

HOGG, Richard 2002: *An Introduction to Old English*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Edinburgh Textbooks on the English Language. IX +163 pp.

This new book by R. Hogg is a monographic work on the earliest period of the history of the English language, and, as far as I am concerned, it should become one of the core readings on the period portrayed for various reasons.

As a well-organized and clearly written book, and presented as an “introduction” to the Old English period, it is the perfect reading material for students with absolutely no experience on the matter and for their teachers. In fact, the latter will find comprehensive teaching ideas to be used in class. In our times, our teaching practices being usually criticised, it is always good news to count on new books and material to enhance the knowledge of our students of English Philology. In this sense, *An Introduction to Old English* is a valuable help.

Hogg’s new work is shorter than other books written before on the same topic. However, its contents do stand out due to their quality the moment one opens the very first page. A coherent organization of those contents is always present throughout the book: ten chapters reflect almost everything related to the Old English period, not only descriptive studies on grammatical aspects, but also on more historical matters such as the Anglo-Saxon settlements in the British Isles. Unfortunately, the reader will not find any discussion on OE phonology, something done consciously by the author: “... my own experiences suggest that too great an emphasis on phonology at a very early stage actually inhibits an understanding of other linguistic matters and even of the reading of original texts” (Hogg, 2002: viii). There is no point in discussing Hogg’s opinion here, but I do think that some phonology would not have done any “harm” in this very good work on the OE period. In fact, I do believe that the lack of phonological descriptions constitutes the only shortcoming in the book, although it is true that further or complementary readings on that topic can easily overcome this fact. Hogg himself has very good monographies on this matter.

The internal organization of each chapter has been carefully planned beforehand. The basic chapter structure is twofold: accounts on linguistic

matters and practical exercises designed to be dealt with in class or to be done by students of Historical Linguistics on their own. In any case, I have found those exercises very useful in practising newly acquired knowledge on the topic.

Chapter 1 deals with the external history of the Old English period: the Anglo-Saxon settlements in what is England today, the peoples, and the written texts as sources to learn about the language of the period.

Detailed aspects on morphology such as the nature of nouns and adjectives in Old English, and the various declensions, are dealt with in chapters 2 and 3. Lots of examples are included in the text, always taking into account that this book is intended for a student audience. The verb types in Old English, strong and weak verbs, the origin of the present-day “modal verbs”, and important phenomena such as the “ablaut”, are also a significant part of the book (chapters 4 and 5).

Old English syntax (noun and verb phrases), word order, negation, relative and other types of clauses appear in chapters 6 and 7. At this point, it is worth mentioning the fact that not only does Professor Hogg provide a list of examples and explanations about those aspects of Old English grammar, but he also relates them to the present-day structures of the language.

Chapters 8 and 9 deal with vocabulary (affixation, compounding and loans) and with Old English variation, putting the stress on the latter to make us forget “that Old English was a somewhat unvarying mass” (Hogg, 2002: 115). On the contrary, regional or stylistic variation was present in the period as well as in any other language of the world at any time in history.

The last chapter of the book (chapter 10) is a kind of conclusion, linking the period already portrayed with the next period in the history of English, Middle English, and beyond. The book has been completed with the addition of two types of glossaries: an Old English – Present Day English glossary that the students of OE will find incredibly useful in their translation practices (to be found in some of the exercises proposed along the chapters); and a glossary on basic linguistic terminology. The didactic purpose of the

book is always present, and the presence of glossaries does simply emphasize this fact once more.

In what concerns the actual contents of the book, very little can I say about Professor Hogg's great knowledge on Historical Linguistics. And what is more important, I could well have written pages and pages on his impressive skills in passing his specialised knowledge to students with supposedly no command of the OE period. I have already praised the clarity and coherence of the book. But I would not like to forget mentioning the fact that I am truly thankful for his attempts to relate Old English structures to those of the present day and to those of its nearest relatives whenever possible. These are not only intentions in his introductory preface, but they become true in the majority of the chapters along the book. Old English is always described by him as a period of the language in accordance with later periods of English and in harmony with the rest of the older languages of the world.

An Introduction to Old English stands out as a didactic and comprehensive book, and very well written above all. From now on, Hogg's latest book should be taken into account when teaching and learning about the oldest period in the history of English.

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