The Latin-French dictionarius of Firmin Le Ver (1420–1440)

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The manuscript

Manuscript nouv. acq. française 1120 of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, contains one of the most remarkable Latin-French lexicons of the Middle Ages. This *dictionarius* is the work of a single compiler, Firmin Le Ver, prior of the Cartusian house of St. Honoré in Thuisson, near Abbeville in the Somme region. Between the years 1420 and 1440 Le Ver put together from named and un-named sources the largest Latin-French lexicon of the Middle Ages, 466 folios in which some 45,000 words are glossed and explained in Latin and French. If there is an evident and acknowledged debt to the *Catholicon* of John Balbus of Genoa, as well as to the *Elementarium* of Papias, the *Magnae Derivationes* of Hugutio of Pisa and the *Expositiones vocabulorum Biblie* of William Brito, which had themselves served as sources for Balbus, and a reference to 'pluribus aliis libris grammaticalibus', some of which may be identifiable, the compilation of the Le Ver text appears to be an important methodological advance over its Latin and bilingual predecessors.[1] In addition, the status accorded the French language in the *dictionarius* Le Ver (DLV) makes it an important work in the history of French lexicography.

Like many lexicons of the Middle Ages, the Le Ver *dictionarius* is accompa-nied in the manuscript by grammatical texts, in this case copies of Donatus' *Ars minor* in both Latin and French, the conjugations of some main verb types, noun and pronoun declensions, a fragment of a syntactic treatise, "Par quantes manieres commenchon sen latin a faire", and a list of morphological exceptions. This juxtaposition of glossary and grammar, as I have noted in a recent paper on the teaching of French in Latin, has a long medieval tradition, itself worthy of further attention.

The Cartusian house of St Honoré at Thuisson was founded in 1300 and consecrated in 1307; according to the Abbé F.A. Lefebvre, who in 1885 wrote a history of the institution, it established a sizeable library soon after its inception

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[1]   Joannes Balbus, *Catholicon,* printed edition, Mainz, 1460, facsimile reprint Westmead, England, Greff International Publishers, 1971; V. de Angelis, ed. *Papiae Elenentarium,* Milan, 1977, 3 vol. (A-Azoni); *Magnae Derivationes of Uguccione da Pisa: a reproduc-tion of the MS Laud 626 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford,* Modern Language Association of America: Collection of photographic facsimiles, no. 30, 1925; Lloyd W. Daly and Bernadine W. Daly (1975). edd. *Summa Britonis sive Guillelmi Britonis Expositiones vo-cabulorum Biblie,* Padua.

and during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries its books and learned inhabitants attracted many visitors. In 1386 the young Firmin Le Ver, son of a well-to-do Abbeville family, entered the monastery where he was to spend most of the rest of his life. Twenty-two years later, in 1418, he became prior and showed in this post considerable administrative talent, though he ran foul of his own superiors when he tried to curb the number of visitors who, he believed, distracted his monks from their true vocation. For a time he left the monastery for another house, resigning his post as prior. When he returned in 1423 he had begun to devote himself to a task for which we now particularly remember him, the redaction of a Latin-French *dictionarius*. Apparently he worked alone at this compilation and we have every reason to believe the manuscript is an autograph. In 1437 he was again persuaded to take over the priorship, this time for three years. In 1440 he completed his immense lexicographical task, resigned his post and lived but a further four years, dying in 1444.

As far as we can tell the *dictionarius* remained in the St Honoré library until the Revolution, doubtless kept more as a precious object than as a working tool, for its present state would suggest that it was treated with more than due respect, as its clean pages and clear script are witness to careful handling. In 1790 the St Honoré monastery fell under the revolutionary decree requiring municipalities to take over monastic properties, and a certain citizen Duflos was charged with the task of disposing of the monastery's possessions. There is no word of the *dictionarius* until 1804 when a local aristocrat, the Marquis Le Ver — we have no link to the compiler — acquired the book. The work remained in his family's hands until 1866 when it was purchased by the Paris printer, scholar and bibliophile, Ambroise Firmin-Didot. Firmin-Didot devoted six pages of his *Observations sur l'Orthographe ou ortografie française* to outlining the importance of Le Ver's work for the history of the French and Latin languages. His remarks attracted the attention of Léopold Delisle, conservateur en chef of the Bibliothèque Nationale, who in 1878 acquired the manuscript from Firmin-Didot's estate for the sum of 9000 francs.[2]

