

Words, Words, Words: Medieval and Early-Modern Dictionaries

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Rolf H. Bremmer Jr (Leiden University)

The Lure of the Glossary: Medieval Wordlists and Their Significance

Medieval glossaries may not seem to be the most exciting textual genre. In any case, they do not figure on the reading lists of my students. Yet, anyone who has experienced the lure of the dictionary – once you start looking for a word it is hard not to read on – will also understand that glossaries may have a special appeal. Who compiled them? Who were they written for? What happened to them during their transmission from one manuscript to another? And finally, how were they received by post-medieval scholars? In my paper I shall address these questions with the help of glossaries preserved in manuscripts in the Leiden University Library, while Leiden (trained) scholars such as Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609), Franciscus Junius (1591–1677) and Jan van Vliet (1620–1665) will serve as representative for early modern philologists who took an interest in medieval glossaries and, in turn, compiled their own.

Paul Hoftijzer (Leiden University)

Early-Modern Anglo-Dutch Dictionaries and their Makers

The early-modern period saw a significant increase in the relations between England and the Netherlands. Much of this was peaceful: the trade between the two nations expanded, as did the cultural and intellectual contacts. On the other hand the religious, economic and political conflicts of the period resulted in serious military confrontations and the mutual arrival of refugees and exiles. The increase of this traffic of humans, goods and ideas across the North Sea was accompanied by a growing interest in the English and Dutch languages. Consequently, in order to better understand each other, various Anglo-Dutch dictionaries were soon published. This paper will discuss these and look in particular at the authors of the books: who were they and how did they go about in compiling these dictionaries?

Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge University)

The Power of Words: Early Medieval Dictionaries and the Transmission of Knowledge

Words are the most fundamental form for the conveyance of knowledge and migration of ideas. From the end of the seventh century a remarkable quantity of dictionaries and thematic word lists from the early middle ages survives. These glossaries have received attention from philologists, but their creation as an historical phenomenon needs to be explained. Without language, whether in writing or speech, how can the ideas and values of any culture be communicated? Without an understanding of the meaning of words, texts from one culture cannot be understood and used in new contexts? Starting with the remarkable sets of glossed words drawn from named texts of the Bible, classics and church fathers in Leiden VLQ 69, a glossary produced at St Gallen at the turn of the eighth century, the lecture charts the first phase of an energetic engagement with words and the assembly of knowledge in new books at St Gallen in the second half of the eighth century which has enormous implications for the subsequent development of dictionaries and transmission of knowledge in the early middle ages on which the Leiden University Library collections throw so much light.

Ed van der Vlist (Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag)

More than Words: Latin-Dutch Wordlists in The Hague

People tend to make all kinds of lists, and so they did in the Middle Ages: names of rulers, biblical places, book titles and dates. Such lists were often ordered chronologically, alphabetically, thematically, or otherwise. However, the relationship between the individual items in a medieval list is not always immediately clear to the modern eye. In linguistics the most interesting lists are those of Latin words with an explanation in easier Latin, or even with a translation into the vernacular. Usually these lists are called glossaries, but some of them deserve to be named “dictionaries”. What is the difference between these two? A recent run through the boxes piled with manuscript fragments at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, revealed the remains of unknown late medieval bilingual wordlists. This paper queries how these new finds fit into our views of medieval wordlists.

Display of Manuscripts from Leiden Collections

Erik Kwakkel, Leiden University