INVITATION TO THE *PETERBOROUGH CHRONICLE* AND ITS LANGUAGE

ALEXANDER BERGS & JANNE SKAFFARI

Universität Osnabrück *University of Turku*

1 "Everybody loves the Peterborough Chronicle"

The Peterborough Chronicle (PetC) is undoubtedly one of the best-known vernacular English texts dating from the centuries between *Beowulf* and the *Canterbury Tales*. The Peterborough manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is an extraordinary and invaluable example of English writing in the twelfth century – a period following the political and cultural watershed of the Norman Conquest (1066), during which very few new vernacular texts were produced in England. Many historical linguists and/or philologists, especially those interested in the transition from Old to Middle English, have found the PetC an excellent source of data. In fact, a prominent teacher and researcher of English historical linguistics said to one of the editors of the present volume in 2000, "Everybody loves the Peterborough Chronicle". The positive reactions prompted by mentioning the text to scholars connected with medieval English studies suggest that perhaps to know the PetC is to love the PetC. This volume is testament to the fact that the language of the PetC has not ceased to attract the attention of researchers.

The PetC is, moreover, familiar to virtually everyone teaching the history of English, for whom it provides a perfect illustration of the earliest Middle English. It is one of those texts that have an ever-growing audience at various institutions of higher education – and not just in English-speaking countries. A quick look at a few randomly selected textbooks of Middle English or the history of English reveals that the PetC is a popular sample text. Among the passages in the chronicle there is one entry that seems to be a particular favourite: 1137. When introducing the subject matter of this entry, Burrow and Turville-Petre (1996: 75) refer to "terrible years" and "cruelties [...] so barbarous that men concluded that Christ was asleep". The reasons for the choice of this particular 'year' as teaching material by many textbook writers and teachers can be said to reflect the motivations for the overall interest in the PetC: the enticing content, which has great historical interest and a wealth of fascinating – and sometimes horrific – details, is interlaced with the lure of the language, which is clearly indicative of the onset of the Middle English period (but can also be used as an example of late Old English), and the attractive style, which is at times dramatic and personal to an extent that is extraordinary in the chronicle genre.

In this first chapter of *The Language of the Peterborough Chronicle* we shall introduce the PetC on a general level and, furthermore, the history and structure of this book. All the aspects of the PetC that are relevant and interesting – linguistic, textual, historical – cannot, however, be discussed in great detail here; such information is easily accessed in recent editions (see below) and other scholarly work, including the papers in this volume.

2 The Chronicle

As one of the seven surviving versions the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC), the PetC is an important part of the tradition of vernacular English historiography. It covers a huge range of topics from national – and sometimes international – politics and history to local events touching the lives of the scribes who wrote the text, even weather conditions. The ASC can only be described as a complex historical record, but a very brief overview of this medieval genre and the textual relationships of the English chronicles will suffice here, as such issues have already been thoroughly discussed elsewhere. Susan Irvine (2004: xxxii-ci) alone devotes seventy pages to the links between the PetC and the other versions of ASC as well as other medieval texts.

The ASC is the earliest national chronicle written in a western vernacular language (e.g. Swanton 1996: xx). 'Vernacular' is the key word here: there were such notable Latin chroniclers in the Anglo-Saxon period as Bede and Gildas (e.g. Matheson 1998: 184). While it has been proposed that the compilation of the first ASC was perhaps initiated by Alfred the Great (Plummer 1899: civ), or at least inspired by him, the initiator of the project remains unknown. The chronicle can nevertheless be said to be linked to this great king of Wessex through his late-ninth-century revival of English learning (Swanton 1996: xviii). The versions of the ASC, labelled with letters from A to G, grew out of this cultural and literary achievement.

The oldest surviving manuscript of the chronicle is 'A', the Parker Chronicle (e.g. Bately 1986). The E manuscript of the ASC is commonly called the Peterborough Chronicle; as it survives in Bodleian MS. Laud Misc. 636, it is also known as the 'Laud manuscript'. The PetC is the version spanning furthest into the post-Conquest era; of the other manuscripts, C ends at 1066 and only A and D stretch somewhat beyond that (e.g. Whitelock 1954: 27-28). The complicated connections between all of these manuscripts can be exemplified by noting that G was copied from A, that there are textual links between B and C, that E (along with C) has connections with D and that F derives from A but is also related to the history of E (Irvine 2004: xxxii-xxxiii). A northern version of the ASC is the source of MSS. E and D (e.g. Cubbin 1996: xxvi).