Despite the recognition of its value by Firmin-Didot and Delisle, the manuscript has received little attention since. No doubt its size deterred many from untertaking an edition or a complete study. The great Romance scholar, Mario Roques, however, planned to include it in his *Recueil général des Lexiques français du moyen âge,* but only two volumes of that series were produced. Roques did complete a partial transcription of the letters *A* to *L* and part of *M,* giving the headword, subheadword and French gloss only, omitting most of the Latin material; Professor Jacques Monfrin, Directeur de l'Ecole Nationale des Chartes, has generously made a copy of this transcription available to me through an agreement signed in September of 1986.

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[2] Delisle (1880) describes the manuscript in his *Mélanges de paléographie et de bibliographie,* Paris, Champion, pp. 161–162.

The sources

The principal Latin source of the Le Ver *dictionarius* is John Balbus of Genoa's *Catholicon,* or more properly the lexicon which was part of that large grammatical work and which became synonymous with the title. Completed around 1285, the *Catholicon* was widely copied throughout Europe in subsequent centuries down to the first decades of printing when it was a popular object of reproduction.[3] It would be difficult to assess in percentage terms the degree to which the Abbé Le Ver used the *Catholicon,* as the latter was both a 'frame reference' in that the list of entries and the entry format provided, with important differences, the working model and chief source for compilation, and as well a 'detailed reference' in that thousands of entries lift their Latin equivalents and Latin definitions straight from the *Catholicon.* Now some of these are also found in Hugutio's *Derivationes,* itself a source of the *Catholicon,* but Le Ver was aware of this, acknowledges it on an apparent par with Balbus' work and ahead of Papias and Brito; Papias and Hugutio are cited several times. The very size of the Le Ver and the absence of so many entries and sub-entries from Hugutio make it clear that the *Catholicon* was Le Ver's chief source, as we can see from the following sample entries of the noun *salus:*

BN n.a.fr. 1120 (f. 379ra)

Salus salutis *Salut Sancteit* id est integritas corporis Sanitas	f.
Sospitas Incolumnitas Et dicitur a Sal salis	
Salutaris et hoc .tare *de Salut ou de Sancteit* id est Ad salutem	o.
pertinens Vel Prestans salutem id est Salubris	
Salutariter Adverbium Id est Salubriter	
Salutarius .a .um *cose de salut* Salubris	
Salutifer .fera .ferum Qui fert Salutem verbis et opere *Portans*	
Salut ou Sancteit	
Salutiger .gera .gerum idem Salutem gerens	
Salutigerulus .la .lum diminutivum Idem	
Saluto .tas .tatum *Saluer* id est Salutem optare vel salutem	act.
nunciare	
Salutatus .tata .tatum *Salués*	
Salutatio .tionis *Salutation* Salutis optio	
Salutatus .tatus .tui Idem *Salutation*	m.
Salutamen .taminis Idem *ou Salut*	n.
Salutatorium .torii locus salutationis	
Salutatorius .a .um *Salutaires*	
Salutatus .a .um Componitur Insalutatus .a .um	
Saluto .tas Componitur Resaluto .tas Omnia sunt activa	

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3 There are several incunabula following the printing of the Mainz edition in 1460: Augsburg, G. Zainer, 1469; Strassburg, Adolf Rush, c. 1470; Strassburg, Georg Hussner, pre 1483; Nuremburg, Anton Koberger, 1483; Venice, Hermannus Liechtenstein, 1483; Nuremburg, Anton Koburger 1486; Venice, Hermannus Liechtenstein, 1487 and 1490; Venice, Bonetus Locatellus for Octavianus Scotus, 1485; Venice, Johannes (Hamman) Herzog for Petrus Liechtenstein, 1497/8.

