



**New**  
**LITERARIA**

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# NEW LITERARIA

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**Translation**

***Der Stricker, Der Pfaffe Amîs – The Priest Amîs***

**Translated from Middle High German**

**Albert Classen**

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**Translation from the Middle High German Text (ca. 1225)**

In the old days long gone, cultured behavior and honor were so much appreciated that, when a person visited a court, people looked forward to listening to his playing a string instrument, singing, and storytelling (5). [1] All that was much appreciated then. All that now no longer counts, not even one out of six people delight in these arts unless that individual knows a story that would give profit to the lords (10) helping him to prevent worries and poverty. Now, it hardly seems good to anyone if he is able to express himself artistically. How then shall a courtier behave at court? (15) I cannot figure that out. But I am very skilled in composing poetry. I will present it to any person who wants to hear it. However, there where that art is not appreciated at court, I only count as a fool (20).

Now, listen to what happened in past days when courtly joy eliminated worries, when honor prevented shamefulness to win, when generosity was the rule instead of miserliness, when Honor marched ahead of Dishonor (25), when loyalty preceded disloyalty, when virtues superseded evilness without any infraction, and when truth stood above the lie. At that time good education was much liked and lack thereof was despised (30). Virtue was in charge of all lands, so that lack of virtue was nowhere to be seen. Goodness superseded evil, and high [joyful] spirits held back sorrow. At that time, humbleness was the servant of peace (35), and justice trumped injustice. That was at the time before deception entered this world.

Now, Der Stricker [2] informs us about who had been the first man (40) who began with lying and deceiving, and what his intentions were without encountering any resistance. [3] He owned a house in England in a town called Trameys (45). He was called Priest Amîs and was a wise man knowing how to read books. He gave away so much to others that he never ignored both through his sense of honor and through God to pay attention to the rule of generosity (50) at any time. He welcomed guests and treated them better than anyone else, as much as he was capable of doing so. [4]

His generosity was so lavish (55) that it began to irritate the bishop to whom he had to

**Translated from Middle High German**

report. Because he heard so much about him that he felt jealous. Once he came to the priest (60) and told him: “Sir Priest, you hold a large court more often than I do. That is very wrong. You have surplus goods (65) that you waste away through holding great festivals more often than I do. That is not right. Of the movable goods (65) that you waste away through courtly feasts, you must give me a portion; do not withhold it from me. I will not let you off the hook here; indeed, you have to obey me” (70).

The Priest Amîs responded: “It is my attitude to spend my goods as I like it and carefully avoid having any leftovers (75). If I owned more, I would need it certainly. I will not give you anything unless you want something to eat from me, so come on your horseback to my house and let me be your host (80). I will not grant you a penny otherwise.”

The bishop was angry about this: “Then you will lose the church/parish,” he said, “that you got from me (85) and which you misuse through this hospitality.”

He answered: “That is of little concern to me. Apart from this matter alone I have obeyed you in everything. I have never neglected my duties (90). Why don’t you test me in what I know from reading books [in Latin]. When I can demonstrate that I know my office so well as required, then let me do as I like otherwise. (95).

The bishop replied: “I will do that. Since you want me to examine you, I can thoroughly test you with just a few words right away. You have dared to challenge the falcon [idiomatic] (100). [5]

Tell me how much water is in the sea; you must answer me that, so think about it well at first. If you answer with too little or too much, I will display such a wrath (105) that you will lose your church.”

“Hundred gallons,” he said. The bishop replied: “Now tell me, who will confirm that for you, show me that person.” “The priest replied: “You will have to be the one. I do not lie by the breadth of a hair. And if you think that this is not correct, then order all the waters that flow into the sea to stop. Then I will measure and let you see the result (115), the correctness of which you will have to confirm.”

The bishop said to the priest: “Since you want to approach this task in that way, so let the water all go. I will spare you the measuring (120), since I cannot realize the precondition. But tell me how many days have passed since the time of Adam [Genesis] until today?”

“Seven,” the priest responded. “Once seven days [a week] have passed, you can see seven more coming along. As long as the world will exist, there will be no less nor more days.”

The bishop was not pleased with that. Angrily he then said (130): “Now tell me at least, where is the center of the earth?” If you do not determine that immediately, you will lose your parish. (135). Do not give me a vague answer.” The priest replied: “That will happen. The church

that I got from you is located right in the middle. Order your servants (140) to measure it with a rope. And if the location is just off by a leaf of a grass, then take away from me the church; I won't object to it."

The bishop answered: "You are lying. As much as you deceive me, I have to believe your words before I begin measuring. You are a smart fellow. [6] Now tell me, how far (150) is it from here to the heaven? I will not let you off the hook regarding the answer." The priest answered: "The distance between both is such that a person can easily call from one side to be understood on the other (155). Lord, if you doubt that, then climb up there, and I will call out, and if you then do not hear me without problems, then climb down here quickly and take back the church" (160). The bishop was furious about that. He said: "Your smartness irritates me greatly. But tell me now precisely how wide the heaven might be (165); otherwise, the church will be returned to me." The priest Amis responded: "I will instruct you about that quickly. As my intelligence [7] has told me, it is in its length thousand fathoms, and thousand cubits in width. If you want to measure it or count the units of measurement – I certainly won't mind you doing that – remove the sun and also the moon from the sky (175) and what stars there are in outer space and put them all together. It will have certainly that size once you have measured it, and so you will have to leave the church to me" (180).

The bishop responded: "You know so much, and thus I will force you, not abstaining from that, to honor me by teaching a donkey how to read. Since you have measured out the heaven (185), the passage thereto, and then the sea and the earth, I want to find out whether there might not be something too difficult for you to accomplish. Since you have done all that (190) what you have been told so far, then you can do as you wish. I will watch it whether anything of that is in any way not true. Once you have done all that, you can pursue all your plans as you wish. But first I want to check whether the rest corresponds to the truth. If you teach the donkey well (195), I will accept all the rest you have said and will know that you were right."

"Well, then give me a donkey that I will teach" (200), the priest said. Quickly, they found a young donkey and took it to the priest. The bishop said: "Now, pay attention and let me know until when you will have taught him (2005) something and by what time." The priest answered: "You know well that he who is to teach something to a child, [8] so that people will call it wise, cannot achieve that (210) unless it studies for twenty years. From this I clearly conclude that if I am to teach the donkey well for thirty years, as I am required to do, considering that it cannot speak (215), this will have to suffice for you." The bishop replied: "Well, let's see. In reality, this will never happen. For that reason, I will rob you of all your happiness."

The priest thought by himself (220): "None of us three will live for thirty more years; I know that for sure. Either the donkey will die, or I will, or the bishop. How ever strongly the bishop (225) is determined to cause me harm, death will protect me from that."

Once the bishop had left, the priest took his donkey and ordered it to be taken to a stable,

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where he could keep hidden well (230) the method by which he intended to teach it. He fetched a book for it and placed it in front of it, having placed oats within all its pages (235). But he never allowed it to satisfy its hunger. He did all that so that it learned better to turn over the pages. When the ignorant beast (240) [9] then did not find anything within a page, it quickly turned over another and searched there for food, and then repeated that when nothing could be found there (245). Thus, the donkey stood there and read in the book for such a long time until it had understood the art well how to find the oats. It did that for a long time from early in the morning until late at night until it had grasped how to turn over pages well.

At that moment, the bishop returned and said that he wanted to know (255) how the donkey had learned to read in books. The priest then picked a new unused book. He placed it in front of himself on the table (260) and addressed the bishop: “I’ll tell you, my lord, what it knows how to do. It can well turn over pages and everything else what one can expect from it.” The bishop quickly replied (265): “Since it has begun with this learning process, which has not yet been a long time, it will also learn to read in the book. Let me see how it turns over the pages.”

The priest said: “That will happen” (270). Once he had opened the book according to the bishop’s request, he led the donkey to the book. When the animal espied the book, it immediately began to search for food (275), [10] that is, it looked for the oats. But there were no oats in it. The donkey kept searching. It turned a page. It did not find anything to eat there (280). Then it turned yet another page and thus went through the whole book. If there had been any grain in it, the animal would certainly have picked it up. Since it did not find anything in it (285), it began to bray right away as loudly as it could. When it began with making this noise, the bishop asked: “What does that mean?” “Let me explain that to you” (290), said the priest. “It has recognized the letters, I am teaching it the ABCs. So far, it has learned only the letter A (295). It has identified many cases of that one letter in the book. Therefore, it repeats that letter many times so that it remembers it better. It is learning extraordinarily well. I will teach it all what I am supposed to do” (300).

The bishop was mightily delighted.<sup>i</sup> Thus, the two separated filled with great joy. Then the great God relieved the poor priest from his difficult situation (305). The bishop died a short time later. So, Amîs no longer gave lessons to the donkey.

People considered the priest Amîs to be such a wise person (310) that they were convinced that, if the bishop had survived, he would have taught the donkey fully [all the lessons]. The priest gained much honor and was widely recognized (315). Whoever heard about this story, came to see him either riding on a horse or walking on foot, [especially] because he welcomed the people well. Thus, the number of his guests grew until his worries became so much (320) that he could not pay for his expenses. It became so bad at that moment that he could not even borrow. This

troubled him deeply. He thought in his mind (325): “Whatever I have done out of goodness, I did happily, even if now I have to abandon my house. I would very much like to stay in it. However, I have gained riches in the past (330), I will have to earn money again before I lose my house. I will go traveling to look for new income; my house will not perish.”

The priest prepared himself (335) together with six servants in a splendid manner. He gave all of them horses for the journey, all fitting for a priest and this both in body and mind who wants to travel around to give sermons and thus to gain wealth (340). Thus, Amîs departed. He was so smart with words that he never encountered any opposition. Whatever a painter needs, he took with him in large quantities (345), and also everything what a medical doctor would need regarding medication. He was fully equipped. Thus, he got on his way. Wherever he came across a church festival (350), he asked the local priest to let him preach the Gospel and to give a sermon, offering him half of the alms/donations that he would get through the collection (355).

Many people came to the service, both peasants and their wives; it was a joy to see them all, there were two thousand people or more. Amîs preached about the New Testament (360) and also about the Old Testament as it was written in the Bible.<sup>ii</sup> Thereupon he said as follows: “You can always be happy that God has sent me here (365). I have brought to you here in this land such a precious relic which manifests miracles all the time. God might well bestow His grace upon you. I will let you see divine signs today (370) that you will believe to be true. See here, Saint Brandan’s head, I have it with me. It has charged me with erecting a cathedral for him (375) with such pure things that are fitting for God. I am not to take any donation, which he has forbidden me to accept, if it comes from a woman (380) who has ever gained, next to her husband, a lover. Those who have such a lover, I order them to stay behind. If they give me anything (385), whatever it might be, I will not take it. I will let you see that.”

The women then came forward, while he was singing, to make their donations (390). Those who had a secret lover were bold enough and were the first ones in line. He accepted all their donations. After they had seen (395) whom he had accepted and whose donation he had taken, and that he did not reject anyone from among them, all the women pressed forward with loud chatter (400). Any woman who had stayed behind would have been immediately badly maligned and would have accused her of having a secret lover. Hence, they all paid attention (405) not to reveal any fault on their own. They all gave the same donation, both the poor and the rich women. Those who did not have money quickly borrowed it (410), or they donated a ring out of gold or silver. They gave so much as if they wanted to purchase their honor (415); evil and good women alike went to the donation box. They were fully aware that the one woman whose husband would not see her giving a donation would say in eternity (420) that her loyalty was worth little.<sup>iii</sup> Thus it happened that the women gave more donations than ever before and ever since to a priest at such a Church holiday (425). Each and every woman would have preferred to be placed in her grave than to admit publicly her adultery<sup>iv</sup> if she had not approached the donation



**Translated from Middle High German**

box (430). And those who had taken a secret lover and wanted to squelch evil rumor, donated three times as much compared to the others so that she became known in public as an entirely innocent person (435).