The PetC itself can be divided into major sections in at least two different ways. Clark (1970: xv-xvii) does this palaeographically, accounting for three parts: (1) The annals until 1121 are homogeneous in writing. (2) The section from 1122 to 1131 consists of six blocks, but the changes in the styles of writing are not definitive; Clark finds a single scribe more likely than a succession of writers here. (3) The entries from 1132 to 1154 are in a hand that differs from the one(s) of the preceding section. The 1122 to 1131 part of the PetC is traditionally referred to as the *First Continuation* (henceforth PetC-1), and the final part is known as the *Final Continuation* (PetC-2); they stand out from the part up to 1121, the copied Old English entries of the PetC (PetC-0), and as Matheson (1998:185) writes, "represent the conclusion of the vigorous OE tradition of prose chronicle writing". It is practical to consider the three sections of the manuscript separately in studies of the language of the PetC, although there are grounds for making a simpler division based on scribal criteria. Irvine (2004: xviii-xix) agrees with recent research that there were only two scribes who wrote the text of the Peterborough manuscript – the first one responsible for the majority of the entries (until 1131), the second one for PetC-2. The first scribe seems to have copied and updated the annals until 1121 and subsequently made new entries into the chronicle in the following years. The second scribe's output consists of a single block of text rather than separately added entries. Worth noting in the work of the first scribe is the material interpolated in the copied entries, known as the Peterborough Interpolations: included in the entries from 654 to 1116, there are altogether twenty passages that stand out from the Old English annals in terms of their language and content (Irvine 2004: xc-xcviii).

Be they narratives or year-by-year annals, medieval chronicles had in their day a utilitarian function as historical sources, and they now provide modern readers with information about history as well as the chroniclers' and their audiences' awareness about the world around them (Matheson 1998:184). This is very true of the PetC as well: its coverage of both local and national history also reveals some of the scribes' reactions to the events of their time. This applies particularly to the continuations: as Clark (1970: xxiv-xxvi) remarks, PetC-1 was apparently composed nearly contemporaneously with the events described in it – which would explain the flavour of topicality in the entries – and the annals making up PetC-2, probably entered into the chronicle right after the last year mentioned in the chronicle, were arranged more by topic than by date, which can be taken to suggest the writer's consciousness about the connections between the events he describes. The copied Old English annals of PetC-0 are less rich in this respect.

The transmission of the chronicle and the connections between the PetC and other texts are topics discussed further in the next chapter (Horne, this volume).

3 The Scholarship

It is almost impossible to imagine a research paper dealing with Early Middle English that would not make reference to the PetC. As the bibliographies in this volume testify, it has attracted considerable scholarly interest for more than one

hundred years (an early example is Behm 1884, essentially a list of phonological and inflectional forms found in the text), and the body of literature drawing from and based on the PetC is constantly growing. Much of the scholarship is based on editions of the text rather than the manuscript itself.

The latest edition of the PetC is by Susan Irvine, who in 2004 published Volume 7 in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, comprising at that time eight volumes published between 1983 and 2001. There is no doubt that Irvine (2004) is now the standard edition of the PetC, a title previously held by Clark (1970) and, for the whole text, Plummer (1892-99). Irvine's is a full edition of MS. E whereas Cecily Clark's work (1970) only covers the post-Conquest part from 1070 to the end of the PetC, i.e. approximately forty per cent of MS. E.

Clark's partial edition was preceded in 1954 by the facsimile of the manuscript, edited by Dorothy Whitelock, but the history of editing the PetC goes much beyond the last half-century. The text of MS. E was first included in an edition of the ASC in 1692, followed by three editions in the nineteenth century, most notably Plummer's parallel edition of MSS. A and E at the end of that century (Irvine 2004: xvii).

