

REVIEWS AND BOOK ANNOUNCEMENTS

Fredericka van der Lubbe

Martin Aedler and the 'High Dutch Minerva'. The First German Grammar for the English. Frankfurt: Lang, 2007, 312 pp.

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The “first German grammar for the English”, i.e. written in the English language, has had a curious fate. When it appeared in 1680, it was the only book of its kind on the market. There was one reprint in 1685. But this unique position lasted for only one year. Heinrich Offelen’s so-called double-grammar for the learners of English in Germany and German in England appeared in 1686/1687. Reviews by Johann Christoph Gottsched in 1733 and 1736 and by Johann Christoph Adelung in 1784 show that Aedler was known in Germany at least by experts, among them Theodor Arnold, the successful author of English grammars for Germans. The book then disappeared from sight, except in treatments of a very general (pedagogic) kind. In his comprehensive study of the history of Germans living in England, Karl Heinrich Schaible (1885) devoted just one page to the book, mentioning that it was generally unknown and “in keinem Catalog und nicht einmal im Britischen Museum zu finden”. Today’s great conspectuses of foreign language teaching like Caravolas (1974: 116) or Glück (2002: 334) make only passing mention of the author and the book before going on to discuss Offelen’s more successful work. One exception, however, is the study by Blamires (1990). My own interest in Aedler (Hüllen 1996) was stimulated by the *Wolfenbütteler Bibliotheksinformationen* 1995 with their announcement that a copy of the *High Dutch Minerva* had been obtained, the only one outside the United Kingdom and the US. The general neglect of the book was underpinned by the fact that the author’s name was assumed to be pseudonymous (or just fantasy). *Qua* person he was unknown. No other work from his pen could be found. The sum total of almost 330 years of historiography on the matter is therefore: There was a book which hardly anybody knew (and knows) and which occupied a unique place in the history of teaching German as a foreign language in England, although it was not at all successful.

Fredericka van der Lubbe, lecturer in European Studies at the University of Sydney, has now rectified this situation, and she has done so with great success. Hers is a comprehensive and highly complex study which has been in preparation over many years (– there are 26 European and American libraries which she mentions as having helped her –) and which leaves hardly any wish or question unanswered. In the third chapter of her book, Van der Lubbe identifies Martin Aedler as having been born, probably in Jena, in 1643. He obviously studied at the university there. In the course of a theological training, he learnt the three holy languages, and beyond that also Arabic, Aramaic, Coptic, Samaritan, Syriac, and Ethiopic. His book shows his acquaintance furthermore with Dutch, French, and Italian. Moreover, he quotes Gothic and Old English as well as Persian and Turkish. He was a member of the *Deutschgesinnte*

Genossenschaft, one of the linguistic societies which planned the development and promulgation of German as a national language, founded in 1642-1643. In 1677 he went to England, where he was to remain for the rest of his life, although he may not initially have planned to do so. He had the *High Dutch Minerva* printed “for the author”, i.e. at his own cost. It was a dreadful financial failure which dogged his subsequent life as a teacher of Hebrew and other Oriental languages in Cambridge. Obviously fettered by an unhappy marriage, he was not able to secure a regular income but lived off the money paid by students who were sent to him by the colleges in order to learn Hebrew. Occasionally he asked the university for extra subventions. Late in his life, he ran into severe difficulties with the authorities because he confessed to being an Ebionite. This means he agreed with the early Jewish Christians who maintained that the Christian religion was a reformed version of the Jewish religion, and that the Muslim religion was a reformed version of Christianity. When he died in 1724, his possessions passed to the overseer of the poor.

Fredericka van der Lubbe puts this unhappy *curriculum vitae* together with its many details, carefully weighing every smallest item of information she could get hold of in the archives and libraries mentioned, disproving all the unfounded guesses that had been made in the past. From there she moves on to the central assumption of her study: The academician and the personality of Martin Aedler were singularly suited to the task of his life, unhappy though it was, in a twofold way – he met all the expectations of the English public concerning German as a foreign language, at the end of the seventeenth century, and he also met all the expectations of the German linguistic societies concerning the grammatical codification and general promulgation of German as a national language. He thus served two masters; his work is “a product of two cultures” (105). Fredericka van der Lubbe explains and exemplifies this central assumption in the subsequent chapter of her book.

A general demand in England for a knowledge of German by merchants and in the general field of ‘modern’ education cannot be excluded. But much more stimulating were the special interests of antiquarians in Old English and the Western Germanic languages, and likewise the special interests of fellows of the Royal Society in German achievements in the field of the natural sciences. Moreover, German theological texts aroused much curiosity. The references to Old English, to the Royal Society and to theological texts in Aedler’s book show its author’s capabilities, and they “are overall strongly suggestive of an appeal to English intellectual society within universities, ecclesiastical circles and intellectual institutions” (117).

The German interest in a grammar for foreigners grew out of the catastrophe of the Thirty Years’ War. It included the need for strengthening and standardization and the wish to preserve the language from foreign, in particular French, influence (120). The *Sprachgesellschaften* included these aims in their programmes and the contemporary linguists did the same in their works. “Aedler’s task, in creating the *High Dutch Minerva*, is to present a model of German to the English which displays a *Kunstsprache*, based in part on the first successful attempt to produce a theoretical grammar, by Schottelius” (144). Thus the similarities between Aedler und Schottelius, which had been noticed earlier (Hüllen 1996), are given a historical foundation.

What remains for the following chapter is a demonstration from the grammar itself of how Martin Aedler went about his task. The divine lineage of German from the pre-Babylonian ideal is shown by the application of a universal grammar model to

this concrete language. Individual deviations are regarded as being systematic (rational), in particular in orthography and in the puristic attitude towards foreign words. There is also a strong bias in favour of the Protestant cause. So the language's capacity for perfectibility is made the driving force of its teachability to English speakers.

The book closes with appendices which give many technical details and which document other, very scarce, sources of Aedler's from his work in Cambridge. It is an almost perfect scholarly work – showing the potential for insights to be gleaned from careful historiographical analyses. Sometimes the author may overstate her case in creating the impression that Aedler's role is a perfect play with its own *historical* sense and forgetting that we speak of an individual whose life was far from making *individual* sense. Very rarely, one misses some relevant literature, in the chapter on the attitude of Germans towards teaching English in their own country, e.g. Schröder (1967). But even so no scholar with an interest in Anglo-German (German-English) relations can work in this field now without studying Fredericka van der Lubbe's book. She proves that important linguistic ideas and academically high-profile books can nevertheless make a poor showing on the market.

References (abbreviated and modernized)

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