The priest became rich there and no one questioned his authenticity.<sup>v</sup> Wherever he went to attend a church festival, he presented the same sermon to women and wives (465). When they listened to his sermon, the women became very happy and could prove their innocence publicly regarding any adultery.

With this trickery (470) Amîs gained such great riches that he could pay off his debt and acquired such wealth that he could keep his house because he honored the women (475). Wherever he went, they welcomed him like a god and submitted under his commands. They pronounced that he was a holy preacher (480). He ought to travel around the countryside and not fail to attend any Church festival. He should give his sermons so that women would more easily prove their innocence regarding adultery (485). Messengers from many noble ladies came to him who intensely begged him in the name of God to come to their Church festivals so that the people could hear his sermon there as well (490).

He thereby secured so much wealth that he was free of all worries. He then began to strive with his trickery for even greater riches (495).

He rode to France to the city of Paris. The priest Amîs went to the court where he found the king of the country. He asked him without delay (500): “My lord, do you need anything what I possess? If that were the case, I would be a most happy person.” The king replied: “Well, tell me, master, what do you know to do?” “My lord, I can paint so well (505), that all the world has to praise it because I can paint in a very special way, which no one else among all the living knows how to do except for me. I invented that method (510). I paint pictures everywhere, in a house or in a hall, on all walls, with familiar and foreign themes. No living person has seen anything like that (515). Once the paintings are done, let people enter the room to gaze at them, both knights and ladies, and everyone else at court, both women and children (520). No one is so good, so wise, or so well-tempered to see the paintings except those who had the good fortune to be legitimate children (525), descendants of their properly married fathers and mothers. Only those can see the pictures, and no one else. Those who were born as bastards, will not see even a line by the brush. If you like to have such paintings (530), I will happily explain to you why I am a master of this art.”

The king said: “Oh yes, with delight.” He took the master then into a very beautiful palace (535) with a high ceiling and a big interior space and asked him to inspect everything [well]. Then he asked him what payment he would ask for the paintings, so that he would produce them for him (540). The priest Amîs replied: “The entire world sings a song of praise about you and your

life, so you could give me easily [what I will ask from you]. Give me six hundred marks, and also enough for my board which will be sufficient, without having anything left over.”<sup>vi</sup>

The king replied: “If you need more, I will rather give it to you than see you leave immediately. Let me impress this on you to carry out your work diligently. I have never spent my money more happily.”

The priest answered in reply (555): “I will paint the hall in such a way that no one will be allowed to come in, neither you nor anyone else, during the whole time. I trust myself to complete the tasks (560) within six weeks or earlier. Issue the order everywhere that no one comes in. On that premise I will paint all the walls in this large room.”

The king said: “Be assured of that (565), and count on getting everything you need. Lock the door well. I will order two soldiers to stand guard there who will not let anyone in, until I will have been the first to enter (570). I will stay outside for six weeks and then I will bring all my knights with me. On that day you will receive from me an estate (575). Every knight who wants to enter the room must give you a payment. If I am staying alive until then, all my knights I have control over must come in there (580). Thus, we will find out who was born as a legitimate child. He who then reveals not to be a legitimately born child, I will deprive of his estate, by God.”

Herewith the king rode away (585) with all his men and made the news known everywhere. The priest then entered the room together with his squires and began with his work of painting (590). But I am going to tell you how he approached his task: All the windows in the hall he carefully blocked out with cloth and did not allow anyone in except for his squires (595). The king’s servants provided him richly with meat, fish, mead, and wine, and whatever he fancied. And I share this with you what he used to do in the room: He either lay down or sat on a chair (600) and did not paint anything. Thus, he lived in the room until the time had arrived when the king returned who brought with him an army of knights (605). None of them could have refused to come along whom he had seen or with whom he had talked. All of them were forced to join him.

So, the king arrived and the entire group made a lot of noise (610). The master came out of the hall. He honorably welcomed the king. He said: “Please come in. Let the knights stay outside, until you have learned how you like the paintings (615) and I have explained the matter to you.” The king was full of excitement. He entered the room and locked the door behind him. Once that had happened, he happily looked at the walls (620). But nothing was painted on them. This frightened the king so much that he would have almost collapsed. He looked all around and became deeply troubled (625). He was willing to swear a firm oath that it was all filled with paintings. “I have lost two honors,” he thought to himself, “my mother’s and my own (630). If I say that I cannot see anything, then the others, who can see the paintings, will say that I had been born as an illegitimate child. I see now well, I am so blind (635), that I was born as a bastard. It will be better for me to claim that I am able to see it all. Thereby I will safeguard my honor. I am

**Translated from Middle High German**

deeply worried (640) that the knights and ladies, and also the servants will be able to see the paintings while I cannot see them; that is truly a heavy strike against me.”

The king said: “Master, now tell me (645) what scenes you have painted so beautifully.” “My lord [said Amîs], this one deals with Solomon and his father David and of the great conflict (650) which Absolon had with him. There he chases after him, and his hair gets stuck at a branch so that he is hanging off it. The next one is about (655) King Alexander, how he overcame Darius [of Persia] and Porus of the Moorish kingdom, and everything what happened there. My lord, stay here (660). Whatever the kings ever did who had control over Rome whom you can see here, and what happened in Babel when God’s revenge (665) split all people from each other through languages. I have painted everything for you in honor of you. I have painted all the walls so that all your knights (670) together with you can come in, stand still, and admire the paintings. He who cannot see anything will feel struck at the heart out of sorrow (675), whereas the others will feel very relieved that they are able to see the paintings.” “Now we have it all seen well,” said the king, although he lied. “He who cannot see them (680) will have to live with the consequences. I have never seen more beautiful interior paintings.”

The master replied: “Now, go outside and let the knights come in, and tell me also right here (685) what my reward will be.” The king then unlocked the door and said to all the knights: “Every knight who enters here until the end of the day (690), must give a payment to the master, or he must stay outside. I have promised him that reward.” Thereupon the knights all streamed in. Some gave him [Amîs] their coat (695), some gave him plenty of money, and some gave him even a horse or a sword. Thus, he got rich and wealthy. Without a doubt, all the knights came flowing in making much noise (700).

No one was so ignorant to believe that they saw the pictures. They became very frightened, but everyone said to preserve his honor that he would see them and that they were very good (705). They all felt depressed that they could not see them. When they heard the king say that this was to be seen there, and that, as the master had explained it to him (710), they all said: “That’s the case, indeed,” and yet they were all unhappy that they had to face their dishonor. Each one was prepared to swear that the others all saw the paintings, only he could not (715). So, each one spoke like everyone else that he could see them very well. Many were filled with wrath about their mothers because she had not protected her honor better (720).

Once they all had looked carefully at the paintings and had openly declared that the work had been done very well, the master immediately began to say good-bye to the king (725) and asked for his reward. The king was more than ready to give it to him. Then he departed and rode away. His fortune was so great that he had amassed about seven hundred marks (730) and gained them well. He sent that money immediately home and ordered that his guest would be treated

well while he was traveling.

Once all the knights (735) had inspected the hall thoroughly the following day, which is true, the queen also came with all her maids and wanted to inspect the hall (740). They got just as frightened as the knights, or even more since they could not see the paintings. They began to speak just like the knights that they could see them alright (745).

Next, the servants came in to look at the paintings. Afraid of suffering dishonor many of them said that they were good and well done (750). They claimed that they had not seen such beautiful paintings ever before.

“Truly, do you see anything,” one of them asked who was with them, “although my eyes are not made out of glass; I do not see them, indeed”! (755) Those who did not want to be dishonored: “We notice well that you are so blind; you were not born as a legitimate child.” Then, a fool among them said: “I do not know who my parents were (760), whether I have ever had a father,<sup>vii</sup> but there is nothing painted on the walls. No one here sees better than me. He who argues against that will pick a fight with me (765) and will then suffer.”

With this a bickering broke out among the servants, which intensified so much that more of them began to say the same; they all realized that they could not see anything (770), and they pronounced that the one who would claim to see paintings,<sup>viii</sup> would act like a fool. Now, the wise people also came to their senses, since they did not see anything there (775). So, they were the next to admit that. The servants said the same, one by one, quite rightly so. When the knights heard that and approached the servants (780), they also split into two camps. At the end, however, truth overcame the lie. They all said, in unison, it was a deception (785), except for the king until he learned what he heard them all saying. They all said in one voice, poor and rich (790), that they did not see anything. Then he said what they all said, that he did not see anything, which he swore by God. Everyone began to laugh and to mock (795), and finally all agreed: The priest is an evil rogue who knows how to gain much wealth.”

Once the priest Amîs had gained such wealth (800) at the royal court of France, he went to Lorraine and soon reached the court of the local duke. He told him wonders (805) that apart from God there was no one else who was a better medical doctor than he. “Then God has sent you here,” the duke replied. “I am very pleased about your arrival here. I have family members and courtiers whose physical suffering pains me much. Many of them are in their sickbeds here. If God grants you such a power to make them healthy again (815), you will quickly get very rich.”

The priest Amîs responded: “I am such an experienced doctor that I can heal them all, except those who suffer from leprosy or have external wounds (820). They can be the worst sick people, and even if there are a thousand of them or more, I will get them all well again still today; otherwise, you can take my life (825). Please do not pay me yet until they have all become healthy again and have told you so, as you will hear from them directly and until you will see this with your own eyes. Then reward me for my work” (830). The duke became very happy about it: “You

**Translated from Middle High German**

“speak well,” he said.

All the sick people were called in, and twenty immediately arrived, whom the priest took with him into a private chamber (835). “I will heal you very quickly,” he said, “of your sickness if you swear me an oath that you keep it a secret for a whole week, before you talk about it (840), because that is part of the healing process in the beginning.” They all submitted under his authority and swore that they would not talk about it. Then the priest addressed the sick again (845): “Now go away to a private room and discuss amongst you all who is the sickest. You let me know who that is. Thus, you will get well again (850). I will kill that person and then right away heal you all with the blood of the dead one. I pledge that to you by my soul.”

The sick people got very frightened (855). Even the one who could barely crawl on the ground because of his sickness now feared that he might die if they would notice his suffering, so he walked upright without a cane (860).

Once they had debated the issue, listen to what they then did. Each one of them thought by himself, “even if I pretend that my sickness is nothing anymore (865), then another person will say that he is even better off than me. And the next one will say that his sickness is even overcome twice as much. Then they all will claim (870) that I am the sickest person here. Once the priest will have learned that, he will kill me and heal the others. I will make sure to prevent that from happening and will say that I am completely well again.” Each one of them thought the same (875). All of them then stated the same, that they had been miraculously healed, they were all well again. They informed the master about that (880). The priest said: “You deceive me.” But then each one swore by his loyalty that it was true that they no longer suffered from anything. The master became very pleased (885). “No go forth,” he then said, “and tell that to the duke.” They did not tarry. They went to the duke, once they had found him (890), and informed him that the doctor had brought them miraculous healing; their sickness was completely gone. The duke was very surprised and asked all of them individually whether that was the truth (895). Their oath which they had sworn to the doctor not to say anything, forced them to obey, and they only said that they were well again.

The duke then put together much silver (900) for the priest and gave him 300 marks. Nothing would have stopped him from that. It was immediately handed over to him. Thereupon he asked for the duke’s blessing for his departure and left right away (905), riding back to England. After he had been allowed to leave<sup>ix</sup> and a week had passed, the sick people felt more miserable than even before (910). Hence, they told the duke of their suffering and complained that the doctor, who was supposed to heal them, had deceived them. They revealed that they had been forced to swear to keep it all a secret for six days (915). When the duke realized how the priest had gotten away, he informed all his people about that. This caused a huge raucous (920)

at the court of Lorraine, just like at the court in France.<sup>x</sup> They all voiced that the priest Amîs was a master of such pranks.