Catholicon (Mainz, 1460)

Salus a sale dicitur hec salus .lutis quia condimentum est sicut enim sal est condimentum omnium ciborum sic salus est omnium membrorum et est salus integritas corporis salubritas saluti conveniens causa per quam sanitas servatur vel restauratur. A salus derivatur saluto .tas, sic enim solemus scribere et salutare. martino petrus salutem, et dicitur salutare quasi salutem optare, unde salutacio quasi salutis optacio. Illum enim salutamus cuius salutem desideramus, et salutatorius .ria .rium, et hoc salutatorium .rii, et salutatorius .ria .rium locus salutacionis. Et est activum saluto cum omnibus compositis. Salus componitur salutifer .ra .rum salutiger .gra .grum salutigerulus .la .lum qui fert vel gerit salutem verbis vel opere et corripit primam salus. Unde Prosper.

. . .

Salutacio a saluto .tas dicitur . . .
Salutigerulus . . . vide in salus
Saluto salutas in salus exponitur

Le Ver is a creative adaptor and, I believe, a lexicographical innovator. In the *explicit* he explains with three verbs the essence of his approach, *congregavi* 'I have gathered together', *compilavi* 'I have compiled', *et conscripsi* 'I have put together in writing' all the words and meanings found in the sources he names and alludes to. He trims much of the *Catholicon's* explanatory and exemplary material, some of which was grammatical in nature, retaining synonyms and near equivalents along with essential definitions; occasional examples are included. Most importantly, of course, his additions are in French, and despite the overwhelming Latin content the DLV has abundant French material, perhaps as much as a fifth, though it is not the proportion of French to Latin that is important as much as the place of French in the structure of each entry. Le Ver is not a mere rearranger of the *Catholicon*; the *Catholicon* is his base for some skilful adaptation and any source, it seems, was grist to his mill.

There is a reference in both *incipit* and *explicit* of the text to 'aliis libris grammaticalibus'. We can assume that these included earlier bilingual derivatives of the *Catholicon* and perhaps others. From the beginning of the fourteenth century there appeared Latin-French glossaries based on the *Catholicon* that Mario Roques labelled the *Aalma* after the first word that appears in most copies. On the whole these glossaries are very simple: a Latin head-word is glossed by a French equivalent, occasionally a paraphrase. This is the case for MS BN lat. 13032 which Roques published in vol. 2 of his *Recueil général des lexiques français du moyen âge* and for the other copies he lists. There exist, however, fuller derivatives of the bilingual *Catholicon* and Le Ver may have made use of these for his own text. One possible intermediary is the form found in MS Montpellier H.110, though for the moment I would go no further than saying 'form' here because the actual detail of the glosses appears to be separate from the DLV. Nonetheless, the Montpellier version is the closest in kind to the DLV of the versions I have seen. Jacques Monfrin and Bernard Quemada are planning an edition of the Montpellier manuscript.

An examination of sources for any scholarly work can risk the underestimation of the originality of the work itself, as for many medieval glossaries copyists were simply that, not compilers or creators. In the case of Firmin Le Ver, however, we have a scholar of considerable talent and reflection who controlled his source material while literally exploiting it and imposing his own orderly format on the whole. He was, in a word, a lexicographer.

The dictionary text

The whole is remarkable first in its size. The *dictionarius* covers 466 folios, two columns to a page, and treats over 45,000 Latin headwords and sub-headwords, providing a mix of Latin equivalents, Latin definitions, French equivalents and French definitions that adds up to a text containing close to half a million words including metalinguistic terms and abbreviations. The grammatical *métalangage* is, with very few exceptions, always Latin. I have noted that some prepositions are defined in French. But it is the size of the DLV that is important; there is simply no Latin-French lexicon of similar dimensions in medieval manuscript, though the unilingual *Catholicon* is itself a vast work. One must not exaggerate the proportion of French, as has been said, but the sheer volume makes this lexicon one of the most important for the study of Middle French. Firmin Didot remarks in his *Observations sur l'Orthographe française*: "Je n'insisterai pas sur l'intérêt que ce beau manuscrit . . . présente pour l'histoire de notre langue, dont il offre le tableau complet à une époque bien déterminée. . . Le soin apporté par l'auteur au classement des mots, soin que je n'ai pu constater dans aucun des glossaires manuscrits que j'ai vus; la justesse des synonymies et des définitions, en font une oeuvre à part, un corpus général de notre vieux langage en même temps que du latin. . ." (p. 102).

