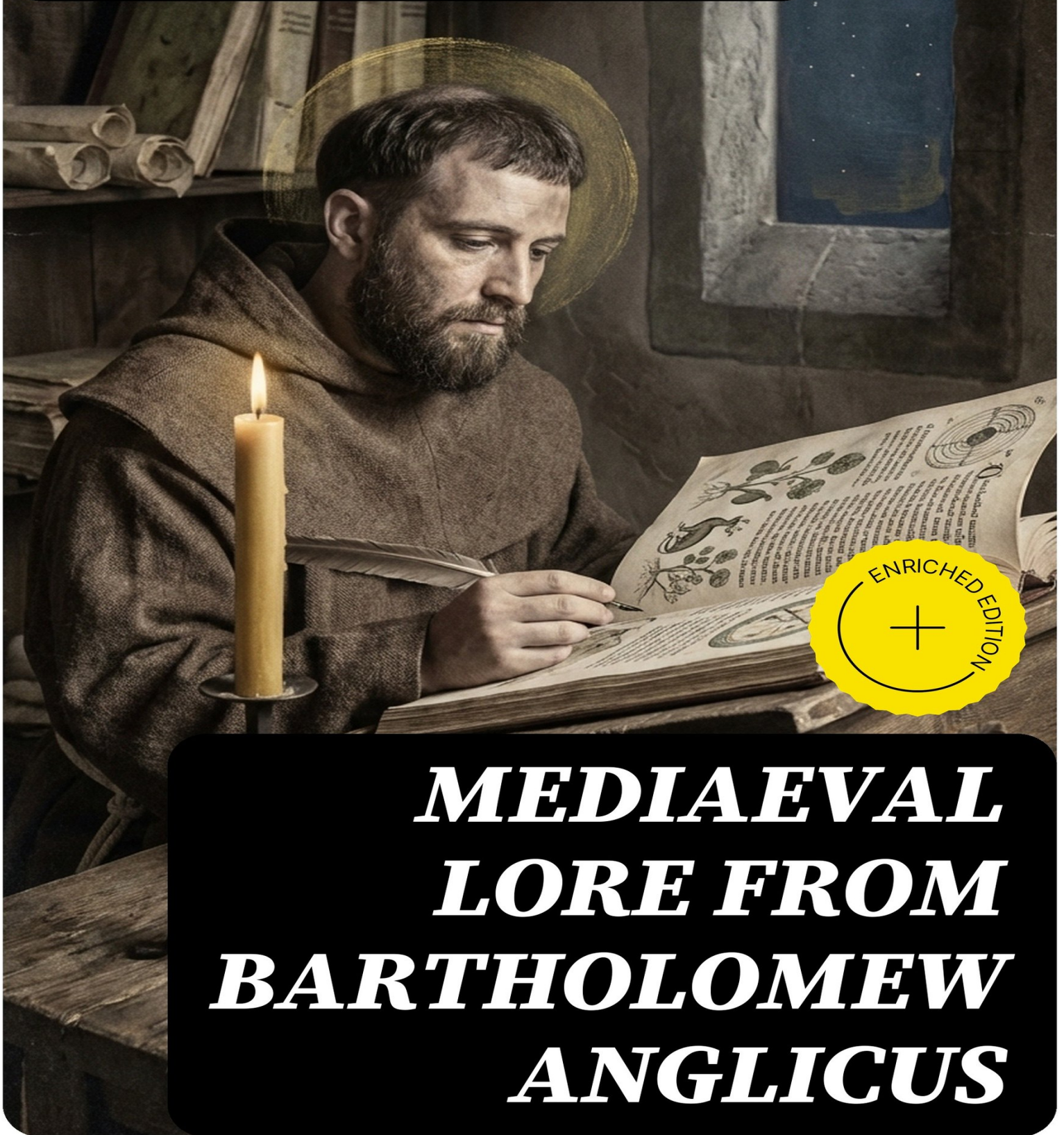


**ANGLICUS ACTIVE
13TH CENTURY
BARTHOLOMAEUS**



**MEDIAEVAL
LORE FROM
BARTHOLOMEW
ANGLICUS**

Anglicus active 13th century Bartholomaeus

Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Gavin Avery

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Introduction

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Balancing reverent faith with restless curiosity, Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus shows how a thirteenth-century scholar seeks to gather the scattered marvels of creation—heaven and earth, body and soul, animal and stone—into an ordered map of meaning where observation, inherited learning, and moral reflection converge to make the world intelligible; at once an inventory of things and a meditation on their purposes, it stages the meeting of authority and experience, assembling reports, analogies, and etymologies so that phenomena may be classified, compared, and understood within a cosmos whose hierarchy frames daily life and whose richness invites inexhaustible attention.