Wherever the priest Amîs learned of a church festival, he offered a sermon there as before. He did even more. He brought with him a nice transportable box in which he kept his containers for the relics and the relics themselves that he used for his purposes. He did not miss a day to send out a servant to go ahead of him to spy and learn where there might be a female peasant (935), rich and naive. He sent his request to her to let him spend the night in her house, and because of his great reputation as a saint she was more than ready to serve him (940) so that she could see him [in person]. He also ordered his servant to learn secretly how her rooster looked like. Once he knew about that, he sent him out (945) to purchase a rooster that looked just like the woman's one. He hid that one in his box. When he reached the farm<sup>xi</sup> and was sure that she believed him to be a holy man, preparing for him a meal as he wished, he told her: "My dear sister," he said; "you have something that you ought to give me as a donation. This is true: what I take from you, God will return it to you before the rooster has crowed. This is your rooster which stands there. Prepare it for me as my dinner in the name of God, as well as you can" (960). The rooster was immediately butchered. She could hardly wait until it was completely cooked. He ate it all by himself and kept the bones.

When all the people had gone to sleep, he took out his rooster that he had kept in the box and released it to the same spot where the other rooster had been taken from. When the time had come (970) that the rooster was supposed to crow, this rooster happily raised its voice. When the priest heard that, he ordered a servant to make a light (975) and let the lady know that her rooster had returned. She herself had heard that. But he told her to inspect this herself. She began to pronounce it that it was the truth (980); a divine sign had been shown. She told this everywhere to women and men. The priest Amîs said: "Believe that God has done that, trust me in this. Whatever I receive from you, (985), God will return to you double-fold: He will give you so much here on earth and also in heaven."

He asked for an old table. He completely covered it with his altar cloths (990) and made it look as a proper altar is supposed to appear. Upon that table he placed his relics. They were beautifully covered in gold. Gems were used as inlays (995) which were all brilliant crystals like ice. The priest placed about thirty candles around them and performed a marvelous church service (1000). He sang the matins/vigils<sup>xii</sup> and then performed Mass. He granted the lady, her family members, and her servants such a great indulgence from sins (1005) that even the person who was completely glutton in God's world would have had enough. Whatever sin they might have committed, whatever wrong they had done, it was all forgiven them (1010). For that he received from them before he departed about sixty marks or more. Even though the husband was rather unhappy about it, his wife pleaded with him for so long (1015) that he finally granted it to her to give to the lord (priest) whatever she wanted in return for her eternal afterlife. With the gains he

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had received, the priest left before dawn (1020).

Thus, he kept going. Every time he stayed at an inn for the night, he had always sent out a servant ahead who stayed at another place and asked people about details (1025), such as about how many years the innkeeper had been married to his wife and how often he went to Rome to pray at St. Peter and St. Jacob (1030). He also learned the names of the fathers of the two married people, when they had departed from this life, and about their mothers. Once he had learned the names of both (1035), he did not linger with lamenting about their passing away and inquired how many children they had and what their names were. Once he had learned all the names (1040) of the children, mothers, and grandparents, he remembered them well. He wrote them down on a wax tablet.<sup>xiii</sup> He was smart as a badger.<sup>xiv</sup> He learned much (1045) about whom [in that community] death had separated from life and with what business everyone maintained their lives.

When the priest had read the letter [the wax tablet] (1050), he could [easily] identify by name the wife's and her husband's children and origin. He did that so much that he confounded both, confusing their mind that they should have kept clear (1055). They believed, in fact, that all he said was the truth, so they did not pay any attention to their property and their own lives. They began to give him so much (1060) that it harmed them for ten years to come. In return, he prophesied that they would grow old and gain riches, and that then they would go up directly to heaven within one day (1065). They believed that he truly told them the future and had no doubt about that. Then, he no longer stayed there.

The priest continued with his hunt [for treasures] and found one Friday (1070) a peasant who had many possessions but was rather foolish. In his courtyard, there was a well. The priest brought with him many large fish that were still alive (1075), plotting to place them in the well [again: still alive]. He did that so that he could make a large profit. When dinner time had come and they were setting the table (1080), the priest Amîs said [to the peasant]: "You ought to try to gain the eternal praise through this dinner. Do not doubt me. Give me, for love's sake (1085) big fish to eat that are still alive [hence, fresh]. I will not eat anything else here." The host said: "Where shall I get them? Those are too far away from here [we cannot get them here far away from the sea, or river]. God, our Lord, knows (1090), if they were offered here for sale, you would get enough of them [for dinner]." The priest replied: "I tell you how you can achieve that.<sup>xv</sup> Go there [to the well] and catch them right there where you can find water (1095)." "But that's at least three miles away," the host began to protest, "and for that reason this cannot happen." The priest replied: "How can that be? Where did you fetch the water that we have drunk so far?" He answered: "I have much of that water right here. Lord, do you want some? Do you not see my well? It has cold and clear water (1105) and is the best one throughout the year, always flowing

constantly.”

[The priest:] “Lord host, may God give you always praise. Now, pick up a fish net and let us go fishing,” he said (1110). “God wants to grant us in that very well good fish. We can easily catch them.” They went to the well. When the priest looked at the well (1115), he said his blessing over it. Once he had done that, he told the host to approach it and to start catching fish. When the peasant approached the well (1120), he saw that it was full of fish. They were alive and healthy. They were big and good to eat. The host then firmly believed that they came from God (1125) and was convinced that Amîs was a true messenger from God and a holy man.

Once he had caught the fish, he showed them to his wife and the maids (1130). He said: “Whatever you can give to gain God’s love [honor], you should now send to God [via Amîs].<sup>xvi</sup> This is truly His divine messenger.” Before they had finished eating (1135), they had agreed to give him ten pounds. In return for that he let them know that whatever sin they might have committed, they had gained an indulgence (1140). Once Amîs had taken all that money, he happily left from there. He, the lord Amîs, sent the treasure back home, where it was highly regarded, and he instructed his men to give enough to the guests (1145) while he was traveling.

He was informed about a knight’s wife who was a rather foolish woman. Her husband was not at home at that time. He sent a request to her to grant him a stay for the night (1150), which was immediately promised him. When she recognized his holiness, she gave him a [valuable] cloth which was finely woven and white (1155),<sup>xvii</sup> and about hundred cubits long. He left with that.

Then, the husband returned home whom the wife told everything, emphasizing that a great miracle had happened by a holy man (1160).

“What did he get from you?” asked the knight right away. She said: “It would have been proper if I had given him some donation. Unfortunately, I did not do that (1165), except for a fine cloth hundred cubits long.” [The knight replied:] “If anyone has to select a fool, he should take you,” he said. “By God, he will return it” (1170). He was angry and miserly. He immediately demanded that a fast and strong horse be brought out for him, and he followed the priest on horseback.

But the priest Amîs (1175) was so clever and smart that he could easily envision what was going to happen, and indeed, that was the way how things developed, namely that the knight had come home and learned about the cloth (1180). He would then chase after him. Amîs lit a fire [coals], and I am going to tell you, what then happened. When he saw the knight approaching, he quickly placed (1185) the hot coal into the cloth.

The knight was angry and said to him filled with wrath: “Be aware, you liar, that I am much committed (1190) to reverse the fact that you have deceived my wife. You should have presented your lie somewhere else! Since you took away my property, I will not rest until I have found it in your possession (1195), and then you will have to pay for it dearly.”



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The priest Amîs replied: “Sir, you will not gain any honor when you attack a priest. I have to defer to your wife (1200); I often rejected the cloth, and then it happened without me agreeing to it that she forced it upon me. You can immediately (1205) take my life and everything we have, unless you let go off this yourself in the name of your honor and of God, and your knightly virtues. We are completely in your power.” Although the knight was greatly filled (1210) with anger and wrath, once the deceiver had spoken so cleverly, he let him ride off without any further duress, except that he took back the cloth (1215).

After he had left the priest, the cloth began to burn. The knight noticed that. As soon as he had unraveled it, it was completely burned on the inside (1220) and kept burning. He felt like a dead man suffering from great pain. He was convinced that this was caused by his sinful behavior (1225) having taken back the cloth which had been granted to him by God. He was afraid that his life might be at risk if he did not return the cloth to the priest because he had robbed it from God (1230).

The knight threw the cloth down on the grass and let it burn up what used to be his property. He immediately ran after the priest; he rushed after him twice as fast as before (1235). His sinfulness, having taken back the cloth from Amîs, hurt him badly. When he reached the priest, he begged him intensively for the honor of God (1240) and the highest loyalty to accept his repentance and contrition. He threw himself down on the ground before his feet and begged him for his mercy (1245). He asked him to forgive his sinfulness, and pleaded intensively with him, demonstrating great humility.

The priest said: “I will do that. You are free of sin toward me (1250). If you are guilty toward God or His laws, He might forgive you through His power. Tell me in the name of your knighthood, why have you done that? (1255). I did not feel any anger that you took back the cloth. I never uttered a curse at you.”

The knight explained to him what had happened, that because of his sinfulness (1260) the cloth had burned completely. He said: “Allow me to repay you in the double amount.” Thereby the knight could coax him to come back to his castle with him (1265), whether he wanted it or not. When the knight reached his home and the lady learned the story what had happened with the cloth she said: “Now, you have learned (1270) that you are fighting against God and living an un-Christian life.” The knight said in return: “Lady, help me in the name of God that I repent” (1275). She pawned all her clothing, and they gave ten pounds to the priest. Moreover, the knight told his peasants what had happened. They also did not neglect (1280) to pay him money to pray for them. Thus, they hoped to gain the priest’s favor.<sup>xviii</sup> Amîs then left them enjoying their best farewell wishes.

Without his own doing, he was treated kindly and well (1285), as I will tell you. He

learned about a city where he would within seven days be able to fill his wallet. He sent two servants ahead of him to that city (1290) who went there quickly and began to arrange things for him, pretending to be blind or lame. Once the priest had arrived there, they spread the news (gossip) of his great fame (1295), and that his relics created great wonders every day. Whoever begged for God's grace, would certainly receive help. The two (1300) whom he had sent ahead of himself, went out in public. They were immediately healed by his relics. Very soon, the news of this wonder spread all over town (1305). Everyone was filled with praise for the priest. They rang the bells and sang. The people thronged around him and eagerly gave him donations, both the poor and the rich (1310). All citizens brought their donations. Once he had received them, he quickly left that location.

If I had to relate all the deceptions (1315) that Amîs did during his life, both by means of words and deeds, I would have to talk too long. Therefore, I want to shorten the account (1320). He was the first man who began with such trickery. At his time, people were not yet used to such practices. For that reason, he grew rich. After he had overwhelmed (1325) with his tricks both poor and rich both in France and in Lorraine, and then also in England, and deceived everyone (1330) with his lies, he attempted to come up with another plan with which he could gain even more money. He thought to himself: "I will pretend to be a merchant and acquire much wealth (1335), and will, with the help of my smartness gain many goods, or I have to die. What does all my effort help me when I continue with my old tricks (1340). When I have made some 'profit,' then the money will be spent quickly back in my house. Thus, I will always remain poor. I really want to make my house into a famous place (1345) or disappear from this earth. I want to chase after goods and risk my life so that people will share wondrous stories [about me] when I acquire wealth (1350).

He began to plan accordingly and dressed up as a merchant who was very rich. He had with him good transport boxes, the best he could secure (1355). He paid about 100 pounds for good transport animals. He filled his containers with heavy objects, not caring about what they might be. His intention was (1760) to make them look so as to appear [publicly] as a wealthy man.<sup>xix</sup> He hired capable servants who served his purpose very well and were ready to dare anything for him (1365). They took care of his horses. Thus, the priest Amîs went on his way as if he were a merchant to Greece where he, however, did not find anything worth purchasing (1370). All merchandise there seemed to be too little to him. But everyone said, and he agreed with that in his mind, great things about the enormous treasures that could be found in Constantinople (1375). [Amîs thought:] "There I will overcome all my worries [regarding money]."

