	Box	*Buxus Sempervirens*			No	No
	Chasteyn	Chestnut	*Castanea*			No	Yes
	Lynde	Linden	*Tilia*			No	No
	Laurer	Laurel	*Laurus Nobilis*			Yes	Yes
	Mapul	Maple	*Acer*			No	No
	Thorn	Thorn			It is possibly hawthorn since Arcite already creates a garland from the material earlier in the tale.		
	Bech	Beech	*Fagus*			No	Yes
	Hasel	Hazel	*Corylus*			Yes	Yes
	Ew	Yew	*Taxus*			No	No
	Whippletree	Dogwood	*Cornus*			No	No
Athelston	Lynde	Linden tree	*Tilia*	Underneath which the wayward cross is situated, meaning that it is also placed at the crossroads.	Ll. 17-18.	No	No
	Lylye-flour	Lily	*Lilium*	Is used to describe the skin colour of the two children of Sir Egeland.	L. 70.	No	Yes
	Rose	Rose	*Rosa*	Used to describe the hair colour of said boys.	L. 71.	Yes	Yes
	Blosme on brere	Brair blossom	*Rosa Rubiginosa*	They are said to be as bright as the blossom on a briar, whether this is related to their countenance of something else is unclear.	L. 72.	No	No
	Chyryes	Cherries	*Prunus*	A garland of cherries the queen cast off.	L. 256.	Yes	Yes

	Elmes	Elms	*Ulmus*	Is used to refer to the street's name and the many elms on that lane.	L. 805.	No	Yes
The Awntyrs off Arthur	Hawe	Hawthorn	*Crataegus*	Guinevere's hood has a hawthorn (berry) hue.	L. 18. Hawthorn has been chosen rather than aqua as the in-text note states due to the connotation given to hawe in the Middle English dictionary.	Yes	Yes
	Lorer/Lorre	Laurel	*Laurus Nobilis*	Under a laurel lay Guinevere, and later she and Gawain stay under once again, under a leaf ceiling made by box and barberry.	L. 32 and l. 70.	Yes	Yes
	Oke	Oak	*Quercus*	Each lord is placed near/to an Oak together with a bow and a hound.	L. 37.	No	Yes
	Box	Box	*Buxus Sempervirens*	Part of the ceiling below which Guinevere and Gawain stay.	L. 71.	No	No
	Berber	Barberry	*Berberis*	Ibid.	L. 71.	No	Yes
	Rose	Rose	*Rosa*	Ruddier than a rose on a branch as is said by the corpse.	L. 161.	Yes	Yes
	Lelé	Lily	*Lilium*	With the face white as a lily.	L. 162.	No	Yes
The Romaunt of the Rose	Rose	Rose	*Rosa*	Refers to a woman who is worthy of being loved, excellent and moral, is named Rose by everyone. A rose garland sits on the head of the fair maiden who opens the door. A Rose chaplet is also present on the head of sir Mirth. Gladnesse seems like a new rose. Cupid wears a chaplet of roses. The narrator spots a 'roser' filled with roses.	Ll. 42-48, l. 566, ll. 845-846, l. 856, l. 908., and l. 1651.	Yes	Yes

	Leek	Leek	*Allium Porrum*	Avarice is green as a leek. Interestingly, the Old French uses chive, which is still used in English today for Allium Schoenoprasum.	L. 212.	Yes	Yes
	Mentes	Mint	*Mentha*	Found down by a little path, close to which sir Mirth was found.	L. 731.	Yes	Yes
	Fennel	Fennel	*Foeniculum Vulgare*	Found down by a little path, close to which sir Mirth was found.	L. 731.	Yes	Yes
	Appel	Apple	*Malus Domestica*	Sir Mirth's face is round like an apple.	L. 819.	Yes	Yes
	Brome	Broom	*Cytisus Scoparius*	The flower of the brome is also not missing from Cupid's garment.	L. 902.	No	Yes
	Violete	Violet	*Viola*	Example of another flower on Cupid's garment. Also, one of the flowers which are present at the well.	L. 903, and l. 1431.	Yes	Yes
	Pervenke	Periwinkle	*Catharanthus Roseus*	Example of another flower on Cupid's garment. Also, one of the flowers which are present at the well.	L. 903, and l. 1431.	No	No
	Slo	Sloe	*Prunus Spinosa*	One of the bows of Sweet Looking/Cupid was black as a (slo)berry.	L. 928.	No	Yes
	Lilie	Lily	*Lilium*	Beauty's face was white as a lily, or Rose on a stem.	L. 1015.	No	Yes
	Hempen herde	Hemp	*Cannabis Sativa*	Fraunchyse wore a suckeny that was not made of hemp.	Ll. 1232-1233.	No	Yes
	Loreres	Laurels	*Laurus Nobilis*	The narrator looks on laurels, pine trees, cedars, and olive trees (mentioned below). Later mentioned again.	Ll. 1313-1314, and l. 1379.	Yes	Yes
	Pyn-trees	Pine	*Pinus*		L. 1314, l. 1379, l. 1456 and l. 1464.	No	Yes
	Cedres	Cedar	*Cedrus*		L. 1314.	No	No