Bartholomaeus Anglicus (active 13th century), a Franciscan scholar, compiled in Latin an encyclopedic treatise commonly known as *De proprietatibus rerum*, a compendium of knowledge about the created world as understood in medieval Europe. Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus offers an English gateway to that tradition, drawing on the thirteenth-century text to present its descriptions of nature, humanity, and the heavens. Emerging from the scholastic milieu of lecture hall and cloister, this work belongs to the genre of medieval encyclopedia, a disciplined survey that orders doctrine, natural philosophy, and practical lore for teaching and

reference, rather than narrating events or dramatizing characters.

Instead of a linear story, readers encounter topics arranged by subject, moving from high matters of the cosmos to particulars of geography, weather, living creatures, and the constitution of the human person. Each section explains properties and causes as understood by authorities available to a thirteenth-century compiler, sometimes noting divergent opinions, and frequently connecting physical description to moral or symbolic significance. The reading experience is cumulative and rhythmic: definitions build into taxonomies; examples illustrate general rules; etymologies hint at meaning; and learned citations anchor claims, creating a mosaic in which careful attention reveals patterns of classification, hierarchy, and analogy across disparate domains.

The voice is didactic and measured, confident in the usefulness of ordered knowledge yet hospitable to wonder. The style is concise in statement and expansive in compilation, juxtaposing inherited explanations with brief observations and presenting them in a manner designed for memory and instruction. While reverent and attentive to theological coherence, the tone is more encyclopedic than devotional, aiming to describe what things are, how they are said to act, and how they may be compared. Readers will notice a preference for balance and distinction, an instinct to define through oppositions and likenesses, and a willingness to include reports that modern science would challenge.

Running through the work is the theme of order—of the universe arranged in degrees, of nature organized by kinds, and of knowledge structured so that particulars serve as steps to universal understanding. Hierarchy links the celestial with the terrestrial, while analogy binds body to soul and human microcosm to macrocosm. Authority matters, not as a constraint but as a lineage through which learning is tested and transmitted. The text also reveals the porous boundary between observation and tradition, where marvels, moral meanings, and practical facts coexist. In this synthesis, intellect becomes a form of stewardship, naming and classifying as acknowledgment of created coherence.

For contemporary readers, the book remains vital as a map of how knowledge once took shape, illuminating the preconditions of later science, medicine, and geography and clarifying references that echo throughout medieval and early modern literature. It sharpens our sense of how information is organized, how authority is weighed, and how cultural frameworks shape what counts as fact. Environmental and ethical questions surface in its attention to interdependence and purpose, inviting comparisons with current debates about classification, expertise, and the value of wonder. Engaging this compendium encourages historical humility while offering a vocabulary for thinking across disciplines in our own time.

Approached slowly, section by section, *Mediaeval Lore* from Bartholomew Anglicus rewards readers with a lucid picture of a world knit together by correspondences, duties, and causes, yet open to surprise. Its encyclopedic ambition invites dipping and dwelling, whether to contextualize a

stray medieval image or to trace a concept across fields. More than a record of what was believed, it is a record of how believing, reasoning, and compiling belonged together, making understanding a communal craft. That craft still matters: to read this work is to rediscover the pleasures of ordering, the discipline of attention, and the humane reach of curiosity.

Synopsis

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Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus presents a concise distillation of the thirteenth-century encyclopedia *De proprietatibus rerum* by Bartholomaeus Anglicus. The compilation gathers what medieval readers considered trustworthy knowledge, coordinating Scripture and the Church Fathers with classical authorities such as Aristotle, Pliny, and Isidore of Seville. Organized as a comprehensive survey of creation, it moves from the highest orders of being toward the observable world, offering an intellectual map designed for study and practical reference. Its guiding premise is that the diversity of things can be understood within a coherent order, making nature, society, and learning mutually illuminating and fit for moral contemplation.

The work first situates the cosmos within a providential framework, describing the heavens as orderly and intelligible. It summarizes the structure and motions of the celestial spheres and considers the sun, moon, and visible planets as measures of time and seasons. Celestial phenomena, including eclipses and conjunctions, are treated as subjects for careful observation with acknowledged influence on terrestrial rhythms. Measurements of days and years, distinctions of months and feasts, and the patterned alternation of seasons establish a temporal architecture in which human activity, agriculture, and devotion find their proper timing,

reinforcing the conviction that time itself reflects a larger harmony.

Turning to the sublunary realm, Bartholomaeus arranges natural philosophy around the traditional four elements and their qualities of hot, cold, dry, and moist. On this basis, the text explains the generation of weather: the rising and cooling of vapors, the circulation of winds, and the formation of rain, snow, hail, and dew. Thunder, lightning, and sudden tempests are discussed as products of natural causes, though often presented with moral cautions about excess and disorder. Earthly disruptions such as earthquakes and unusual atmospheric appearances are recorded with deference to received authorities, illustrating a method that seeks rational accounts while acknowledging areas of uncertainty.

