SPANISH WORDS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LEXICON: SOURCES AND PROBLEMS[1]

The cultural and economic importance of the Spanish-Arabic community throughout the Middle Ages is reflected in the number of loan-words which, mainly through French and Latin, entered the western European languages in this period. Some of these words also found their way into the linguistic varieties used in England between the years 1000 and 1500.[2] In spite of this impact, there are relatively few studies devoted to tracing the lexical relationship between medieval England and Spain, probably due to both, the indirect

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[1] This is an updated version of a paper read at the fifth International Conference of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature (León, September 1992). I appreciate and acknowledge the comments by some colleagues who were present at the talk, particularly Dr Andrew Breeze and the late Professor Patricia Shaw. In addition to the latter's well-known contributions to English and Comparative Literature, Professor Shaw had always a keen interest in diverse aspects of the cultural history of the English language. In the panels that she chaired at SELIM and AEDEAN conferences she was always alert to lectures and papers on this subject and very often raised interesting questions and topics for discussion. Throughout her publications on medieval and renaissance English literature she regularly pointed to linguistic aspects of the texts she shrewdly analysed. In addition, she thoroughly studied the influence of the Spanish language on seventeenth century English (1979) and, in a recent article ("The Presence of Spain in Middle English Literature", 1992), pointed to the literary, historical and linguistic connections between both countries in the period from 1150 to 1485.

[2] See Taylor (1934) where, together with a long list of place and personal names, other common words of Spanish, Arabic or Spanish-Arabic etymology are mentioned, among others: *acton* (1300), *admiral* (1205), *alchemy* (1362), *alchitram* (1325), *alconde* (1486), *alcoran* (1366), *algorism* (1340), *alembic* (1374), *aliade* (1450), *alkali* (1386), *alkanet* (1326), *almacantar* (1391), *almagest* (1386), *almanac* (1388), *almury* (1391), *amber* (1398), *azimuth* (1391), *barbican* (1300), *beduin* (1400), *bezoar* (1477), *borage* (1265), *borax* (1386), *brazil* (1386), *buckram* (1340), *cable* (1205), *caliph* (1393), *camphor* (1313), *caraway* (1390), *cipher* (1399), *cotton* (1381), *dragoman* (1300), *elixir* (1386), *fustian* (1200), *garble* (1393), *jazerant* (1400), *lemon* (1400), *mancus* (799), *maravedi* (1430), *marcasite* (1425), *marzipan* (1494), *nadir* (1391), *olibanum* (1398), *quintal* (1401), *realgar* (1386), *saffran* (1200), *soldan* (1297), *syrup* (1398), *taffeta* (1373), *tartar* (1386), *zenith* (1387), etc See also: Serjeantson (1935), Steiger (1963) and Breeze (1991).

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nature of this relationship and the problems which the analysis of linguistic borrowings in a medieval context are likely to raise. Among these words, *cordwain* and *cork* stand out because they derive from one of the earliest romance varieties which survived in the central areas of the Iberian peninsula populated by the Arabs: this language was known as *musta'rib* by the Moslems and, later on, 'mozárabe' in Castilian romance. It is the aim of this article to trace the origin, development and introduction of these 'mozárabe' words into Middle English, and to illustrate some of the problems which affect the study of medieval lexicon.

Lexical borrowing in a medieval context is not merely a process whereby gaps in the overall vocabulary of a language are filled, nor simply the result of the whims and desires for prestige, snobbism or exoticism by some members of a speech community (Rothwell 1980: 118; Hoad 1987: 51). The scholar who studies medieval lexicology and, particularly, the exchange of words from one language to another, must face a threefold problem. Firstly, the number of unpublished and undiscovered manuscripts impinges on the usefulness of etymological dictionaries, which, by definition, are as useful as their source material allows them to be. Secondly, the absence of sources and the lack of information on the kind of text where some words might have occurred makes it difficult to trace their chronological, geographical and stylistic distribution. Finally, it is obvious that the linguistic circumstances of the medieval world cannot be properly understood nowadays, when we still tend to make all the information available fit into pre-established categories, which sometimes may not reflect accurate historical situations: for instance, the equation of language and nationality did not wholly prevail in the Middle Ages, and the neogrammarian tenet which grounds the study of borrowing on the behaviour of bilingual speakers, must be extended into the domain of social multilingualism prevalent throughout Europe in the period (Haugen 1950: 210).