Firmin Didot notes that the Le Ver manuscript had not been available to Du Cange for his great lexicon of medieval Latin, nor to his reviser Carpentier, and no medieval Latin lexicographers since have, to my knowledge, used it for their work, probably because of its late date of compilation. Modern dictionaries of Old and Middle French appear to have ignored it too and it will therefore be important to extract the French from the text in an accessible form.

What seems to me most interesting in Le Ver's *dictionarius* is, as Firmin Didot notes, the *classement de mots,* the lexicographical methodology. As part of this one might add page layout that makes the DLV a genuinely useful reference tool. At its simplest, it is a new and improved *Catholicon* with French added; at its best a compilation that Jean Nicot would have appreciated a century and a half later as he was putting together his *Thresor de la langue françoyse.*

The underlying principles of organisation are alphabetical and etymological. Le Ver determined first of all a head-word, usually noun, verb or adjective,

which becomes the head of a group of derivatives and compounds set out in a macro-entry. Some of the derivatives and compounds will in some cases form heads of their own entries or appear with a cross-reference. All headwords are in fully alphabetised order and are marked in the manuscript by a large coloured initial — alternating blue and red for much of it, red only for some stretches. I have noted only very occasional slips in the ordering. Each headword is usually followed by a combination of an etymology (ET), Latin equivalents (LE), French equivalents (FE), a Latin definition (LD), sometimes a French definition (FD). Not all elements are necessarily present. Then follow derivative words, each of which is set against the column margin and identified by a capital in brown ink, the normal ink of the text. These derivatives are not in alphabetical order, but their presentation follows a pattern.

Take the example of *salus*:

Salus salutis Salut sancteit Id est integritas corporis Sanitas
      Sospitas Incolumnitas Et dicitur A Sal salis
      (Lemma/FE/LD/LE/ET)

Salutaris	ADJ 1	
Salutariter		ADV < ADJ 1
Salutarius	ADJ 2	
Salutifer	ADJ 3	
Salutiger	ADJ 4	
Salutigerulus		ADJ DIM < ADJ 4
Saluto	VERB	
Salutatus		PP ADJ < VERB
Salutatio		NOUN 2 < PP
Salutatus		NOUN 3 < PP
Salutamen	NOUN 4	
Salutatorium	NOUN 5	
Salutatorius		ADJ 5 < NOUN 5

Salutatus Componitur Insalutatus .a. .um   COMP
Saluto .tas Componitur Resaluto .tas Omnia sunt activa   COMP

The entry here embraces the word group of parts of speech etymologically and derivationally related to the headword in a sequence NOUN ADJ VERB DERIVED NOUN COMPOUNDS. These major parts of speech are however interspersed with immediate, or second order, derivatives, for example the adverb *salutariter* follows the adjective *salutaris,* the diminutive adjective *saluti-gerulus* after the adjective *salutiger.* Where the headword is a verb, the order of the principal subheadwords is NOUN ADJECTIVE. If the headword is an adjective, the order is NOUN VERB sometimes broken by another ADJ. So far it is only an impression, and one I have not yet verified through large samplings, that as Le Ver progressed through his work, the entries grew more comprehensive and structured. Certainly under the letter *A* there are words dealt with in separate entries that would probably have been combined, had they occurred later. For example *abactus* and *abigo* are separate and without cross-reference. A count of the number of headwords is much higher in the first fifty folios than

in the last fifty; under *B* the largest entry has eleven subheads, in *S somnus* for example has twenty. I expect statistical analyses to confirm these initial impressions.