The survey next encompasses the world's regions, seas, and notable places, adopting the inherited geographic division of zones and climates. Rivers, mountains, and islands are described for their characteristic properties and the resources they afford. Reports of distant lands are included as mediated knowledge, balancing marvel and prudence by citing reputable sources without insisting on firsthand proof. From this platform, the text catalogs minerals and metals, noting their extraction, craft uses, and attributed virtues. Gemstones are described for color and hardness as well as reputed effects, reflecting an interest in how matter's qualities might communicate power, benefit, or danger to human users.

A substantial portion addresses plants and animals, combining practical description with moralized readings

common to medieval learning. Herbs, grains, and trees are identified by form, habitat, and usefulness, especially in diet and medicine. Creatures domestic and wild are presented through characteristic behaviors, habitats, and reputed properties, sometimes accompanied by emblematic lessons that frame nature as a book of signs. The compilation preserves both routine observations and inherited lore, allowing familiar animals and rarities alike to illustrate broader truths. This dual approach—utilitarian and emblematic—shows how medieval readers integrated empirical notes with traditional interpretation without sharply separating the two.

The human being is treated as a microcosm, composed of body and soul yet situated within the same elemental order. Anatomical functions, the senses, and the faculties of memory and reason are outlined alongside the ages of life. Health is explained through humoral balance, and the regimen of diet, sleep, exercise, and environment is recommended as the first medicine. Diseases and their symptoms are listed with cautions and remedies drawn from standard medical authorities, including the virtues of simples and compounds. Throughout, moral counsel accompanies practical advice, presenting care of the body and formation of character as interdependent pursuits.

As a whole, *Mediaeval Lore* from Bartholomew Anglicus preserves a disciplined way of organizing knowledge that shaped learning for centuries. It transmits classical and patristic inheritance into a usable compendium, later influential in vernacular translations and in the study and preaching of the later Middle Ages. Its enduring value lies

less in any single claim than in its method: an orderly synthesis of observation, authority, and moral purpose. For contemporary readers, it offers a clear window onto medieval intellectual habits, showing how an encyclopedic vision sought unity across theology, natural philosophy, and daily practice without collapsing their distinctions.

Historical Context

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Bartholomaeus Anglicus (Bartholomew the Englishman) was a Franciscan scholar active in the mid-thirteenth century, working within the studia of his order and the university milieu of Paris. Around the 1240s he composed *De proprietatibus rerum*, an encyclopedic compendium gathering knowledge for students and preachers. The setting was Latin Christendom's network of schools, monasteries, and mendicant houses, under papal oversight and secular rulers from England to the Holy Roman Empire. Bartholomew is recorded as a lector in the Franciscan convent at Magdeburg, reflecting the order's teaching mission. His work situates natural, moral, and theological topics within a pedagogical framework shaped by institutional learning.

De proprietatibus rerum emerged amid the consolidation of scholastic method in Europe's universities. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century translation movement had brought Aristotle and Arabic science (notably Avicenna and Averroes) into Latin, alongside older authorities such as Isidore and Pliny. In Paris the reading of Aristotle's natural books was restricted in 1210–1215, formally admitted to the Arts curriculum in 1255, and subjected to the Condemnation of 1277, which proscribed certain propositions. Bartholomew's encyclopedia reflects this climate: it orders knowledge by causes and categories, cites approved

authorities, and frames natural philosophy within Christian doctrine to ensure conformity with ecclesiastical oversight.

The Franciscan Order, founded in the early thirteenth century, rapidly established studia and lectorships to train friars for preaching and pastoral care. Figures such as Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure shaped its intellectual profile at Paris. Bartholomew's compendium served those needs: it distilled theology, natural history, medicine, geography, and cosmology into accessible summaries, useful for sermon exempla and classroom exposition. He declares a practical aim—to assist readers who lack many books—matching mendicant ideals of mobility and utility. The work thus bridges university disputation and pastoral instruction, turning scholarly authorities into organized, portable knowledge for clergy and educated laity.

Like earlier compilers, Bartholomew assembled learning from Scripture, the Church Fathers, and classical and late antique authors, including Augustine, Jerome, Isidore of Seville, Pliny the Elder, Solinus, and Cassiodorus, alongside Aristotle, Ptolemy, and medical writers such as Galen and Avicenna. *De proprietatibus rerum* is arranged in nineteen books, moving from God, angels, and the soul to the human body, virtues and vices, the elements, times and seasons, geography, animals, plants, stones, and medicines. Entries often combine etymology, reported properties, and moral interpretation. This format typifies thirteenth-century encyclopedism, where natural facts and spiritual meanings were presented as harmonizable dimensions of creation.