Joyfully he journeyed there where he asked for a good inn. The owner was very pleased about that because his company made it look (1380) that an innkeeper could gain much profit from it. He took great care<sup>xx</sup> to prepare for him a good room/suite.

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Thereupon he took his time to inspect the city and the great merchandise (1385). He cheered up and was sure that he would overcome all his worries. He went to a merchant's shop where he saw more silk fabrics than ever before (1390); he was stunned by the display. All that pleased him much. There were at least thirty different kinds of such great quality. His heart told him (1395)<sup>xxi</sup> that the best cloth he had ever seen in other countries was the least regarded there and yet highly valuable. Once he had inspected the cloth, he approached [the owner] without saying a word (1400) as if he did not want to purchase anything. He was not yet sure how he would acquire them.

At that moment, the priest Amîs saw a bald mason (1405) and asked him who he was.<sup>xxii</sup> He replied: "I am a Frank.<sup>xxiii</sup> I am delighted to hear you speak German. Those were odd circumstances (1410) that brought me to this country. But I cannot speak the local language [Greek]. That troubles me a lot."

Amîs said: "If you would like to live like the lords, (1415), I can advise you what to do. I know how to make you really happy. On Sunday in the morning (1420), my lord, the bishop, died. You should become a substitute for him. I was his favorite chaplain. People have now asked me to decide whom to choose as the new bishop (1425), who should please us all. You must become the new bishop. All over the Greek world, there is no wealthier bishopric. You will earn (1430) both worldly fame and God's grace."

"Cut out your mockery," said the bald mason. "I have hard enough a time to get my daily food; I cannot accept your suggestion" (1435). [Amîs:] "I will not accept your refusal, my very dear country fellow," he said. "Since God has sent you here to enjoy great blessing. I like you particularly (1440) because we come from the same country in which we both have been born. You have been elected as bishop. That is now a fact." The mason replied: "Why do you mock me? (1445) "How could I be a bishop and do not know how to sing or read and know nothing about the book [Bible]?" [Amîs answered:] "You do not need to know anything else but one phrase that I will teach you: Whatever people will tell you or do (1450) within the next three days, do not reply in any other way and only say: 'That is true.' If you might live thousand years, you will be bishop the whole time (1455). You do not need to know how to sing or read, I can help in that matter. The priests in this country do not understand our Bible. When you have to sing (1460), then sing a German song. The people here are Christians. I will tell them that it was a liturgical song.<sup>xxiv</sup> We will have no problems. We will have a wonderful time (1465). You have the right appearance for a bishop."

Now, the mason was so foolish that he let himself be convinced and went ahead in the belief (1470) that he wanted to become a bishop and ought to be a lord. He desired to live the life of nobles. The priest Amîs brought that all about. He dressed the mason (1475) as if he were a

bishop and brought him a chair appropriate for a bishop.<sup>xxv</sup> The priest said: “Now pay attention not to say any other word (1480) but ‘It is true.’ If you say anything else, even by the breadth of a hair, you will be recognized as a fool and will lose your office as bishop. Since I like you (1485) I will protect you later from all dishonors in the land of the Greeks.”

He took him to the textile shop<sup>xxvi</sup> that was well equipped (1490) with clerics’ vestments, all well displayed. Amîs the deceiver asked the merchant how many clothes he could bring out (1495). The smart<sup>xxvii</sup> shopkeeper<sup>xxviii</sup> said: “If I knew why you would need them and what good they would do for you, he would quickly bring many.” The Priest Amis said (1500): “It is true, this will be a good business for us both.” The merchant replied: “So, I will then let you know, there are so many vestments that if I gave them to you at half price (1505), that there would not be a person rich enough in the entire Roman empire to pay me for them. So, where would be the one who would purchase them at the full price?” (1510). The priest said: “Just consider what you will be able to offer. We will take them all. Our man is a rich bishop who wants to celebrate the upcoming Pentecost in a grandiose style. He wants to give to many knights that clothing, horses, and swords. If you agree to sell (1520) all the cloth that he wants to purchase, your storage will not seem to be so big any longer. For him, all that won’t even be enough.” Thereupon the bishop said: “That is true.”

The merchant became very happy (1525). “Truly, my lord,” he said, “since you desire them all, here is the price: The poorest piece is about ten marks worth. I will let you have the best for the same price. Do not refuse that offer (1530). The priest Amîs responded: “I am smart enough with the trading business to tell my lord not to accept that price. Tell me quickly what would be your lowest price you would be willing to offer [for your goods] (1535) and let me and my lord hear your decision, whether you will accept our proposal or not.”

The merchant said: “I will do that. You will not get any (1540) unless you pay eight marks per bundle of cloth. If you think that this price is too high, then forget the deal. I will rather keep them for twenty years, if I will live so long (1545), before I sell them at a lower price.” [Amîs] then said: “Then let’s shake hands. We will purchase them.” Thus, the bales of cloth were sold to him. The priest ordered them to be carried away (1550). The merchant then said: “Now, pay for them first.” Amîs replied: “You do not need to do anything else but to count how many bales there are. The inn [where I stay] is nearby. Count them so that my lord will see (1555) that you both have a fair bargain. He will sit here with you. We will pay you with all our smarts and complete the deal. You do not need to wait (1560), while we carry them off, to let us know what my lord is to pay you. He will then hand over the money. I know all about [his finances] (1565), I have locked away about three thousand pounds of his silver. You will receive them today before you both part from each other, and both of you will be pleased with the deal (1570). My lord will give you his money for the purchase that you will do with him; it will help you; it will be in the amount of your entire income for half a year.” The bishop replied: “That is true.”

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The merchant was very pleased (1575). He ordered that all his bales be taken to the [bishop's inn], which [in turn] pleased the priest very much. He ordered his servants to come and to take the bales (1580) to place them on his ship without telling him who was owed the money about it.

Once they had fetched them all, the priest Amîs said (1585): “We will pay you in such a way that there won't be any disagreement. Get us a scale. I myself will bring the silver melted both into coins (1590) and metal bars.<sup>xxix</sup> Take the scale and weigh [the silver] yourself until you will be satisfied. My lord does his purchases without any deception<sup>xxx</sup> (1595). Thereupon, the bishop said: “That is true.”

Thereupon, the priest quickly went to his servants who had carried everything he [now] owed onto the ship. He was mightily pleased (1600). His men were well informed by him how he wanted to get away from there. His plan was to sail away [as fast as possible]. They did not linger. They soon departed with the ship (1605), so the priest got away from there.

Let us now think of the situation back in Constantinople. The merchant ordered splendid meals in honor of the bishop. He got much food and more (1610) for the one man. He brought out his own scales and weights so strong that he could measure well the twelve marks for eleven (1615).<sup>xxxi</sup> He waited all day for the priest's return who was to bring the silver. The time passed until dusk arrived (1620). He became deeply worried that no one brought anything to him or even thought about doing that. “Where is your treasurer, where does he stay?,” he asked (1625). “I guess, he wants to bring the silver not until tomorrow morning. He acts so strangely that I might say that he does not want to do so at all.” The bishop replied: “That is true” (1630).

During the night, the merchant was very concerned, but he offered a splendid meal and instructed his servants to provide him with a comfortable bed fitting for a prince. In the morning (1635), breakfast was served most splendidly billed to the bishop. The merchant invited his neighbors [fellow merchants?] and friends whom he took good care of. Again, he waited all day (1640) for his silver to arrive as before. But nothing was brought to him, just as the day before. In a friendly fashion he complained to the bishop (1645). “It would have been appropriate if the silver would be brought here this morning according to our contract.<sup>xxxii</sup> I fear that something has happened that holds him back. Either the inn where he stays is too far away (1650) or the keys might have gotten lost. I am angry with the treasurer that he does not fulfil his obligations to come to see you today. I am afraid that the entire day might be ruined for you” (1655). The bishop [only] responded: “That is true.” The merchant repressed his anger and served him well again and provided him with yet another pleasant night's rest.

Then, very early the third morning (1660), once they had had a good breakfast, the merchant said: “I do not know what to do now in my anxiety because I do not get my silver. I

believe that your treasurer (1665) avoids you for a whole year for a small profit.” The bishop responded: “That is true.” This frightened the merchant deeply. He said, “You will no longer be hosted so well (1670) as before unless you pay me with your silver. I am so greatly worried. I am afraid, your treasurer intends not to pay me (1675) and makes me wait more than twenty years.” The bishop replied: “That is true.” The merchant became furious when he heard those words and said: “You will have to face (1680) that your arms and legs will be broken [made lame]. I will not have any pity for you, whatever I will do to you. I will not let you live one more day (1685). Since you have harmed me so much, you will have to face death. Neither you nor your chaplain have earned anything less by the breadth of a hair.” The bishop replied: “That is true” (1690). The merchant screamed: Truth? Today, you will suffer.” Filled with deep anger he walked up to him, grabbed his hair.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Furiously, he threw him down on the floor (1695), but the other man said nothing but: “It is true, it is true!” Although the merchant ripped off his skin and hair, he did not shout anything else (1700) but: “It is true, it is true!” Even if he had beaten him for a year, he would have screamed nothing else. The merchant had almost split his head and broken his legs (1705), when people heard about this and came running in. Among them was the citizen for whom [‘the bishop’] had worked as a mason who now immediately asked (1710) what the merchant blamed that man for.

“Sir, all that I have gained in my life, he has all taken away, and now I am all ruined. He is a bishop from whatever diocese (1715). His people will never see him again. He must give up his life here or give me three thousand marks. For that money he is here as a hostage. I have never heard of such an evil strategy (1720) to rob a person of his goods. If he does not return them, I will hurt him worse than any lord has ever suffered (1725). For three days he told me that it was all true.” The bishop responded to this: “That is true.”

Thereupon the citizen said: “Honestly, it pains me (1730) that you have beaten him so badly. Even though you do not want to let him live, he is free of any guilt and any evil intentions. You must let him live (1735). He had been my mason for about one and a half years.” The bishop replied: “That is true.” The merchant had a hard time accepting that. “He is not a mason” (1740), he said, “by my life. He must be a bishop until he returns to me what he owes me. After that I will grant that he was a mason (1745), or that he sings or reads.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> He pulled his hair again. “It is true! It is true,” the poor man screamed. “My master, what are you saying?” (1750), asked the citizen. “Tell me the truth, then I will rescue you from here. You will certainly die if you do not stop saying that (1755). Why are you saying ‘that is true, that is true’? You have been of a completely healthy mind well for two years. If you want to keep your life (1760), then tell me the meaning of your words. I will rescue you and get you free.”

“Dear Sir,” he said, “a chaplain came here who was a German as I am (1765). He chose and selected me as a bishop explaining that he granted this honor to me more than to any other fellow German although I do not know to read (1770). He severely instructed me upon my clerical

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honor not to say anything else for these three days but ‘This is true.’ I did that. Otherwise, they would have considered me a fool if I were to say anything else. I was very happy about this rank as bishop and spoke only the way he had taught me. Since he bestowed so much honor upon me (1780) and had appointed me as a lord, I believed that I had gained much dignity. The honors that I received of which he had talked, I believed to be able to enjoy for the rest of my life (1785). But I had to pay for that I regret the development of me having ever become a bishop. He has abandoned me although he had promised so much to me (1790). He deprived me of my healthy mind. Now, I do not really know who I am. I am a fool, God knows only too well, having caused so much harm to myself upon his instruction (1795). I would happily let it go of the dream of being a bishop because my back hurts so badly.

All those standing around burst out laughing, except for the merchant whose heart (1800) and mind hurt badly. He said: “Pay me for my goods! Truly, you must do that.” The mason replied: “I was told that I was a real bishop (1805) and would hold a real court at Pentecost, enjoying there both honor and fame. Now, show me my bishopric (1810). I’ll swear an oath to you, then I will pay you happily what I owe you. If the chaplain lied to me, see, then you are also deceived.” Even though the merchant was very angry (1815), the citizen helped the poor mason to preserve his life when he would have been nearly killed.

