

The New College fragments of Caxton's *Janua* grammar

New College, Oxford, holds unique fragments of an elementary Latin school grammar, the *Janua*, issued by the press of England's first printer, William Caxton. A second witness to the same edition is located at Christ's College, Cambridge. The fragments do not bear a place or date of printing, but are known to have been printed in Westminster and are assigned by BMC XI to the year [1489-90].¹ They are set up in Caxton's Type 5, a gothic type, and are in quarto format. The Oxford fragments are rare specimens of Caxton's printing on vellum.

The fragments in question bear the shelfmark MS 391, Folder 4, f. 13, and comprise four strips from two conjoined leaves. They were discovered by Robert Proctor in 1893, in the binding of an unknown volume where they were probably used as quire-sewing reinforcements.² It was evidently their material, vellum, that made them useful for the bookbinder. The cut-down strips run laterally so we have no height dimension, but the widest page width is 195 mm, with the text area occupying around 120 mm; there are portions of lines of text on either side of each strip. What proves to be the first strip is from the opening leaf of a quire and has the beginning of the *Janua* on its recto in the form of three lines of printed text. The verso of this strip holds the top three lines from the following page. A second strip preserves most of the text contained in the top three lines (recto and verso) of what is the last leaf of the same quire. The other two fragments preserve another eight to nine lines, recto and verso, from further down the same two leaves. No more than one or two lines

¹ *Catalogue of Books Printed in the XVth Century Now in the British Library. England*. Ed. Lotte Hellinga (The Netherlands: Hes & De Graaf Publishers BY, 2007), p. 88 (referred to hereafter as *BMC XI*). In most of the references, however, these fragments are dated about the year 1487; see STC 7013; ESTC S91757; ISTC id00342223; E. Gordon Duff, *Printing in England in the Fifteenth Century. Duff's Bibliography with supplementary descriptions [...] by Lotte Hellinga* (London: The Bibliographical Society and The British Library, 2009), no. 129; and Dennis E. Rhodes, *A Catalogue of Incunabula in all the Libraries of Oxford University Outside The Bodleian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), no. 701, and Plate 5, facing p. 310.

² Robert Proctor, "Memoir", in Robert Proctor, *Bibliographical Essays, 1894-1903* (London: Chiswick Press, 1905), pp. xx-xxi.

are missing from the end of each page. In all cases the lines are in register on the recto and verso pages.

The second witness to the Caxton edition, the fragments located in Christ's College, Cambridge, Document 35, consists only of small pieces of paper, - which after being assembled -, proved to represent one leaf with a number of gaps in the text. They are now preserved between two panes of glass. In addition, two fragments of an edition of the same grammar by Richard Pynson, printed about five years later than Caxton's, have come down to us.³

Due to their fragmentary nature, the surviving witnesses of this grammar do not provide a title for the text they represent. Therefore it is not surprising that modern cataloguers and scholars have used a range of titles to describe it, most of them associating it with the name of Aelius Donatus (about 350 A.D.) whose *Ars minor* is extant in numerous medieval versions under various titles. The title most commonly given to the text in earlier reference works and studies is *Donatus melior*, but it is also found entered as *Ars minor. Rudimenta grammatices*. Some scholars add to these titles, as the reviser of this grammar, the name of the famous humanist Antonius Mancinellus (1452-1505), an Italian pedagogue, grammarian and rhetorician. The fragments have also been given the title *Rudimenta grammatices: Janua*. BMC XI corrects the erroneous attribution to Donatus by stating: "The elementary textbook that Caxton printed [...] usually wrongly identified as a Donatus, is in fact a rather more original choice, the anonymous *Janua*, used widely for elementary teaching in Italy, where it was printed many times."⁴

³ See BMC XI, 266, for the description of the British Library fragment, London, IB.55482, two leaves (b1 and [b2]). Another leaf of this edition is located in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Rawl. fol. 1(3), last leaf only. For a description see Alan Coates *et al*, *A Catalogue of Books Printed in the Fifteenth Century Now in the Bodleian Library*. Vol. III (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Bod-inc. D-149.

⁴ BMC XI, Introduction, p. 54.

The fragment of the *Janua* located in New College, Oxford, preserves the beginning of the treatise where the discussion of the grammatical rules is preceded by a proemium of which three distichs still survive. On the basis of the first word of this verse prologue, the grammar was christened *Janua* by the Italian scholar Remigio Sabbadini in 1896.⁵ The lines of the proemium read:

I²Anua sum rudibus primam cupientibus artem/ |

Nec sine me quisquam rite perit<u>s erit. |

Nam g<e>nus et casum. speciem numerum que figuram: |⁶

A close examination of the Caxton fragments and a comparison of their text with the corresponding passages in Donatus's *Ars minor* shows that the *Janua* can be identified as a grammar different from that of Donatus, which was a grammar aimed at native speakers of Latin. Though the *Janua* discusses the eight parts of speech, as does Donatus's grammar, and is written in question-and-answer form, it includes additional subject-matter not contained in the *Ars minor* and uses a different approach to the material. Unlike Donatus's grammar, the *Janua* teaches Latin as a foreign language. By printing and then reprinting the *Janua*, the earliest English printer, William Caxton, and one of his immediate successors, Richard Pynson, were responding to a demand for school texts in English grammar schools at the end of the fifteenth century.⁷

⁵ Remigio Sabbadini, *La Scuola e gli studi di Guarino Guarini Veronese* (Catania: Tip. Francesco Galati, 1896), pp. 35, 42-44; also Wolfgang O. Schmitt, "Die Janua (Donatus) – ein Beitrag zur lateinischen Schulgrammatik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance", in *Beiträge zur Inkunabelkunde*. Dritte Folge 4 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1969), pp. 43-80, esp. 53-54, 73-74.

⁶ A fourth verse not preserved in Caxton's print reads in Wolfgang O. Schmitt's transcription on p. 74 of the *Janua* (GW 8998): "His que flectuntur partibus insinuo." The verses can be translated: "I am the door for beginners desiring the first art. And nobody without me will be duly learned. Because gender and case, species, number and figure [I implant in those parts of speech which are inflected]".

⁷ A forthcoming article by the same author will deal with these fragments in more detail.

Dr. Hedwig Gwosdek
University of Bonn