The PetC has also been translated into Present-Day English. The first translation of the E text was Rositzke (1951), which, however, contains some errors according to Whitelock (1954: 35). A selective translation of the ASC by Whitelock (1965) contains also material from the PetC. Similarly, the E text is well represented in a recent chronicle translation by Swanton (1996).

Discussing the scholarship continues below, with reference to the language of the PetC.

4 The Language

Some of the linguistic features of the PetC will now be briefly described. Generally speaking, much attention has been paid to the transitional character or 'modernity' (or not) of its words and structures. Of the different levels of language, the syntax of the PetC has been discussed by, for example, Mitchell (1964) and Shores (1971), vocabulary by Kniezsa (1993, 1994), and issues of orthography and phonology by Phillips (1995, 1997). For a fuller picture of the language of this text we refer to the chapters of this volume and their bibliographies as well as the introductions in the editions by Susan Irvine and Cecily Clark.

The dialect(s) of the PetC provide a natural starting point for a linguistic survey. Clark (1970: xli-lxix) writes that PetC-0 is basically written in the standard written English of the late OE period and therefore hardly reflects current speech. The conservatism applies not only to spelling but also to grammar where dialectal indications are uncommon. The language of the continuations is not at all as conservative, although it has also been influenced by West Saxon: it is

clearly marked by the dialect of the East Midlands, in particular in its morphology. PetC-1 and PetC-2 were composed by monks at the Abbey of Peterborough, by men who are likely to have been locals (Clark 1970: xxxvii). Susan Irvine, the latest editor of the chronicle, does not disagree with Clark on the dialectal differences of the copied annals and the continuations.

The words contained in the PetC have attracted a fair amount of attention: particularly the late entries are rich in examples of fresh loans dating from the transition from Old to Middle English and have therefore provided a valuable source of material for many studies (for example, the classic Serjeantson 1935). In the newest edition of the PetC the topic of lexis (and proper nouns) is treated very concisely on a few lines of commentary followed by a short list of lexical differences between MS. E and the other versions of the ASC (Irvine 2004: clxiii-clxvi). Clark (1970: xlv, lxii-lxiii, lxviii-lxix) points out the conservative character of the PetC-0 vocabulary and the great number of obsolescent OE words. In PetC-2, the number of Romance words increases and also many Scandinavian-derived words appear. Scandinavian loans occur to a lesser extent in PetC-1. Even before her first edition of the PetC, Cecily Clark published a detailed lexical study of the text (Clark 1952: 53), in which she observes that the number of loanwords is remarkable, particularly in PetC-1 and PetC-2. A large number of loans are what she calls Franco-Latin: it is likely that most loanwords referring to administration and church affairs were directly borrowed from the current Latin, which was a language of government and scholarship. Many feudal and social terms occurring in the PetC are loanwords from French. Some early Scandinavian loans appear also in the Old English PetC-0. A later quantitative study (Skaffari 2002) observes that in terms of the proportions of Latin, Scandinavian and French loans, PetC-1 bears a greater resemblance to the copied PetC-0 than to the subsequent PetC-2.

Many structural features of the PetC – ranging from phonology to syntax – are discussed in the chapters of the present volume. In earlier research, both remnants of Old English grammar and changes towards Middle English have typically been identified; it is particularly the language of PetC-2 that has been singled out as different from the earlier parts of the text. Clark's comment on the syntax of the continuations is worth citing: "Before our eyes English is beginning to change from a synthetic language to an analytic one" (Clark 1970: lxxiii). Syntax and morphology are intertwined in this type of change, affecting word order (verb-movement is discussed in the present volume by Sims). The morphological features of PetC-2 suggest a transition from Old English, which is nonetheless already visible – even if to a lesser extent – in PetC-0 and PetC-1, written by the first scribe who is more likely to exhibit contemporary practices (such as the loss of dative inflections in nouns) in PetC-1 and the interpolations than in the genuinely copied parts of his text (Irvine 2004: cxxxix-cxliii, cliii-clv). In the present volume, Allen discusses another case, the genitive, and ar-

gues that it had not been lost as a case in the language of the second scribe, although it was becoming more restricted in use. Orthographically, both the work of the first scribe (the majority of the text) and that of the second scribe (PetC-2) mostly conform to the late West Saxon standard, with some variation in the forms (Irvine 2004:civ-cvii). Phillips (this volume) points out that certain spellings particular to the continuations reflect the scribes' East Midland dialect.