When the priest Amîs had gotten away from Greece<sup>xxxv</sup> having gained there (1820) such a huge profit, he returned home to England filled with joy and happiness. But he immediately thought by himself: “By God, I must go there again (1825). I have realized that the person who knows how to acquire goods there will simply become a rich man. I want to push the wheel of fortune to my advantage (1830) since it spins so well for me.

Both with his hair and clothing he took on the appearance of a merchant. He took good care to put together everything what he needed for his voyage (1835). He did not wait long. In his appearance he traveled like a lay person. In that way he put on a good disguise so that no one would recognize him. He traveled to Greece once again (1840).

Once he had arrived in the city [Constantinople] and found an inn, he did not allow anyone to be in there except for himself and his servants.<sup>xxxvi</sup> I tell you why he did that (1845). He did that to be safe and that he could protect all of them there better and everything they had brought with them. Amîs had conceived of a plan (1850) as I will explain to you. He went into the city to inspect where he could find a merchant deal that would give him a hundred pounds or more (1855). As before, he found a man who was a wealthy merchant. He saw that he had displayed many precious gemstones. He thought: “Only one of these gemstones (1860) is probably twelve marks worth.” He said [to the merchant]: “Tell me, sir, for what price you will sell me your gemstones.” [The merchant:] “I will offer you a fair price.” The priest Amîs responded: “How

much would you ask for all of those you have?” (1865) He replied: “Truly, do not even ask for that; you might not, if I judge correctly, pay for them. They are just too valuable.” The priest Amîs responded: “Your situation is thus (1870) that God granted them all to you. Hence, there might well be a person who is as rich as you are. I trust myself to be that one. Tell me what I would have to pay you for the gemstones (1875). I will offer you a good deal.”

The merchant then ordered his servants to bring out all the gemstones that he owned and to display them to the priest Amîs and explained to him in an amazing fashion (1880) what they all were called. The priest cut him short: “Let go off all your explanations. What is the price for them all?” The merchant replied (1885): They are worth a thousand marks for him who wants to purchase them and knows how to appreciate their virtues [qualities]. That person would have to admit to me that I have precious merchandise” (1890). The priest Amîs replied: “Good fortune is with you because you own so much and because I want to buy it all. If they are properly available for purchase (1900), I will acquire them all. Sell them all to me, without opposing me, for six hundred marks. If you refuse,<sup>xxxvii</sup> we won’t have a deal” (1900).

“You seem to me,” said the merchant, “trustworthy enough, as far as I can tell, so I will accept your offer. Let God give His blessing to this deal.” They both shook their hands (1905). They ordered good wine [to seal the deal] and drank it. Once that had happened, [Amîs] told his servants to take the gemstones away. The merchant protested against that (1910): “I will not allow it that they be carried away before I have gotten my money.” The priest said: “I tell you how we will do it. My lord, I am a foreigner here. You will surely receive your gold (1915). I am staying here with an innkeeper. Let the gemstones be carried there. He seems to be such an honest man that he should weigh the silver.<sup>xxxviii</sup> I know that he is so trustworthy (1920) that he will do justice to both of us. I have entrusted all my property to his loyalty. What I have bought from you is not as much (1925) as I still want to purchase.” The other man replied: “Then I am content with that. Make sure that when the silver will be weighed that I do not suffer any loss.” [Priest Amîs said:] “Lord, then come with me (1930). I will pay you ten marks. I will do as you wish. If there is any silver that you will reject, I will immediately replace it with other types of silver. I have so much of it here (1935) that ten donkeys can barely carry it. If you are not content with the honest weighing, I will rather give you (1940), before I lose this deal, two marks more. So, come with me, instead of staying here behind.”

The merchant was very pleased with these words (1945). “If you want to give me two marks extra voluntarily,” he said, when your innkeeper will pay out to me, then I am willing to accompany you and let him weigh the silver” (1950). “Very well,” said the priest. Thus, he succeeded to make an ape out of a man, and he went with him to the inn. He ordered that all the gemstones be carried with them (1955). The merchant was later to lament about that badly. I tell you how that happened.

Amîs shouted<sup>xxxix</sup> to his servants when they entered the house to take the merchant



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prisoner (1960) and to tie him up without anyone else noticing it, keeping this a secret. They also took care that he could not scream (1965). All what was their task to prepare for the voyage home, they did promptly, as was expected from them. They did not wait any longer (1970). They had their ship ready, and they brought all the goods into it which belonged to the priest.

It would be a pity to keep from you [audience] what happened to the merchant and what suffering he had to go through (1975). When the priest Amîs was ready to depart for home, he went, late at night to a wise medical doctor (1980) who owned a house in the city. He urgently begged him for medicine. Let me tell you what he said. He told him: “Lord, I have here with me my father whom I love (1985), who has now been very sick for a long time. Could you heal him with your great skills?<sup>x1</sup> We have come here for that reason (1990). We will give as payment whatever you demand. He has suffered now under his sickness well for two years or more.”

“Now tell me, what is his medical problem,” said the doctor (1995). “Then I will be able whether there might be any help for him and whether my skills might be of use in this case.” “Lord, he has lost his mind,” said the priest Amîs. “Before, he was virtuous and wise (2000), and now he has lost his reason.<sup>xli</sup> His mind is completely perturbed by an insane rage, which has deprived him so badly of sanity that he has not said anything else to me (2005), since he has become stricken with this mental illness, but ‘sir, give me my goods.’ Whatever one might respond or do about that, he demands to be paid. He never says anything else (2010). He is rarely quiet and regularly wakes up everyone who is bothered by his screaming, except that I keep him well hidden. We have to have his hands tied (2015) all the time, and gag his mouth with a cloth, otherwise he would scream constantly. I do nothing else but travel around (2020) from country to country since he had contracted his illness. I suffer both from blame and dishonor because of him. People mock him and also me. In whatever city he is staying (2025), he claims: ‘I am a citizen here.<sup>xliii</sup> I own a house in the city. He never tires of that, and of uttering the demand that I return his goods. “Help me so that I can live (2030) up to the time when he will stop saying that and assume a quiet life.”

The doctor replied: “Now, trust me. Whatever his ailment might be, if you give me sixty pounds (2035), I will heal him so that afterwards people will recognize in him a sane person. I will not do it for even one penny less.” “I will pay you that,” the priest said. [The doctor:] “Now bring the sick man to me” (2040). The priest replied: “That will be done. He rushed home where he kept the merchant. He quickly took him to the doctor. “I want,” the doctor said (2045), “that you untie his hand. I want to observe and hear his illness and his crazy behavior.” The priest let that happen (2050). Once he had ungagged him, the merchant immediately shouted: “Sir, help me and let me inform my friends about my suffering brought upon me by this man (2055). I handed over my goods to him today that he had purchased, as he had wanted. I have a house in

this city. When he took all the goods to his house (inn) and was supposed to pay me (2060), there was no one else but me. He took me prisoner and tied me up and has almost killed me. Please send a messenger to alert my friends (2065). I will pay him a pound and will guarantee that through a guarantor.”

“You hear that?,” asked the priest. “That way he has acted now for two years.” The doctor answered: “Now tell me, when will you give me my payment. I fully understand his ailment. I will heal him.”<sup>xliii</sup> The priest Amîs answered: “If you work hard on him (2075), I will give you thirty of the sixty pounds tomorrow morning. The other thirty pounds I will pay you when he will no longer say those words of which I have told you” (2080). “That’s praiseworthy/a good deal,” said the doctor. “I want you to go to sleep until tomorrow morning. Then you bring me thirty pounds. You will recognize a definite improvement with him (2085).<sup>xliv</sup> That healing must happen tonight so that he regains his reason. I will try out everything I know.” So, the priest went away and straight to his ship (2090) which he happily launched. He left the merchant with the doctor. The former would buy his freedom when he wanted/could. Let me tell you what he suffered during the night (2095). He had to undress, whether he wanted it or not. The servants pulled off his dress and placed him in a hot bath. The claim that he owned a house in the city (2100), that he was a citizen and was well in his mind, which he swore many times, the master/doctor did not, although it was the truth, believe him (2105).

The doctor shaved his head, which increased his suffering greatly. The merchant repeatedly offered him ten marks to spare him that pain. But irrespective of how much he promised him (2110), the doctor did not believe him. He poked his scalp with a good knife normally used for bloodletting although he was not in any need of medical treatment which they [the doctor and his servants] applied to him (2115). He almost died from all that and went through a terrible night.

The doctor had heated up the tub water so much that he was almost scalded to death and barely survived (2120). He was also greatly grieved that his strong oaths had so little effect on the doctor. Crying, he said: “Help me to get away from here, great God (2125). I will always observe your commands until my death.” Whatever he offered the doctor so that he stopped torturing him and let him send a messenger (2130) to his friends, was all of no avail. Whatever he said was spoken into the wind. He had to suffer as a child has to whatever they did to him (2135). The doctor did not pay attention to his prayer/begging. All he wanted to do was to restore his sanity. With many different strategies he treated him all night and said early in the morning (2140): “Do you feel in any way somewhat better?” The merchant said: “My suffering has increased so much that I no longer dare to say<sup>xlv</sup> that the man [the priest, or the presumed merchant] ought to pay me (2145). I would have certainly received my money or gotten back my goods, but you have protected him from me so that he does not pay me anything, and you have hurt my body so badly (2150) that I will be dishonored for ever.” “Truly,” replied the doctor,

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“what you have suffered so far, is nothing compared (2155) to what will happen to you next. You will never regain your freedom from me as long as you say that he owes you even a penny. That’s what your son wants to achieve (2160) that you stop saying that. For that reason, he is paying me so that I apply all my skill in a masterful fashion to you so that you will refrain from using those words (2165); or I will torture you as long as you live.”

“Truly,” said the merchant, “if I cannot preserve my life in any other way, I will swear right now that he does not owe me anything” (2170).

“I praise/thank God,” said the doctor, “who has created us, that I have restored your sanity. This was a blissful night during which you regained your healthy mind (2175) and I became a rich man.” The merchant said: “Send someone to him that he pays you the silver completely that you have earned from him.” “I will do that,” said the doctor (2180). A messenger was sent out who quickly returned and said that the man [the priest, the false merchant] had departed. [The merchant:] “You could have prevented that earlier.” “Truly,” said the doctor (2185), since he has left his father behind, I want to impose shame on him and will now gouge out your eyes.” “Oh no, sir,” said the merchant, “if I can pawn myself free (2190), let me keep my eyesight.” “I can let this happen,” said the doctor to him. The merchant sent a messenger to his home and urged his wife (2195) that if she wanted to see him still alive to come to that house [the inn].

When the messenger found her and the wife had learned (2200) the bad news, she was horrified. She quickly left the house and immediately went to see her husband. When she saw him sitting there naked (2205), she was deeply worried about the [unpaid] six hundred marks. So, she asked him at first whether he had the silver, and then she asked him who had done the harm to him (2210). When she began asking, the merchant told her: “Be quiet, look at how I have been mistreated. I was charged with having lost my mind. When I asked for the silver (2215), they caused me all that pain. If you keep repeating this question, they will, by God, hurt you as much.”

“Woe is me, woe,” the wife screamed. How did it happen that you lost (2220) your goods and your freedom<sup>xlvi</sup> in such a murderous manner. What criminal<sup>xlvii</sup> shaved your head?” He answered: “The doctor did that to me, my master who is standing before you.” Then he told her the whole story (2225). [Once she had learned the full truth,] she called in all her friends whom she told his misery. They all badly lamented it. Even though his loss was so great, he still had to pay thirty marks (2230) to the master as his payment. For the rest of his life, the shame hurt him more than the loss of the money (2235), although he was hurting badly from both. The fact that he had to grant the doctor his money and could not prevent that was the result, as people say, of him being the king’s doctor (2240). Therefore, he had the power to make the merchant give him the promised payment. He was ashamed of that until his death.<sup>xlviii</sup>

When the priest Amîs had made (2245) the healthy man to a sick man there in Greece, he

quickly traveled home and brought with him many treasures. He was filled with a strong sense of generosity (2250). For that reason, we ought to praise the priest Amîs. How ever far away he traveled, one could always find a great welcome in his house (2255). The dice could fall on the lowest numbers,<sup>xlix</sup> both old and young found there what they wanted.