De proprietatibus rerum circulated widely. It survives in hundreds of medieval manuscripts across Europe, attesting

to sustained use in monastic, cathedral, university, and courtly libraries. While Vincent of Beauvais's vast *Speculum maius* represented the most ambitious encyclopedic project of the age, Bartholomew's treatise was more compact and practical, suiting instruction and reference. Catalogues and surviving copies show it in England, France, the Low Countries, and German lands. Its clear organization and frequent moral applications made it a standard aid for teachers, preachers, and educated readers who sought a reliable digest of natural knowledge compatible with orthodox Christian teaching.

In the later Middle Ages the work entered major vernaculars. In 1372 Jean Corbechon, a Franciscan at Paris, translated it into French for King Charles V, enriching the royal library at the Louvre and aligning with the crown's program to promote learned works in French. In England John Trevisa rendered it into Middle English in 1398 for Thomas, Lord Berkeley, the West Country magnate he served. Trevisa's prefaces elsewhere defend translating Latin learning for lay readers, a contemporary debate. These versions broadened the encyclopedia's reach beyond clerics and scholars, shaping household and courtly reading in France and England.

With printing, *De proprietatibus rerum* became one of the standard incunabular encyclopedias. Latin editions appeared in German and Swiss centers from the 1470s, including Cologne and Basel, and in other European cities. The French translation was printed in Paris, and an English version based on Trevisa entered print in London; by 1495 Wynkyn de Worde had issued an edition. Print multiplied

copies and stabilized the text, moving it from scriptoria to commercial presses and into broader professional and urban readerships. Well into the sixteenth century it served physicians, teachers, and preachers before newer humanist compendia began to supersede it.

Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus, edited by Robert Steele in 1905, presents portions of *De proprietatibus rerum* in accessible English, often drawing on John Trevisa's translation. Its appearance reflects continued interest in medieval encyclopedism as a witness to intellectual life before modern science. The selections display a hierarchical, sacramentally interpreted cosmos, where natural history, medicine, and cosmology are integrated with theology and moral exempla. As such, the work mirrors the thirteenth century's confidence in the orderliness of creation and the authority of approved sources, while revealing the period's practical, pedagogical aims.

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PREFACE

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It is not long since the Middle Ages, of the literature of which this book gives us such curious examples, were supposed to be an unaccountable phenomenon accidentally thrust in betwixt the two periods of civilisation, the classical and the modern, and forming a period without growth or meaning—a period which began about the time of the decay of the Roman Empire, and ended suddenly, and more or less unaccountably, at the time of the Reformation. The society of this period was supposed to be lawless and chaotic[1q]; its ethics a mere conscious hypocrisy; its art gloomy and barbarous fanaticism only; its literature the formless jargon of savages; and as to its science, that side of human intelligence was supposed to be an invention of the time when the Middle Ages had been dead two hundred years.

The light which the researches of modern historians, archaeologists, bibliographers, and others, have let in on our view of the Middle Ages has dispersed the cloud of ignorance on this subject which was one of the natural defects of the qualities of the learned men and keen critics of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries. The Middle-class or Whig theory of life is failing us in all branches of human intelligence. Ethics, Politics, Art, and Literature are more than beginning to be regarded from a

wider point of view than that from which our fathers and grandfathers could see them.

For many years there has been a growing reaction against the dull "grey" narrowness of the eighteenth century, which looked on Europe during the last thousand years as but a riotous, hopeless, and stupid prison. It is true that it was on the side of Art alone that this enlightenment began, and that even on that side it progressed slowly enough at first—*e.g.* Sir Walter Scott feels himself obliged, as in the *Antiquary*, to apologize to pedantry for his instinctive love of Gothic architecture. And no less true is it that follies enough were mingled with the really useful and healthful birth of romanticism in Art and Literature. But at last the study of facts by men who were neither artistic nor sentimental came to the help of that first glimmer of instinct, and gradually something like a true insight into the life of the Middle Ages was gained; and we see that the world of Europe was no more running round in a circle then than now, but was developing, sometimes with stupendous speed, into something as different from itself as the age which succeeds this will be different from that wherein we live. The men of those times are no longer puzzles to us; we can understand their aspirations, and sympathise with their lives, while at the same time we have no wish (not to say hope) to put back the clock, and start from the position which they held. For, indeed, it is characteristic of the times in which we live, that whereas in the beginning of the romantic reaction, its supporters were for the most part mere *laudatores temporis acti*, at the present time those who take pleasure in studying the life of the Middle Ages are