Such complications are reflected in the history of the two words we are dealing with. The romance world where they come from must be viewed as a vast linguistic area where new varieties kept arising out of, at least, three different sources: a latin substratum, common to all of them, substrata and adstrata particularly related to each variety - such as Arabic in the case of the romance languages of Spain - and, finally, the influence of the "dialects" on one another, which functioned, therefore, as superstrata in a sort of interac-

tive relationship (Baldinger 1963: 62-91; Iordan and Manoliu 1972: 144-145). The process leading to the formation of the Spanish-Arabic word *cor-cho/corcha*, where English *cork* comes from, clearly illustrates the above-mentioned issue. The connection of *corcho* to 'mozárabe' seems to be proved by the palatal articulation in vulgar Latin, [p], of an original velar plosive (< cortice) (Galmes de Fuentes 1983: 325). But the common usage of this word in Spain was preceded by the substitution of the etruscan *suber*, applied globally to the cork tree, by the synonyms *cortex* or *quercus* in those communities, which, linked to the Roman empire, esteemed the bark of that tree as a source of economic profit (Bertoldi 1947: 132-140). Moreover, the relation of *corcho* and Latin *cortex* is not direct. Corominas and Pascual (1980: s.v.) state that the romance word derives ultimately from the short Indoeuropean root * *ker(t)*; this vocalic quantity should have favoured a process of diphthongization in mozárabe, which did not take place. The appearance of a monophthong [o] has led them to think of the influence of the Arabic adstratum in its final shape. Rohlfs does not seem to agree with them when he states that the origin of *corcho* is the metathesis of Latin *quercus* into vulgar Latin * *cerquus*, and that the interference of another word, probably *cortex*, favoured the velarization of the root vowel from [e] to [o] (1979: 204-207). As a final instance of the linguistic mixing which defines the romance world in medieval times it is worth mentioning the hybrid form *alcorque*, where the Arabic article is combined with the evolution of the blended pair * *cerquus - cortex* in Castilian.

A further problem which complicates the study of medieval lexicon is the natural fact that it is constantly affected by semantic changes which extend or simplify the original meaning. Thus, the initial reference of *cor-doban/cordouan* to "… someone or something from Cordoba" is reduced after a process of metonymy to 'leather' and, particularly, the skin of goats tanned and manufactured in that town (Corominas and Pascual 1980: s.v.). The later use of this material by shoe- and harness-makers and its collocation in the thirteenth century with the noun *çapatos/çapatas* (texts 1 and 2) favoured in the fourteenth another process of metonymy which restricted its meaning from the material to the object (text 3).

(1) 1252: Çapatos de cordobán entallados et a cuerda vi pares por i mr. los meiores (*Cortes de Sevilla*, 127).

(2) 1351: Por el par de los çapatos de calça de buen cordonan et bien solados dos mrs. (*Cortes de Valladolid*, II. 82).

(3) 1386: La doçena de los cordouanes doze mrs. (*Cortes de Jerez*, I.71)[1]

The study of the introduction of these two words from Arabic Spain into Norman Britain seems to be methodologically founded on the concepts of cultural and linguistic contact between speech communities. However, these notions must be handled with care when they are applied to medieval lexicon. Neither political and economic, nor cultural and scientific relations worked on a one-to-one basis between two groups of people, but should be included in an international context. It is sufficient to mention, in order to prove the point, that the commercial exchange of Spanish oil, dyes, salt and wine with English wool and cloth depended on the maritime routes that linked the Mediterranean and the North Sea through Andalusia and were under the control of Genoese and Venetian seafarers (Childs 1978). At the cultural and scientific levels, it is also interesting to notice the role the Santiago route played in spreading French loanwords in the romance dialects of Castile, Aragon and La Rioja. *Corcho* and *cordoban*/*cordovan* were not, however, words which could have found their way into English as a result of scientific or humanistic and cultural contacts. Since they were linked to very specific goods, they probably entered Middle English thanks to the indirect trade relations between Spain and England through France and Barcelona. Both products were part of Arabic commerce from the beginning of its expansion in the eighth century. *Cordoban* was exported from Al-Andalus to Europe as a luxury good used in the manufacture of shoes. *Corcho*, at first also an item of luxury, seems to be linked to the trade of glass commodities which reached northern Europe from the Syrian coasts. The French markets would have particularly helped to introduce these products and the words referring to

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[1] Medieval Spanish texts are taken from Castro (1921: 343) and Corominas and Pascual (1980). The abbreviations used by these authors to identify each original text are also supplied after the quote.

them into England, together with the Norman variety used as official language after the conquest in 1066.