After the priest had lived (2260) for thirty years here on earth, he turned toward God and turned his back to society, entering a Franciscan monastery,<sup>1</sup> taking all his goods with him (2265). He eagerly served God with humility and a submissiveness and thus lived up to the requirements both early in the morning and until late in the evening. With his goods and his intelligence (2270) he improved the monastery so much that the monks became happy about it. This he did so much that when the abbot died, they elected him as the successor (2275). Any other decision would have been wrong. He improved his attitude and endeavored much to do good. His mind assisted him in that very well. Thus, the priest earned (2280) his eternal life after he had died. The same way, the heavenly crown certainly ought to be granted to us as well (2285), which I praise much more than anything here in life.

Thus, the book about Amîs comes to an end. May God take care of us in heaven.

#### A Brief Biography of Der Stricker with a Discussion of His Works<sup>li</sup>

Hardly any other medieval poet has ever identified him/herself more fittingly than Der Stricker. This name is a *nom de plume*, a literary term, referring to the act of knitting, or stringing together ropes, or weaving. Every text, both then and today, constitutes a narrative fabric, a textile, so to speak, whether we talk about poetry or prose. Insofar as Der Stricker thus refers to himself as a person who is occupied with knitting and the like, he implies specifically his art of weaving together words and sentences, hence texts, to create new literary/poetic tapestries. Although we cannot say more about this poet in biographical terms, the pseudonym already indicates his high degree of self-confidence and pride about his own accomplishments. Only in his “Die Frauenehre” (Panegyric on Women’s Honor; ed. Hofmann), here disregarding short self-references in the prologues to *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal* and to *Pfaffe Amîs*, does he refer to himself explicitly though with tongue-in-cheek. He was mentioned only by his contemporary poet, Rudolf von Ems, once in his *Alexander* (after 1230), and once in his *Willehalm von Orlens* (after 1240); there are no other comments about him in later documents. But there are numerous indications that he enjoyed considerable popularity in the late Middle Ages because, apart from a large number of manuscripts containing his various texts, some of his literary motifs were copied by other poets.

Der Stricker might have originated from southern Germany, maybe eastern Franconia, but he was mostly active in modern-day Austria, as we can tell from the many references to local towns and aristocrats there, such as in his verse narratives “Die Herren zu Österreich” (The Lords of Austria), “Die Gäuhühner” (The Chickens Paid in Tribute), and “Die schreiende Klage” (The Screaming Lament). Altogether, we can

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date Der Stricker's active time as a poet between 1215 and 1250. As many other contemporary poets, Der Stricker was probably a minstrel who wandered from court to court to find patrons for his art, but details escape us.<sup>lii</sup>

Based on the manuscripts containing Der Stricker's texts, we can say that this poet was highly popular and flourished well during the first half of the thirteenth century and enjoyed considerable respect far into the late Middle Ages. One of the criteria to determine the abilities and qualities of a poet both in the Middle Ages and today consists of the range of literary genres which s/he was able to develop. Considering what types of works Der Stricker published, we can easily rank him on a very high level compared to many of his contemporaries.

In his probably earliest work, judging on the basis of the language, Der Stricker succeeded in composing a remarkable Arthurian romance, *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal* (maybe his first major work, ca. 1210–1225; Daniel of the Flowering Valley), which still exists in five manuscripts (<https://handschriftencensus.de/werke/1207>). In contrast to most other romances of that type, the protagonist appears right away as an ideal character who never has to develop further and shines as a paragon outdoing everyone at court both through his bravery, strength, knightly skills, and, above all, through his superior intelligence. King Arthur is threatened by a hostile giant who was sent out by King Matûr as a challenger. This giant is a kind of robot, but Daniel learns how to outdo him and thus to kill him. On his way to Matûr's kingdom, the protagonist faces several other magical adventures, but he manages to defeat the most unlikely opponents, at times using their own magical tools against them. He can even overcome a devilish monster that kills people to take a bath in their blood. In the war which subsequently erupts, Daniel creates wonders and proves to be the superior fighter, securing Arthur's victory. At the end, when all seems to be settled, an old man suddenly appears who knows some magic and manages to kidnap first King Arthur and then Parzival to avenge the death of his two 'children,' the robotic giants. None of the knights knows how to combat this mysterious old man, until Daniel intervenes, once again, and secures a magical net with which they can capture the opponent. Only then can Daniel explain the reasons for having killed the 'sons,' which the old man finally understands and accepts as a justified action. This conflict then also concludes peacefully, and the old man is given by King Arthur a mysterious kingdom as his own behind insurmountable mountains, apparently a direct allusion to the Islamic cult group of the assassins, led by the Old Man of the Mountains, certainly a historical reference to the mysterious group of Assassins active during the history of the Crusades operating from present-day Iran.<sup>liii</sup> *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal* clearly separates Der Stricker from many of his predecessors, viewing the world of King Arthur already through a rather ironic lens and injecting a new type of protagonist who appears to be ideal and perfect and 'only' has to cope with monstrous challenges from the outside.

With his *Karl der Große* (ca. 1217–1225; *Charlemagne*), probably his second major

work, the poet continued with the long tradition of *chansons de geste* focusing on this almost mythical emperor (d. 814) and his paladins, especially his nephew Roland. Der Stricker adapted the Middle High German version *Das Rolandslied* by the Priest Conrad (ca. 1180) without changing the text dramatically, except for casting it slightly in a more courtly fashion. In both text versions, Charlemagne needs to return home from the battlefield in northern Spain, but he would like to establish a firm and solid border against the Muslims. Those promise him to abide by their agreement, and even to consider conversion to Christianity, but in reality, they intend to deceive Charlemagne, to ease his distrust, and to convince him to leave the country.

Roland, above all, is betrayed by his jealous and callous father-in-law, Genilun, who informs the Muslims that this paladin will lead the rearguard across the Pyrenees (Roncesvalles). The narrow passage over the mountains proves to be an ideal place for an ambush, and the Arabs then attack with a vast army. Roland at first believes that the Christians can resist the enemies, but eventually, they are all slaughtered. Roland waits too long to blow his famous horn, Olivant, to call Charlemagne back for their rescue, and he then also dies. But once the emperor has arrived, he takes terrible revenge and utterly defeats the Muslims and thus can firm up completely his control over northern Spain. Back home, then, Genilun is tried for his betrayal, convicted, and executed by quartering. *Karl der Große* was really a ‘hit’ on the medieval ‘book market,’ with forty-four manuscripts containing his work either in full or in parts (sometimes as little as only eight hundred verses) having survived until today.<sup>liv</sup>

Der Stricker was even more successful with his fables and short verse narratives in which he related general life-relevant wisdom, provided overall teachings about a good way of life, about the proper relationship between husband and wife, ethical and moral behavior, and economic and political concerns. Undoubtedly, this poet pursued rather conservative, traditionalist ideals and lamented generally about the decline of his society and time. Der Stricker criticized foolish people, disrespectful individuals, and argued harshly against those who rebelled against the traditional feudal order. He also assumed a strongly religious position warning about the lack of piety and devotion among his contemporaries.

Der Stricker’s short verse narratives, approximately 170 altogether,<sup>lv</sup> have survived in forty-five manuscripts (<https://handschriftencensus.de/werke/367>), yet their great popularity might indicate that some of them could have been composed by imitators. Famously, the poet created the figure of the smart, cunning, if not wily, *Pfaffe Amîs* (after 1225; Priest Amis) who became the role model for the much later *Till Eulenspiegel* (anonymous, but perhaps by Hermen Bote, first printed in 1510). This is the work I have translated here into English. This collection of twelve stories focuses on this clever and ruthless priest from England who knows exceedingly well how to defy his bishop’s authority, expose his greed, and to make fun of him; just as he laughs about other foolish people all over the world to whom he pretends that he can create

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miracles. Moreover, Amîs uses many tricks to deceive people and thus to expose their foolishness and naivete in matters of faith, money, and public reputation.

But this protagonist is not evil-minded – maybe a questionable notion – instead, he uses the money he gains for meals to which he invites many people back home. As much as the protagonist ridicules many individuals and cheats them, he really aims for the restoration of traditional honor, courtly joys, and virtues. He achieves that, however, at a high price for the many victims of his strategies to extract money from them. The *Pfaffe Amîs* has survived in thirteen manuscripts (<https://handschriftencensus.de/werke/368>)<sup>lvi</sup> and in one early imprint produced by the Strassburg printer Johann Prüss at the end of the fifteenth century,<sup>lvii</sup> certainly also an impressive number which underscores Der Stricker's great success as a literary author. These episodes were published again in 1872 a collection edited by Hans Lembel.<sup>lviii</sup>

Der Stricker's fables<sup>lix</sup> follow the ancient tradition established by the Greek poet Aesop (ca. 620–564 B.C.E.), but like every other medieval fable author (Marie de France, Ulrich Bonerius, etc.), he adapted their meaning for his own purposes, regularly injecting a religious or ethical message. In the well-known fable of the rooster and the pearl (no. 1), for instance, the pearl which the rooster dismisses as useless for itself since it is not food, represents the words that people address to God and with which they pursue honor. Foolish and naive people need extra explanations, but those who do not accept those teachings are ultimately not worth the effort. In many of his fables, the poet highlighted virtues and vices and examined the ordinary problems in human life. At the same time, Der Stricker also emphasizes problems when people abuse someone's generosity (no. 5, "Der Hofhund," The Court Dog), since the kind person might at the end stop sharing his/her goods, which would then hurt all the poor. At the same time, the poet used his fables also to warn about those who improperly try to rise on the social ladder, such as peasants who want to turn into nobles, which quickly ruins their ethical standards and make them into arrogant and heartless beings (no. 6, "Der Hofhund und die Jagdhunde," The Court Dog and the Hunting Dogs). Der Stricker's fable proves to be a remarkable antecedent to Wernher the Gardener's *Helmbrecht* (ca. 1260–1270) where the young peasant protagonist turns into a robber knight and is at the end apprehended by the authorities, severely punished, and a year later lynched by his former victims as a punishment for his pride, hubris, and violence.

Der Stricker voiced strong criticism of all efforts to change the feudal structures and warns the non-aristocratic population ("gebûr," peasants) against any attempts in that regard. He also formulated warnings addressing the poor not to abuse the generosity demonstrated by the wealthy (no. 8, "Die Fliege und der Glatzkopf," The Fly and the Bald Person). The poet's conservative and religious viewpoints find vivid expression in his admonishment of people to guard themselves against the temptations of this world and not to forget God since death would come

faster than expected. As he expresses it in “Der Vogel und der Sperber” (no. 10; The Bird and the Sparrow Hawk), worldly people (lay people) who die without having repented their sins would suffer endlessly and horribly in the afterlife. Through many animal parables, Der Stricker explored virtues and vices, discussed the meaning of honor, ridiculed and chastised fools and ignoramuses, and praised the wise and intelligent people.

