

HPHI7016

Past Peoples, Present Societies:

Research Methods and Skills

Assignment 2

Bibliographic Exercise – Froissart's Chronicles

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Froissart's *Chronicles* cover the years 1326 to 1400, offering a contemporaneous account of the early phases of the Hundred Years' War, as well as the Great Revolt of 1381. The work reflects chivalric ideals and aristocratic perspectives, making it both a valuable historical source and a literary artifact of late medieval Europe.¹ The *Chronicles* were first published in France in the late 1490s in four volumes, although manuscript versions existed from the time Froissart started work on the project in 1361.² Over 150 manuscript volumes have survived and these are held in numerous libraries across the world.³ There are also many complete or partial printed versions, both in the original medieval French and in translation to English, modern French and other languages. Aurell describes the chronicles as a 'durable text' and equates it to other major works of historiography.⁴

This review identifies ten significant editions of Froissart's *Chronicles* and evaluates their accessibility and relevance for academic research as well as for general readers interested in fourteenth-century history. It also considers their importance for understanding the evolving representation of medieval history across different periods, and their value to the fields of art history and the history of book production.

It is important to understand some biographical details to assess Froissart's motivations for producing the chronicles and his possible biases. He was born in Valenciennes in 1337, and his native tongue was French although he was of Dutch nationality. He enjoyed the patronage of the Court of Hainault and from 1361 he travelled to the English Court and served as a household clerk to Phillipa of Hainault, wife of Edward III. He travelled widely throughout the British Isles and Europe, producing reports for the English Court. Following Phillipa's death, Froissart returned to France and entered the patronage of Robert of Namur and began producing the *Chronicles* from 1369.⁵

¹ Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, Online Froissart Project <<https://www.dhi.ac.uk/onlinefroissart/index.jsp>> [accessed 13 November 2025].

² Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey Brereton, (London: Penguin, 1978), p 26.

³ Peter Ainsworth and Godfried Croenen, ed., *The Online Froissart*, version 1.5 (Sheffield: HRIOOnline, 2013), <<http://www.dhi.ac.uk/onlinefroissart>> [accessed 13 November 2025]

⁴ Javier Aurell, 'Writing Beyond Time: The Durability of Historical Texts', *History and Theory*, 57 (2018), 50–70., (p50).

⁵ Brereton, *Chronicles*, pp 9-13.

Froissart travelled extensively, and from 1361 onwards the *Chronicles* were based on first hand observation and interviews with witnesses to events.⁶ However, descriptions of events before 1361 are based on the work of Jean (or Jehan) de Bel.⁷ While Froissart was writing from the point of view of the courts where he lived, it would be anachronistic to attribute a modern sense of nationalistic bias to the *Chronicles* as the ruling elites across France and England were interrelated. There is some evidence of impartiality, for example in the descriptions of warfare where notable deeds on both sides are highlighted.⁸

Whilst historians have pointed to inaccuracies in certain details, the *Chronicles* are a rich source of social history, containing descriptions of how people lived and their prevailing attitudes and customs. It could be the case that Froissart was accessing sources that are no longer available to modern historians.⁹

A number of resources were used to compile the bibliography. The introduction to Brereton's work¹⁰ and the *Online Froissart*¹¹ discuss the significance of several different versions of the text. Other editions were found through library and other online searches.

⁶ Ibid. p. 15.

⁷ F. S. Shears, 'The Language of the First and Third Versions of Froissart's *Chronicles*', *Medium Ævum*, 1.1 (1932), 56–60, (pp. 56-57).

⁸ Brereton, *Chronicles*, p.14.

⁹ Ibid. p. 16.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 9-29.

¹¹ Ainsworth and Croenen, 2013.

Significant Editions

- 1 **Froissart, Jean. *Chronicles*. trans. and ed.by Geoffrey Brereton (London: Penguin Classics, 1978)**

This is the most accessible text for academics and general readers. It is readily available and relatively inexpensive. It contains a useful introduction, providing context and background information about the *Chronicles* and their author. It also provides references for other versions of the text which is useful for the academic reader. However, Brereton has not translated the complete work only including selected extracts. Nonetheless, it is a good starting point for the study of both Froissart and his *Chronicles*.

- 2 **Ainsworth, Peter, and Croenen, Godfried ed., *The Online Froissart*, version 1.5 (Sheffield: HRIOOnline, 2013),**
<<http://www.dhi.ac.uk/onlinefroissart>> [accessed 13 November 2025]

The *Online Froissart Project* website is edited by academics from Liverpool and Sheffield Universities and has contributors from institutions around the world.¹² It contains new English translations of many sections of the text, particularly from the first three books, and access to high resolution images of fragments of several manuscript version. It is useful for the comparative study of various versions of the *Chronicles* and contains commentary and links to resources for further study.

