

Book Reviews

Nissille Christel, «Grammaire floue» et enseignement du français en Angleterre au XV^e siècle: les leçons du manuscrit Oxford Magdalen 188 (Romanica Helvetica, 133.) Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2014, x + 492 pp. + CD-ROM. 978 3 7720 8508 6 (paperback)
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Magdalen College 188, on which this fine study is based, is not entirely unknown. It is a didactic manuscript for teaching, housed in Oxford, containing a version of the *Orthographia Gallica*, a Latin-French-English *nominale* in the Donatus tradition, as well as a trilingual version (incomplete) of Laurent d'Orléans's *Somme le Roi*. Andres Kristol has published a number of studies of the manuscript, highlighting its importance as a witness to the relationship between the three (main) languages of medieval England, and as evidence of at least one form of pedagogy by which French was taught there. Nissille's substantial and important book adds to these an edition of the *Somme le Roi* text, with abundant commentary, preceded by the best currently available introduction regarding the teaching of Latin and French in late medieval England (15–95). This new material is further supported by an extensive bibliography of manuscripts and texts to do with all aspects of the language-teaching tradition in medieval England (annex 1, 275–297) and should henceforth be considered the starting point for any further work on the subject.

The Magdalen manuscript receives a detailed description (96–130) including a number of high-quality reproductions of the manuscript, followed by three chapters dealing with the translator's methods and didactic system (134–160), his 'linguistic profile' (161–220), and then a series of case studies on his approach to demonstratives, articles and personal pronouns (221–256). These are of course systematically different in English and French and thus provide an insight into how the translator worked. The text itself is relegated to annex 3 (300–491) and is also on a CD-ROM accompanying the volume, together with the bibliography of texts and manuscripts (annex 1), enabling searching for forms in any of the three languages. Regrettably, perhaps, there is no glossary.

The text is well edited, and preceded by a brief introduction. Its wider significance should not be underestimated. Whilst much has been written about multilingualism in medieval England, there are relatively few complete trilingual texts in existence. Here we have a case of a text which starts in French, translated into Latin and English

by an Anglophone author. This is an uncommon direction for translation to occur in (another trilingual text, Lichfield 16, QuatBeatT, starts in Latin; the Oxford and Cambridge Psalters likewise). The mechanisms deployed by the translator – and some of his errors – in handling both French and English provide valuable evidence of how at least one writer/translator understood not only his task, but the words concerned. That he must have been an English speaker is shown for example by a mistranslation of *apertement lierres* ('openly a thief', c.s. of *larron*) as *openlyer* in English, 'flagrant liar' (211) – an early example of a *faux ami*.

In general terms, the Latin text is akin to an interlinear gloss – although it is written as continuous and coherent text –, the English being more of a 'true' translation. The suggestion (160) is that the whole would have been presented orally to students, with the Latin text the starting point for more theoretical elaboration (and perhaps in effect 'teacher's notes'), and the English translation the means for direct comparison with the French the students were meant to be acquiring. This is where the idea of 'grammaire floue' comes in: the aim of the translation (and perhaps of the teaching) is to convey meaning, partly achieved by apparently cognate words in different languages (whence *faux amis*) rather than exact grammatical equivalence. A complicating factor in the relationship between the various languages of the text is that English is both the target language of the translation, and the translator's L1, and French, in the fifteenth century, is both a dead (or dying) language and the apparent goal of the teacher's work. The didactic method implicit in Magdalen 188 does seem to run counter to the argument that even later Anglo-Norman was a language acquired in a 'naturalistic' way by speakers (Ingham 2012). Here we have a text deploying a pedagogy intended for second (or foreign?) language acquisition, revealing an underlying methodology which survives in 'grammar translation' to this day. The publication of the textual evidence for this process is an important piece in the puzzle of determining what was going on in terms of the continuation of competence in French well after the period when it will have ceased to be the mother tongue of almost anyone in England. This volume thus goes far beyond the immediate study of one manuscript, and constitutes a perspicacious, thoughtful and authoritative contribution to a much wider and still unresolved discussion.

REFERENCE

Ingham, R.P. (2012). *The Transmission of Anglo-Norman: Language history and language transmission*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

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