The poet also created a number of verse narratives of strongly didactic nature,<sup>lx</sup> such as “Der Riese” (The Giant) in which twelve men seek shelter in a house owned by a cannibalistic giant, but then they are discovered by that monster who demands one of them for his food. The group of men sacrifices the weakest among them, but the giant is not satisfied, demands ever more victims, so he eats one after the other. When the last man insists that he would finally take up a fight and defend himself, he is told that only all twelve of them together would have had a chance against the giant, so the last one has to die as well. The narrator concludes his account by comparing the giant with an evil lord and the twelve men with the lord’s subjects. The people as a collective could raise some effective resistance if they all worked together, but since everyone tends to go the easiest route and rather sacrifices the neighbor instead of forming a strong alliance with everyone, the evil lord would have an easy game pursuing his strategy of subjugating everyone. While Der Stricker expressed highly conservative views regarding the social structure, here he voiced surprisingly innovative perspectives encouraging the ordinary people to stick together, to support each other, and thus to recognize the actual power they wield.

Indeed, Der Stricker advocated rather contradictory viewpoints, sometimes supporting the rigid feudal system, sometimes outlining concepts of how the subjects of a prince could defend themselves against his tyrannical rule. He warned distinctly against wives who would dare to oppose their husbands and fight for their own rights (no. 17; “Die eingemauerte Frau,” The Enwalled Wife). And he ridiculed foolish husbands who try to dismiss their wives but then demonstrate complete weakness against their rhetorical skills (no. 18; “Das Ehescheidungsgespräch,” The Discussion about Divorce). And he laughed about foolish couples who do not progress in life and remain poor because even when God grants them free wishes, they do not know how to use them wisely and squander them badly (no. 19; “Die drei Wünsche,” The Three Wishes). In other verse narratives,<sup>lxi</sup> Der Stricker commented on ignorant and smart kings, judges, and other people, combining skillfully literary entertainment with didacticism, and thereby he created many narrative motives which later poets copied and embellished for their own purposes, beginning with the tales of *Till Eulenspiegel*. The figure of the priest Amîs became a role model for Eulenspiegel, such as when the priest pretends to be a painter and creates images that only those can see who were born as legitimate children.<sup>lxii</sup> Der Stricker warned about the dangers of excessive drinking of alcohol, and ridiculed knights who are so poor that they wear only a coat and nothing underneath it (no. 10; “Der nackte Ritter,” The Naked Knight). And he



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also told stories about the practice of using the ordeal with the red-hot iron for the purpose of determining a marriage partner's loyalty (no. 5).

Being an important forerunner of many subsequent storytellers in the following centuries (Boccaccio, Chaucer, Kaufringer, Franco Sacchetti, Poggio Bracciolini, etc.), Der Stricker deserves much credit for having laid the foundation for the genre of the *mære*, *novelle*, or *tale*.<sup>lxiii</sup> He was a master in various literary genres and can be counted among some of the greatest thirteenth-century Middle High German poets. We have to recognize, however, his highly conservative viewpoints, his sharp criticism of the cultural, ethical, and material conditions of his time, condemning greed, worldliness, disregard and mistreatment of women, disrespect of courtly values, the rise of homosexuality, lawlessness, excessive parsimoniousness among the aristocrats (in Austria), and decline or lack of piety ("Die Klage," The Lament).

*Der Pfaffe Amîs* proves to be a complex corpus of episodes in verse focusing on the pranks by this curious English priest – as an aside, we hardly ever hear of England in medieval German literature, the one exception, apart from Der Stricker's text, being Rudolf von Ems with his *Der Guote Gêrhart* (ca. 1220). The narrator repeatedly insists on Amîs's good character and praises him highly for his generosity and hospitality. He identifies him as an intelligent, wise, but also street-smart person who can easily outdo a bishop and other authority figures. But this does not necessarily mean that we would have to condone all those evil deeds that he commits to gain money, money that he does not want to keep for himself but to use it to maintain his open house, allowing virtually everyone to enjoy free meals there. In the early cases, we are invited to chuckle when Amîs succeeds once again in pulling the wool over foolish people's eyes – he finds fools in all social classes and in all countries wherever he travels. His criticism especially targets a bishop and hence maybe the upper echelons of the clergy altogether. But increasingly, his pranks become painful, hurtful, mean, and outright vicious. Moreover, we would have to identify this priest as a major scoundrel who would not have hesitated to let his victims die as long as he could rob them of their extensive properties. Amîs is the cheater and deceiver *par excellence*, and as such he became a role model of Till Eulenspiegel, whose pranks were printed the first time in 1510/1511 and then became most popular throughout the following centuries, and actually until today.<sup>lxiv</sup> In fact, at the end, we might choke in our laughter when we hear of the terrible tortures the poor merchant in Constantinople has to sustain although he is completely innocent. Other victims belong to the peasant class, the royal court, a variety sick people in a hospital, and the faithful at large. Significantly, he never targets Jews or members of monasteries. By contrast, both men and women are his victims, as long as they have money or can be used as vehicles to make money. Children, however, never figure anywhere.

In the prologue, the narrator laments about the decline in culture, especially at court. He

praises generosity and the arts performed by members of the courts. Perhaps, picking up on that topic, at the end we hear once again the narrator giving great praise to Amîs who finally joins a monastery, supports it with his vast wealth, and ultimately rises to the post of the abbot. How could such a mean-spirited, unethical, if not criminal character be the object of God's love? There is something absurd about the entire setting since this priest commits so many pranks to fool and rob people of their money, and finally even resorts to brutal maneuvers to deprive wealthy merchants in Constantinople of their wealth. Does *Der Stricker* perhaps reflect western European contempt of the eastern neighbors, that is, the Greek-Orthodox in Constantinople? But we also need to consider that Amîs cares little for Greece itself and makes his big profit only in the capitol of the eastern Roman empire. Nevertheless, this priest targets anyone who owns some wealth wherever he can find victims. Future research will have to decide on these issues, but it is obvious that *Der Pfaffe Amîs* represents a huge moral, spiritual, ethical, and economic challenge both for his contemporaries and us today. It is rather puzzling to consider that these episodes were intended for a courtly audience. However, the large number of available manuscript copies strongly suggests that these stories significantly appealed to them although we hear of a king, his court, a duke, and numerous courtly ladies who are all targeted by Amîs who can mercilessly expose their foolishness.

Here I present the first English translation and hope that it will serve well as the foundation for new interpretations, also by those who do not have a solid command of Middle High German. *Der Stricker* deeply confounds us in our traditional views of what constitutes high medieval courtly German or European literature.

## Endnotes

[1] A typical topos, in Latin called "laudatio temporis acti," praise of the times past, going back to Horace, *Ars Poetica* l. 173 (ca. 19 B.C.E.). It implies that a narrator believes that everything in the past was better than in the present. See online at: <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/arspoet.shtml> (last accessed on Jan. 20, 2024).

[2] This poet is identified through this odd formulation, 'The Stricker,' i.e., 'the Weaver,' or 'the Knitter,' but I keep his original name throughout, *Der Stricker* for the sake of authenticity.

[3] It remains rather puzzling why *Der Stricker* almost idealizes this rogue and deceiver. We are supposed to laugh about the foolish people who fall for his tricks, but in the course of time, his victims do not only lose their money to him, they become even terribly abused and tortured. See, for instance, the last episode in Amîs's life before he joins a monastery.

[4] There seems also to be a sense of subtle criticism of this priest who does everything possible, legal or illegal, to gain as much money as he can to demonstrate his generosity.

[5] This means, the bishop claims that he is intellectually much superior to the priest who will be killed by the falcon and eaten as its prey.

**Translated from Middle High German**

[6] This can only be meant as a sarcastic comment. In fact, the bishop is already frustrated with the outcome of the examination, but he cannot help it and has to admit that Amîs has provided, at least on the surface, a correct answer to a foolish question.

[7] “kunst” is a rather vague term; it can mean ‘art,’ ‘skill,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘wisdom,’ ‘ability,’ or the like.

[8] “buch leren” (208) literally means: to teach the books, i.e., to teach the lessons contained in a book.

[9] “tumme” means ‘the dumb one,’ but since it is an animal, ‘ignorant beast would be the better translation. Of course, donkeys are commonly characterized as dumb or recalcitrant.

[10] “gewin” would actually mean ‘profit’ or gain, but in our context, the simple term ‘food’ fits best.

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<sup>i</sup> This can only be a sarcastic remark since the bishop had stated explicitly above that Amîs would never achieve that goal of teaching an animal how to read. After all, he wants Amîs to fail so that he will lose his parish, or income.

<sup>ii</sup> This is almost a tautology. But the demand of the rhyme scheme makes it often necessary for a poet to repeat himself or to rephrase something unnecessarily.

<sup>iii</sup> “kuppher” or ‘copper’ refers to a ring of less monetary value, hence out of copper.

<sup>iv</sup> “valscheit” normally means ‘deception,’ ‘falseness,’ ‘fakeness,’ etc., but in our context the only charge raised pertains to potential adultery.

<sup>v</sup> This is a very free translation, but the literal translation would have rendered only meaningless words: ‘they believed in him in a rough fashion.’

<sup>vi</sup> Certainly, a little confusing statement, which ultimately only means that the king is supposed to pay him extraordinarily well. ‘Marks’ are a monetary unit of high value.

<sup>vii</sup> He means a father who acknowledged him as his legitimate child born by his married mother.

<sup>viii</sup> Here is a grammatical mistake in the original. It says literally: who would not see a painting. The syntactical structure leads, however, over to the opposite situation.

<sup>ix</sup> It was common in the Middle Ages that a visitor had to ask for permission to leave the court again. Under certain circumstances, the prince might even deny him/her that privilege forcing him or her to stay longer for whatever reason.

<sup>x</sup> The poet reflects here the political situation in what we call France today, which was still pretty much divided into separate dukedoms and the French kingdom.

<sup>xi</sup> Literally, hostel for the night.

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<sup>xii</sup> The ‘matins’ is the morning prayer offered by the priest in many different Christian churches. It is part of the traditional divine office during the canonical hours carried out by the priests or monks some time between 3 a.m. and dawn, when the next service began, the ‘lauds.’

<sup>xiii</sup> Wax tablets served as a kind of scrap paper before the introduction of paper into Europe before the fourteenth century (ca. 1390, the first papermill was built in Nuremberg). The scribe quickly scribbled down his text, passed that on to someone to copy it onto a parchment, if it was valuable enough, and wiped the wax tablet clean again. See the contributions to *Papier im mittelalterlichen Europa: Herstellung und Gebrauch*, ed. Carla Meyer, Sandra Schultz, and Bernd Schneidmüller. *Materiale Textkulturen*, 7 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015); as to wax tablets and paper, see Paul Bertrand, *Documenting the Everyday in Medieval Europe:*

*The Social Dimensions of a Writing Revolution 1250-1350*, trans. Graham Robert Edwards. *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 42 (2015; Turnhout: Brepols, 2019). Cf. also Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Bound Fast with Letters: Medieval Writers, Readers, and Texts* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

<sup>xiv</sup> Normally we would expect a reference to the fox as a sly and smart animal, and Schilling in his modern German translation replaces the badger with the fox, suggesting in his commentary that Der Stricker might have thought of the appearance of the badger in the animal narrative *Reinhart Fuchs* (ca. 1170) who cleverly knows how to defend his relative, the fox, against the many charges raised by the other animals. A much easier explanation would be that our poet wanted to have a fitting rhyme word, “wachs / dachs.”

<sup>xv</sup> The original is a little unclear here whether the priest is still speaking, as I translate, or whether here we face the narrator’s voice, as Schilling does in his German translation.

<sup>xvi</sup> Through the switch of the personal pronoun from “ir” (you in plural) to “si” (they in third person plural), it seems as if there were a switch from direct speech to indirect speech, which is, however, not intended, considering the syntactical context.

<sup>xvii</sup> The adjective “klein” would normally mean ‘small,’ but in the current context, ‘finely woven’ or ‘elegant’ seems more fitting.

<sup>xviii</sup> Literally: they bought their way into his prayer so that the priest felt more comfortable. But that is not good idiomatic English.

<sup>xix</sup> This is a complicated Middle High German sentence. Literally, it says: “that people said something about his status.”

<sup>xx</sup> Literally, the text says the opposite: ‘it did not bother him much at all.’

<sup>xxi</sup> More idiomatic would be: He realized in his mind.