In spite of the initially "exotic" nature of these products,[1] the application to historical linguistics of subjective labels such as prestigious or exotic must be cautious. The ideas put forward by Hope in his article "Loanwords as cultural and lexical symbols" (1962) are worth mentioning in connection with this. The author diminishes the function of the explanations which account for "psychological climates of borrowing" and defends a purely linguistic study of vocabulary, assuming that there are cultural and commercial relations between two communities of different importance, and concentrating on how the new contexts of usage mould and change the original meaning of words in the recipient language.

There are three different entries in *The Oxford English Dictionary* for the words related to mozárabe *cordoban*: *cordovan* (with a number of orthographical variants such as *corduban*, *cordovant* and *cordevan*), *cordwain* (*cordewane*, *cordewayne*, *cordwane*, etc) and the agentive noun *cordwainer* (*cordewaner*, *cordewenere*, *corduener*, *cordeweyner*, *cordwiner*, etc). Even though the first one is the most directly related to the Spanish romance, it is not attested in writing until the late sixteenth century, in Percivall's *Spanish Dictionary* (1591) (Murray, *et al* eds. 1933: s.v). It is interesting to point out, however, that Percivall uses *cordouan* to define the word *taperados* ("the inside of a cordouan skin turned outwards") and this may suggest either that the word already possessed this form years before its inclusion in the dictionary, or else, as I think, show the influence of Castilian on the author: he knew the language and, in the context of a bilingual Spanish-English dictionary, reshaped the original word *cordwain* so as to link it to its proper etymology.

The forms *cordwain* and *cordwainer* are documented in England from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Although the first evidence is provided by official texts, like lists of goods and prices, as well as population censuses

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[1] In fact, as Professor Shaw remarked in the above-mentioned article, the word *cordwane* in Middle English texts always had the connotation of a luxurious, exotic product - 'the very finest leather' - This seems to be confirmed in texts (8) and (14) of the brief corpus offered in this article, where *cordwain shoes* are respectively used by bishops and by the knight Sir Thopas in consonance with their social position and, in the second case, with "the rest of his costly rear" (Shaw 1992: 44).

written in an extremely concise style, there are some determiners and prepositions of French origin *(le* and *de)* which allow the scholar to conclude that for more than two centuries - up to 1380 - none of them had broken with the original Norman French context expected in these documents (texts 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).

(4) 1281: Barth, le Cordewaner (*Fransson Surn*. 130).

(5) 1310: In 12 pellibus de Cordewain empt., 13s. 6d. (*Account Rolls of the Abbey of Durham*).

(6) 1312: Coreum de Cordewan viiij d. (*Wills and Inventories from the Registry of Durham*).

(7) 1359: De chescune dozeyne de cordewane (*Ipswich Domesday* (1), 188).

(8) 1380: Bischopes wole kepe her feet cleene wiÍ sccarlett and cordewanere (*Cursor Mundi*, 21975).[1]

The form that the word *cork* adapts in Middle English reflects a process of contamination of the original mozárabe *corcho* with the Spanish-Arabic hybrid *alcorque* and the Latin etymon *quercus*. This word is also documented in Anglo-Norman and Latin texts until the end of the fourteenth century (texts 9, 10 and 11) (Kurath and Kuhn, 1956: s.v.):

(9) 1303: De Arnaldo pro bord et cork (*Gras. Eng. Syst*. 216)

(10) 1342: Navis carcatat erat in eisdem partibus cum sale et cork (*Chancery Inquis*, file 148 (22)).

(11) 1417: In diuersis peciis Maeremii, peciis de Corke (For. Acc. 8 Hen. V D/1 dorso).

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[1] Medieval texts in Anglo-Norman and Middle English are taken from Kurath and Kuhn (1956 s.v.) and Murray *et al*. (eds. 1933: s.v.). The abbreviations used by these authors to identify each original text are also supplied after the quote.