The *Catholicon* has of course large main entries where derivatives are included, and compounds, but not all related words are given and the ordering is less logical than in Le Ver; each entry tends to be more of an etymological and derivational narrative essay. Hugutio, as the title of his work the *Magnae Derivationes* suggests, also presents what can be called essays.

Once one recognises Le Ver's ordering and organising principles, his placement of French within the macro-entry is easier to understand. The headword is nearly always glossed in French but not all subheads. However there are always sufficient equivalents to ensure that the reader, who would of course be francophone, could make the necessary deductions for those words where the French is not supplied, or there is an internal cross-reference. Take the example of *pastorice* in the entry under *pastor*:

Pastor a pasco .scis pavi pastum derivatur
Pastor .storis id est opilio mandrita custos ovium qui pascit oves
    id est *pasteur ou berquier*
Pastoralis et hoc .rale *de pasteur*   o.
Pastoraliter adverbium *ad maniere de pasteur*
Pastoralia et dicitur loca pastorum pascendis animalibus apta.
    Amos primo capitulo dicitur
Pastoratus .tus .tui *Offiche de pasteur*   m.
    id est officium vel dignitas pastoris vel prelatura
Pastorius .a .um id est pastoralis ad pastorem pertinens
Pastoricus .ca .cum idem est *de pasteur*
Pastorice adverbum id est pastoraliter
Pastoricia .ricie id est caula pastoris cubile eius gallice *logette a*
    berquier
Pastorculus .culi diminutivum parvus pastor *pastourel*
Pastorales .lium libus pluraliter *les pastourales que saint*   f.
    Grigoire fist un livre

The Latin equivalent given for *pastorice* is *pastoraliter; pastoraliter* five subheads above is glossed in French *ad maniere de pasteur.* Similarly one derives the French equivalent of *pastorius* by the reference to *pastoralis* which is glossed *de pasteur.* The *pastor* sample is a good one for appreciating the status of French in the DLV. French is not massively present, but it has an essential lexicographical rôle in the text.

Thus there is a great difference between the DLV and the simpler *Aalma* glossaries which usually provide a simple structure of Latin lemma and French gloss; the DLV is also more highly developed than such intermediary versions as that found in Montpellier H.110. Further, one should note that Le Ver does not promote the provision of French equivalents and definitions as part of his larger purpose, as is the case in one of the copies of the *Aalma,* BN lat. 14748 where aiding translation from Latin to French and French to Latin is a stated aim of

the lexicon. French in the DLV is a natural part of the definition and explanation of Latin vocabulary.

The project

I have not to this point begun to examine in detail the French content of the *dictionarius*. Firmin Didot notes some interesting examples of what appears and what does not appear, but his remarks are too cursory to constitute the basis of an opinion. The manuscript hand seems archaic for the fifteenth century and it is interesting to note that traces of the case system, notably retention of nominative singular -*s*, are present. Many of the spellings and forms are, of course, Picard. One of my objectives in studying this text will be to draw out the French element and to establish a synchronic *tranche* of early fifteenth century French from north-western France.

It is my intention to undertake an edition and study of the Le Ver *dictionarius* with the aid of an IBM PC/XT provided under a cooperative arrangement between IBM (Canada) and the University of Toronto and to generate a number of concordances and wordlists from the text entry. To some degree I shall follow the model of the Nicot *Thresor de la langue françoyse* done by my colleague, Russ Wooldridge, though I shall naturally develop text-specific differences.

Essentially this *dictionarius* is a large database that to date has been little exploited. There is no evidence that the DLV leads linearly to the great dictionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries, though Jacques Monfrin has some questions about its influence on the printed form of the *Catholicon*. There is no doubt that Le Ver possessed a methodological awareness that was well ahead of his time and I have so far only skimmed the surface of what he accomplished. Closer and more detailed analysis promises to confirm and increase our initial evaluation of the great merit of his work and I hope that the Abbé Firmin Le Ver will be recognised as a lexicographer of the first rank.

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