	Oliveres	Olives	*Olea Europaea*		L.1314.	Yes	Yes
	Pomgarnettes	Pomegranate	*Punica Granatum*	Is noted to be the fruit belonging to hideous trees. However, these fruits are also noted to be helpful to the sick.	Ll. 1356-1358.	Yes	Yes
	Notemigges	Nutmeg	*Myristica Fragrans*	Used as a sweet savouring nut.	Ll. 1361-1362.	Yes	Yes
	Alemandres	Almonds	*Prunus Dulcis*	A present tree species.	L.1363.	Yes	Yes
	Figes	Figes	*Ficus Carica*	A present tree species. Cupid also spies on the narrator standing against a fig tree.	L. 1364, and l.1718.	Yes	Yes
	Date-tree	Date tree	*Phoenix Dactylifera*	A present tree species.	L. 1364.	Yes	Yes
	Clow-gelofre	Clove	*Syzygium Aromaticum*	Clove to zedoary, these are spices that are present in the garden.	L. 1365.	Yes	Yes
	Licoryce	Liquorice	*Glycyrrhiza Glabra*		L.1365.	Yes	Yes
	Gingere	Ginger	*Zingiber Officinale*		L. 1369. Ginger only occurs in the translation, not the original.	Yes	Yes
	Greyn de paradys	Grains of paradise	*Aframomum Melegueta*		L. 1369.	Yes	Yes
	Canelle	Cinnamon	*Cinnamomum Verum*		L.1370.	Yes	Yes
	Setewale	Zedoary	*Curcuma Zedoaria*		L. 1370.	No	Yes
	Peches	Peaches	*Prunus Persica*	Peaches to bolas, these are types of ‘hoomly’ trees.	Ll. 1373-1377. These line numbers include the other species until bolas.	No	Yes
	Coynes	Quince tree	*Cydonia Oblonga*			Yes	Yes
	Apples	Apple	*Malus Domestica*			Yes	Yes
	Medlers	Medlar tree	*Mespilus Germanica*			No	No
	Ploumes	Plum	*Prunus Domestica*			Yes	Yes
	Peres	Pears	*Pyrus*			Yes	Yes
	Chesteynes	Chestnuts	*Castanea*			No	Yes

	Cheryse	Cherries	*Prunus*			Yes	Yes
	Notes				Unfortunately, the type of nut is not specified further.		
	Aleys	Serviceberries	*Amelanchier*			No	No
	Bolas	Wild plum	*Prunus (Americana)*			Yes	Yes
	Cipres	Cypress	*Cupressus*	Cypress to linden, these trees range the garden.	L. 1381-l. 1385. These line numbers include the other species until linden.	No	No
	Elmes	Elms	*Ulmus*			No	Yes
	Maples	Maples	*Acer*			No	No
	Asshe	Ash trees	*Fraxinus*			No	Yes
	Ook	Oak	*Quercus*			No	Yes
	Asp	Asp	*Populus Tremula*			No	No
	Planes	Planetree	*Platanus Orientalis*			No	No
	Ew	Yew	*Taxus Baccata*			No	No
	Popler	Poplar tree	*Populus*			No	No
	Lindes	Linden	*Tilia*			No	No
	Netles	Nettles	*Urtica Dioica*	Nettles are among those plants that keep the narrator from the rose.	L. 1712.	No	Yes
	Thistles	Thistle	*Cirsium Vulgare*	Thistles are also among the plants that keep the narrator from the rose.	L. 1711 and l. 1835.	No	Yes
	Barly-breed	Barley bread	*Hordeum Vulgare*	Is what one gets to eat when in prison.	L. 2757.	Yes	Yes
	Reisins	Raisins	*Vitis Vinifera*	‘Nor of the reisins have the wine.’	L. 3689.	Yes	Yes
	Grapes	Grapes	*Vitis*	‘Till grapes rype and well afyne.’	L. 3690.	Yes	Yes
	Hawthorn	Hawthorn	*Crataegus*	Danger, Shame and Dread find the Cherl lying under a hawthorn.	L. 4002.	Yes	Yes
	Pepir	Pepper	*Piperaceae*	‘Ladyes shulle hem such pepir brewe.’	L. 6028.	Yes	Yes