- 3 **Froissart, Jean, *Chroniques*, ed. and pub. by Antoine Vérard (Paris: Antoine Vérard, 1495)**

This is the first printed version of the chronicles, in four volumes. The Bibliothèque National de France (BnF) holds several copies which can be viewed in person. The catalogue entry contains a description of the text in French and contains links to digitised versions of two volumes which can be viewed online.¹³

¹² Ainsworth and Croenen, 2013.

¹³ Bibliothèque National de France, *Catalogue Général*,
<<https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30468293m>> [accessed 14/11/2025].

The *Chroniques* are written in Middle French and are important for the study of the transition from manuscript to printed culture. Access to the physical volumes is important for an understanding of the process of early book production.

- 4 **Froissart, Jean, *Le premier volume de Froissart des Croniques de France, dangleterre, descoce, despaigne, de Bretagne, de Gascongne, de Flandres et lieux circonvoisins* (Paris: Antoine Vérard, c.1505). British Library, shelfmark C.22.d.6.**

The British Library holds a later copy of the original printed version which contains some textual revisions. It is useful for a comparative study and for an understanding of early editing and revising practices. The physical volumes are more accessible for British researchers as they can be accessed in the British Library on request. It is not currently digitised.

- 5 **Froissart, Jean, *Chronicles*, trans. by John Bouchier, Lord Berners, ed. by G. C. Macaulay (London: Macmillan, 1904)**

Lord Berners, who was a descendant of Edward III, produced this English translation at the request of Henry VIII and it can be seen to reflect a Tudor interpretation of medieval history, in the tradition of chivalric and romantic tales. It was published in two volumes between 1523 and 1525.

Kane argues that Berners translation represents Froissart's clarity of language and only contains minor errors of translation or transcription.¹⁴ It is, therefore, useful as an early English language translation which can be compared with later versions to assess the impact on the text of the Tudor world view.

- 6 **Froissart, Jean, *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries*, trans. by Thomas Johnes (Hafod: J. Henderson, 1803–10)**

Johnes published his translation at his own press at Hafod. It was widely read in the nineteenth century and reflects the romantic literary traditions of the time. It was reviewed by Walter Scott who praised it for its readability but felt it

¹⁴ George Kane, 'An Accident of History: Lord Berners's Translation of Froissart's *Chronicles*', *The Chaucer Review*, 21.2 (1986), 217–225, (p221).

lacked scholarly rigour.¹⁵ An abridged children's version was produced, and both versions were likely to have influenced nineteenth century medievalism.

7 Froissart, Jean, *The Chronicles of Froissart*, trans. and abridged by John Buchan (London: William Heinemann, 1924)

This is a popular literary text, written for the general reader. In the introduction, Buchan describes his translation as a 'narrative of chivalry and adventure'. It is a selective translation and useful to study how the medieval text is adapted and presented to a twentieth century audience.

8 Froissart, Jean, *Chroniques*, ed. by Siméon Luce (Paris: Vve J. Renouard, 1869–1897)

This is an important scholarly work which carries out a comparative study of versions of the *Chronicles* from 1369-72, after 1376 and after 1400. It is useful for the study of the development of the French language during this period.¹⁶ Luce sets out his methodology in the introduction, and this is referenced by subsequent scholars, including those working on the Online Froissart project. The text is accessible online.¹⁷

9 Froissart, Jean, *The Boy's Froissart: Being Sir John Froissart's Chronicles of Adventures, Battle, and Custom in England, France, Spain, etc.*, ed. by Sidney Lanier, illus. by Alfred Kappes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895)

As the title would suggest, this edition is aimed at a young audience in the tradition of boys' own adventure stories which presented history reframed in the time of the British Empire and is interesting for the study of Victorian medievalism. The full text is available online.¹⁸

¹⁵ Walter Scott, 'Review of Thomas Johnes' Translation of Froissart's *Chronicles*', *Edinburgh Review*, 10 (January 1805), 347–62.

¹⁶ Shears, *Language*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁷ Project Gutenberg, *Chroniques de J. Froissart*, <<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/73768>> [accessed 13 November 2025].

¹⁸ Library of Congress, *The Boys' Froissart*, <<https://www.loc.gov/item/16007353/>> [accessed 13 November 2025].

10 **Froissart, Jean, *Oeuvres de Froissart*, ed. by Baron Kervyn de Lettenhove, 25 vols (Brussels: Victor Devaux et Cie, 1867–1877)**

This Belgian edition compares manuscript and text variations of the *Chronicles* and provides a critical commentary. This version is still studied by modern historians; however, some consider that Lettenhove conflates several versions of the manuscript and that the work lacks a modern critical framework.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ainsworth and Croenen, 2013.

Secondary Sources

Aurell, Javier, 'Writing Beyond Time: The Durability of Historical Texts', *History and Theory*, 57 (2018), 50–70

Kane, George, 'An Accident of History: Lord Berners's Translation of Froissart's *Chronicles*', *The Chaucer Review*, 21.2 (1986), 217–225

Scott, Walter, 'Review of Thomas Johnes' Translation of Froissart's *Chronicles*', *Edinburgh Review*, 10 (January 1805), 347–62

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