

THE KNIGHT

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

There was a Knight, a most distinguished man,
 Who from the day on which he first began
 To ride abroad¹ had followed chivalry,
 Truth, honour, generousness and courtesy,
 He had done nobly in his sovereign's war 5
 And ridden into battle, no man more,
 As well in Christian as in heathen² places,
 And ever honoured for his noble graces.
 When we took Alexandria ³, he was there.
 He often sat at table in the chair 10
 Of honour, above all nations, when in Prussia.
 In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,
 No Christian man so often, of his rank ⁴.
 When, in Granada, Algeciras ⁵ sank
 Under assault, he had been there, and in 15
 North Africa, raiding Benamarin ⁶,
 In Anatolia he had been as well
 And fought when Ayas⁷ and Attalia⁸ fell,
 For all along the Mediterranean coast
 He had embarked with many a noble host⁹. 20
 In fifteen mortal battles he had been
 And jousted¹⁰ for our faith at Tramissene¹¹
 Thrice in the lists¹², and always killed his man.
 This same distinguished knight had led the van¹³
 Once with the Bey of Balat¹⁴, doing work 25
 For him against another heathen Turk;
 He was of sovereign value in all eyes.
 And though so much distinguished, he was wise
 And in his bearing¹⁵ modest as a maid.
 He never yet a boorish¹⁶ thing had said 30
 In all his life to any, come what might;
 He was a true a perfect gentle-knight.
 Speaking of his equipment, he possessed
 Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.
 He wore a fustian¹⁷ tunic stained¹⁸ and dark 35
 With smudges¹⁹ where his armour had left mark;
 Just home from service, he had joined our ranks
 To do his pilgrimage and render thanks.

1 abroad. *Qui*: fuori dal suo paese, in giro.

2 heathen. Pagani.

3 Alexandria. Alessandria d'Egitto, occupata dai Saraceni e liberata nel 1365 da un esercito cristiano comandato dal re di Cipro, Pietro di Lusignano.

4 rank. Rango.

5 Algeciras. Città della Spagna sul golfo dominato dalla rocca di Gibilterra, fu difesa nel 1344 contro l'esercito moresco del re di Granada.

6 Benamarin. Regno del Nord Africa.

7 Ayas. Città dell'Armenia conquistata dai cristiani nel 1367.

8 Attalia. In Turchia, conquistata dai cristiani nel 1361.

9 host. Schiera, esercito.

10 jousted. Aveva partecipato ad un torneo, combattendo con la lancia a cavallo.

11 Tramissene. Tlemcen in Algeria, un tempo roccaforte berbera.

12 lists. Arene per competizioni cavalleresche.

13 had led the van. Aveva combattuto in prima fila.

14 Bey of Balat. Sultano turco, una volta alleato dei cristiani.

15 bearing. Portamento.

16 boorish. Volgare.

17 fustian. Di fustagno.

18 stained. Macchiata.

19 smudges. Sbavature, macchie.