How are the three parts of the PetC then to be labelled diachronically? This question is worth asking even if it overlaps with the issue of dialect, discussed above. Irvine's (2004:ciii) linguistic description of the PetC starts from the observation that the copied PetC-0 is essentially late West Saxon (standard Old English) and the continuations are early Middle English of the East Midland variety. Clark's (1970: xli-lxxiv) analysis is similar but goes further in suggesting a three-way division. PetC-0 is (late) Old English, but the language of PetC-1 is Middle rather than Old English: in unstressed syllables vowels are fairly often obscured, and the declensional system appears to be in the process of simplification. Following this "Early Middle English" part of the chronicle, PetC-2 is then "incontrovertibly Middle English" (Clark 1970: lii); it evidently displays the contemporary language usage at Peterborough. Its orthography has been influenced by French and Latin, which is implied by some new spelling variants; phonological and grammatical innovations continue as well. In this volume, Pysz shows that the differences in demonstrative pronouns between PetC-0, PetC-1 and PetC-2 neatly illustrate the stage-by-stage changes through the parts of the chronicle, and van Gelderen, looking at grammaticalization, finds proof for PetC-2 being clearly Middle English. However, scholars have not unanimously agreed with this type of diachronic classification of the language of the PetC: a case in point is the syntax of the continuations, which Mitchell (1964) regards as on the whole fairly conservative. It is nevertheless typical that at least the final entries of the PetC are regarded as (early) Middle English: for example, Laing (1992: 566) considers 1150 as the beginning of the ME period to be able to include these annals in the material for the *Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English*, and in the *Middle English Dictionary* the earliest citations of early ME words are not seldom from the PetC. PetC-2 has thus been seen as the first text written in Middle English.

5 This Volume

Most of the following chapters stem from the workshop on the PetC which the editors hosted at the 13th International Conference on Historical Linguistics (Vienna, 2004). In addition, contributions on topics that were not specifically addressed at the workshop (for example, the historical background) were invited in order to make the coverage more rounded. The objective of the book has been to bring together scholars working on various aspects of the PetC and to inform a broader audience about current issues in their work. In terms of scope, *The Language of the Peterborough Chronicle* thus combines a single central subject – the PetC – and a variety of theoretical and practical approaches, methods and theories, which makes the volume diverse and focused at the same time: the basis for discussion remains the same for all chapters, while the questions asked and approaches used can be radically different.

The collection comprises ten individual papers as well as this introduction and a general index. The first chapter (by Malasree Home) provides an introduction to the historical and literary background of the chronicle, followed by papers on phonological (Betty S. Phillips), orthographical (Alexander Bergs), morphological (Agnieszka Pysz), syntactic (Cynthia L. Allen, Elly van Gelderen, Lynn Sims) and comparative issues (Bridget Drinka). There may seem to be a gap in the range covered by this volume in that no papers focusing on lexis are included here, but this level of language received more attention than any other individual level in the previous section, with references to some sources of further information (most importantly Cecily Clark's introduction and her classic study of the PetC words).

As the text under scrutiny is frequently used in higher education, two chapters are devoted to this topic: one discusses the use of the PetC in teaching the history of English at university-level in Europe (Oliver M. Traxel), the other in the United States (Carol Percy). Traxel shows that the PetC provides good material for teaching both Old and (early) Middle English as well as linguistic change. However, as Percy points out, the text – with all the variation and change it exhibits – may be too complex for shorter courses on the history of English, and it also competes with texts whose content is more familiar to the students and texts with a recognized literary rather than historical or linguistic value. More work can still be done to promote the use of the PetC in universities.

Whether you are interested in historical or general linguistics, philology, medieval literature, history or pedagogy, we are pleased to invite you to explore the following chapters – and the language of the Peterborough Chronicle.

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