An important landmark in the history of these words in Middle English is that they appeared as individual entries in the first English-Latin dictionary published in England: *The Promptorium Parvulorum*. The popularity of this work can be inferred from its preservation in six manuscripts since 1440 and from the fact that it was printed at least five times during the first quarter of the sixteenth century. The dictionary answered the demand for a list of English words with their Latin equivalents and grammatical information on gender and case by the *parvulii* - novices - who started to learn Latin (Way ed. 1843: 12). Thus, the "Ad Lectorem" of one of the issues printed by Winkyn de Worde (1510) explains:

> … thys boke is thus ordened for to fynde a laten after any maner of worde in englysshe for them that wyl lerne to wryte or speke latyn, and because that no man or chylde herafter have any diffyculte more to serche for any latyn or englysshe worde (Starnes 1954: 5).

In column 425 of the *Promptorium* there is the English entry *sowtare*, to which the synonym *cordynare* is added; both words are equated to the Latin masculine nouns *sutor/sutoris* (shoemaker) and *allutarius/allutarij* (shoemaker). Column number 94 includes the synonyms *cordwayn* and *ledder* which are explained by the feminine Latin noun *alluta/allutæ* (fine leather) and again *cordwar*, equivalent to *allutarius/allutarii*. As far as *cork* is concerned, this word appears in column 95 in the compounds *cork-tre* and *cork-bark*; the former is explained by the feminine Latin noun *suberies/suberietis* [sic] (cork tree), while the latter is equated to *cortex/corticis* (cork bark) (Mayhew ed. 1908).

An apparent reason which may lie behind the appearance of these two words as specific entries in *The Promptorium Parvulorum* is that they were widely used in English at all communicative levels before the year 1400. This hypothesis can be supported by the use of the word *cordewan* in the Coventry cycle of *Mystery Plays* (1400) (text 12) and of *cordwaners* in the York one (1415) (text 13) (Kurath and Kuhn, 1956: s.v.):

(12) 1400: Off ffyne cordewan a goodly peyre of long pekyd schon (*Coventry Mystery Plays*, 241).

(13) 1415: Cordwaners (*York Mystery Plays*, Introd. 243)

(14) 1390: Sir Thopas, his schoon of Cordewane (*Sir Thopas*, 21).

If we believe that *Mystery Plays* reflect the colloquial levels of communication in Middle English, we may understand that these words were already widely used at oral levels late in the period. However, there is also evidence that these could still be qualified as learned words, restricted to formal or official contexts: this is suggested by the necessity for the compiler of the *Promptorium* to clarify their meaning by means of the synonyms *ledder* and *sowtare*, or by the widespread idea that the entries of the dictionary have their origin in those of previous Latin-English glossaries which were reversed without any regard as to their real usage in the English language.

The dilemma is far more complicated in the case of *cork*. *Cordwain* is attested in literary works such as the poem *Cursor Mundi* (1380) (text 8) or the romance *Sir Thopas* (1390) (text 14), which may point to the way the word followed from Latin or Norman-French to Middle English; but the first written evidence of *cork* is *The Promptorium Parvulorum* itself. Nevertheless, it is used in compound words in the dictionary and by 1450 it had already changed its meaning to refer to objects manufactured with that material (texts 15 and 16) (Kurath and Kuhn 1956: s.v.) This process may confirm that *cork* was already widely used years before the edition of the *Promptorium*.

(15) 1450: Ye schall make your flotes in thys wise; take a feyr corke yat ys clene with oute many hoolys (*Treat fish*., 16; Bk. St. Albans).

(16) 1463: That no Marchaunt bryng into this reame … tawed Bootes, Schoen, galoches or Corkes (*R. Parl*. 5, 507a).

It seems, finally, that the conclusions which may be drawn from the data contained in etymological dictionaries are sometimes misleading when historical linguists try to evaluate the extension of usage of a linguistic borrowing

in the medieval period. This can be so in the case of *cordwain* and *cork*, which may be qualified both as learned words restricted to some levels of communication and as common ones used in everyday conversation; there is proof to support both options. The lack of some manuscripts which could confirm one possibility or the other, the multilingual context in which the words were used, and the vague assessment of the concepts contact, prestige, formality and informality in the period are some of the problems which impinge on the study of medieval lexicon and, therefore, complicate their exact description.

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