<sup>xxii</sup> There is, as far as I can tell, no other reference to a mason in medieval or early modern literature.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The following exchange indicates that he means, ‘German,’ not ‘Frenchman,’ but in the Middle East, and also in the Byzantine empire, most westerners were identified as ‘Franks,’

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drawing from the ancient name for the Frankish kingdom under the Merovingians and then Carolingians. The First Crusade (1096-1099) was led primarily by the French, which cemented the notion that all Europeans were to be called ‘Franks.’ See the contributions to *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades*, ed. Daniel H. Weiss and Lisa Mahoney. Parallax: Re-Visions of Culture and Society (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). Until today, the northern region of Bavaria is called ‘Franken’ or ‘Franconia,’ and people there speak ‘Fränkisch’ (Franconian). In the Moselle and Rhine region, the local dialect is called until today “Mosel-Rheinfränkisch.”

<sup>xxiv</sup> In the original, it says: “that it was a Mass.”

<sup>xxv</sup> The bishop has always an extra chair next to the altar in a cathedral, his ‘cathedra,’ so this chair signals that the church is a bishop’s church, a cathedral.

<sup>xxvi</sup> In the original, he uses the term “kemenate” (room, chamber), but the switch of scenery implies that the two have gone to the merchant’s shop.

<sup>xxvii</sup> The use of the adjective “weis” (wise) might be ironic when we consider the outcome of the trade; hence, in the present context, it is better to render the word as ‘experienced,’ ‘practiced,’ ‘smart,’ or the like.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The text proves to be confusing, with the narrator using the same noun for the innkeeper and the shopkeeper, calling both ‘wirt.’ The story has now clearly moved to the merchant’s shop.

<sup>xxix</sup> These comments signal that all trading was done by means of rather crude methods of paying with gold, silver, or other precious objects, instead of having an elaborate coinage as in modern times.

<sup>xxx</sup> The term used here, “var,” would normally mean ‘journey,’ ‘travel,’ or even ‘landing site,’ but in our context, which is not reflected in the relevant dictionaries, the meaning refers to ‘instability,’ hence ‘untrustworthiness’ (see Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, <https://woerterbuchnetz.de/?sigle=Lexer&lemid=V00224#0>). In Old High German, however, ‘var’ refers to deception, ambush, persecution, seduction, even riot, unstableness, etc. See <https://awb.saw-leipzig.de/?sigle=AWB&lemid=F00258> (last accessed on Jan. 25, 2024). It is not clear why Der Stricker resorted to this older meaning of “var,” unless we keep in mind that the next line closes on the rhyming word “war” (true).

<sup>xxxi</sup> It is possible that the narrator wants to indicate that the merchant intended to cheat with fake weights. But the text is not quite clear here.

<sup>xxxii</sup> The original does not make this clear, “im den staten” could mean a variety of things, such as ‘according to the conditions,’ or ‘circumstances.’ Considering the specific context, however, ‘contract’ seems to be the best option for us. Alternatively, the poet might mean: ‘irrespective of what might have held him back from returning here.’

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<sup>xxxiii</sup> There is some contradiction here. The mason was introduced as a bald man. He might have some hair locks left, or his beard, but there is supposed to be no hair on his head. The poet simply drew from formulaic language pertaining to violence, commonly directed against women.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> The meaning is that he might hold a Mass, reading from the Bible and singing the liturgy.

<sup>xxxv</sup> He means, of course, Constantinople.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> In other words, he rents the entire inn for himself and his people to have free rein for his plans.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Literally: if you say anything against that.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> The poet switches carelessly between gold, silver, or money at large.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Literally, he said. But depending on how we have to imagine the situation, he might have whispered or shouted to achieve the surprise attack.

<sup>xl</sup> Literally: Could you be of use to us, to heal him, with your teaching. I mention this only (once again) so that the reader understands, both here and throughout, the challenges of translating properly from Middle High German to modern English.

<sup>xli</sup> The term “zuht” carries many meanings. So, this line might indicate, at first, “He has lost his education or culture.” The term is critical in all courtly manners and carries a variety or shades of meaning. Schilling, trans. (117), uses the term ‘self-control,’ but that could also imply ‘incontinence.’ For a good discussion of the range of semantic meanings, see Otfrid Ehrismann, together with Albrecht Classen, Winder McConnell, et al., *Ehre und Mut, Abenteuer und Minne: Höfische Wortgeschichte aus dem Mittelalter* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995), 248-53. For him, “zuht” was the result of courtly education, a sign of being a member of the courtly community. In our context, however, the poet intends to address mental illness.

<sup>xlii</sup> The word “wirt” is used here in various contexts. Normally, it would mean ‘innkeeper,’ but Der Stricker uses it often for ‘merchant,’ and here it means ‘citizen.’

<sup>xliii</sup> Literally: I will win the prize over him.

<sup>xliv</sup> The word “mere,” “maere,” or “mære” has many meanings, such as ‘news,’ ‘announcement,’ ‘amazing event,’ ‘unusual account,’ and it was also used as a term for the genre of short verse narratives, like the Old French *fabliaux*. The best known *mære* poet was probably Heinrich Kaufringer, fl. 1400.

<sup>xlv</sup> Literally: can say.

<sup>xlvi</sup> “lîp” means ‘body,’ and thus, metaphorically, she means his ‘life’ or ‘freedom.’

<sup>xlvii</sup> The word “mudinich” seems not to exist in any dictionary. I could only find “modich” in the Southern Hessian dictionary, for ‘mud,’ ‘slick,’ ‘slime,’ etc. See <https://www.lagis-hessen.de/de/subjects/rsrec/sn/shwb/entry/modich> (last accessed on Jan. 29, 2024).

<sup>xlviii</sup> Literally, until his grave.

<sup>xlix</sup> Metaphorical expression pertaining to the wheel of fortune, here expressed by dice.

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<sup>l</sup> Each monastic order observed a specifically colored habit, and gray, later brown was the color preferred by the Franciscans.

<sup>li</sup> I have adapted some of this outline from my article “The Stricker,” *The Literary Encyclopedia*, first published 16 August 2021, online at: <https://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=14777>. But in light of this translation, I could refine and expand this essay further, and bring it up to date in scholarship. The online article on Der Stricker in *Wikipedia* is truly insufficient ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der\\_Stricker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Stricker)). The German version, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der\\_Stricker](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Stricker) (both last accessed on Jan. 29, 2024), is helpful insofar as it provides a good bibliography. For a solid introductory study, see Michael Resler, “Der Stricker.” *German Writers and Works of the High Middle Ages: 1170–1280*, ed. James Hardin and Will Hasty. Dictionary of Literary Biography, 138 (Detroit, MI, Washington, DC, and London: Gale Research, 1994), 117–32. The relevant research literature on Der Stricker is listed there (130–32).

<sup>lii</sup> For a concise and thoroughly scholarly study on Der Stricker, see Karl-Ernst Geith, Elke Ukena-Best, and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler, “Der Stricker,” *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 9. 2nd ed. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 417–49.

<sup>liii</sup> Albrecht Classen, “Assassins, the Crusades, and the Old Man from the Mountains in Medieval Literature: With an Emphasis on The Stricker’s *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal*,” *Marginal Figures in the Global Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Meg Lota Brown. Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, 47 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 123–40.

<sup>liv</sup> For a list of the available manuscripts, see <https://handschriftencensus.de/werke/366> (last accessed on Jan. 25, 2024). For a detailed discussion, see Classen, *Charlemagne in Medieval German and Dutch Literature*. Bristol Studies in Medieval Culture (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2021), 47–71; cf. also Der Stricker, *Karl der Große*, ed. Karl Bartsch (1857; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965).

<sup>lv</sup> Der Stricker, *Die Kleindichtung des Strickers*, ed. Wolfgang Wilfried Moelleken. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 107.1–5 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1979–1978).

<sup>lvi</sup> Der Stricker, *Des Strickers Pfaffe Amis*, ed. K. Kamihara. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 233 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1976). Here I rely on the bilingual edition, Der Stricker, *Der Pfaffe Amîs: Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*. Nach der Heidelberger Handschrift cpg 341 herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert von Michael Schilling (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1994).

<sup>lvii</sup> A copy is in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, Rar. 422.

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- <sup>lviii</sup> *Erzählungen und Schwänke*, ed. Hans Lamel (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1872).
- <sup>lix</sup> Der Stricker, *Erzählungen, Fabeln, Reden: Mittelhochdeutsche / Neuhochdeutsch*, ed., trans., and commentary by Otfried Ehrismann (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1992).
- <sup>lx</sup> Emilio González and Victor Millet, *Die Kleinepik des Strickers: Texte, Gattungstraditionen und Interpretationsprobleme*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 199 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2006).
- <sup>lxi</sup> Der Stricker, *Verserzählungen*, ed. Hanns Fischer. 2nd rev. ed. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 55 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967).
- <sup>lxii</sup> Schilling, trans. (1994), 142–52, printed all the texts in *Till Eulenspiegel* that derived direct inspiration from *Pfaffe Amis*.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Klaus Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz und das Chaos: Eine Geschichte der europäischen Novellistik im Mittelalter: Fabliau – Märe – Novelle* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2006), 79–105.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> Stephanie Desmond, “Cheating and Cheaters in German Romance and Epic, 1180–1225,” Ph. D. diss., University of Toronto, 2013.

### Bio-note

**Error! Main Document Only.** **Albrecht Classen** was born near Bad Hersfeld in Germany and studied at the universities of Marburg, Erlangen, Millersville (PA), Oxford (Great Britain), Salamanca (Spain), and Urbino (Italy). He received his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in 1986. He has a broad range of research interests covering the history of German literature from about 800 to 1600. His publications include currently 130 books and more than 800 articles, beginning with a study on Oswald von Wolkenstein and his Italian sources (1987), a post-structuralist interpretation of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Titurel* (1990), a comparative analysis of 15th-century autobiographical European poetry (1991), a monograph on the German *Volksbuch* (1995), a critical investigation of late-medieval songbooks (2001), and an extensive investigation of the communicative community as portrayed in Middle High German literature (*Verzweiflung und Hoffnung*, 2002). Since then, he has published scores of new monographs and edited volumes, most recently on **Error! Main Document Only.** *The Forest in Medieval German Literature* (2015), **Error! Main Document Only.** *Reading Medieval European Women Writers* (2016), **Error! Main Document Only.** *Water in Medieval Literature* (2018), **Error! Main Document Only.** *Toleration and Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern European Literature* (2018), *The Relevance of The Humanities in the Twenty-First Century* (2020), **Error! Main Document Only.** *Prostitution in Medieval and Early Modern Literature* (2021), **Error! Main Document Only.** *Charlemagne in Medieval German and Dutch Literature* (2021), **Error! Main Document Only.** *Tracing the Trails in the Medieval World* (2021), **Error! Main Document Only.** *Wisdom from the European Middle Ages* (2022), **Error! Main Document Only.** *The Secret in Medieval Literature* (2022), **Error! Main Document Only.** *Globalism in the Middle Ages and*



*the Early Modern Age* (ed., 2023), and **Error! Main Document Only.***Der Niederrheinische Orientbericht, c. 1350* (trans., 2024). A new book on court criticism and of evil kings in medieval literature appeared in 2024. **Error! Main Document Only.** Although a philologist/medievalist, he is also fascinated by modern and medieval literary theory and applies comparative and gender-oriented interpretations. As a result of his passion for teaching, he has won a number of prestigious teaching awards. He has given well over 1050 scholarly presentations all over the world and ca. 400 lectures to libraries, cultural organizations, High Schools, University classes, and social groups both all over Arizona and across the nation. In 2017, he received the rank of Grand Knight Commander of the Most Noble Order of the Three Lions. For further information, see <https://aclassen.faculty.arizona.edu/>.

**Email Id:** [aclassen@arizona.edu](mailto:aclassen@arizona.edu)

