

ÓRSI TIBOR

FRENCH LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE IN THE COTTON VERSION  
OF *MANDEVILLE'S TRAVELS*



SEGÉDKÖNYVEK  
A NYELVÉSZET TANULMÁNYOZÁSÁHOZ 57.

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*(Francia nyelvi hatás a „Mandeville utazásai”  
című útleírás angol változatában)*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

a	ante	OHG	Old High German
adj.	adjective	ON	Old Norse
adv.	adverb	ONF	Old Norman French
AF	Anglo-French	OPr.	Old Provençal
AL	Anglo-Latin	OSp.	Old Spanish
AN	Anglo-Norman	P	Paris (Continental) Version
AS	Anglo-Saxon	PDE	Present-Day English
c, c.	circa, century	PDF	Present-Day French
Cat.	Catalan	PDG	Present-Day German
CF	Central French	Pg.	Portuguese
CL	Classical Latin	ppl. a.	participle adjective
C	Cotton Manuscript	prep.	preposition
cp.	compare	refl.	reflexive
D	Defective Version	Pr.	Provençal
E	English	Sp.	Spanish
Eg	Egerton Manuscript	v.	verb
F	French	vbl. n.	verbal noun
IE	Indo-European	vr.	variant reading
It.	Italian	VL	Vulgar Latin
L	Latin	W	Warner's edition of the Insular Version
LL	Late Latin	>	becomes
ME	Middle English	<	derives from
MF	Middle French	*	reconstructed form
ML	Medieval Latin	**	ungrammatical
MS	Manuscript	< >	grapheme
n.	noun	[ ]	phonetic transcription
OE	Old English	//	phoneme
OF	Old French	‘ ’	meaning
(O)F	Old and Modern French		
OIt.	Old Italian		

### A note on quotations:

In page / line quotations the first number stands for the page number, whereas the second indicates the line where the key word examined occurs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present work is to study French lexical influence in the Middle English translation of a fourteenth century French prose work. It is well known that the Norman Conquest created an entirely new linguistic situation in England. We do not wish to discuss all the linguistic effects of the Conquest but fully adhere to Lass (1987: 54–61). Most of our findings are based on the direct analysis of our corpus texts.

The choice of *Mandeville's Travels* is the result of a deliberate search. For our purposes we needed a prose work written in French and translated into English in prose shortly afterwards. As a considerable part of the literature in Old French was produced in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, prose texts are very scarce. Old French prose works like *Mort Artu* or *Queste del Saint Graal* were translated into English either in rhyming couplets or in alliterative verse, and only rarely in prose. This further restricts the number of available texts, which must also meet the criterion of being accessible in a recent critical edition, possibly in both languages. As we will see, only the English edition fulfils this criterion. In the last analysis, *Mandeville's Travels* proved to be a happy choice. It is a work of great importance that survives in hundreds of manuscripts. Due to its encyclopedic character it discusses a variety of topics, which makes it suitable for vocabulary study.

We adopted the traditional philological method. We rely on dictionaries, text editions, language histories, but above all we subject the Cotton Version in Middle English and the Insular Version in Anglo-French to rigorous scrutiny. At the beginning of the discussion of each particular lexical item we quote the two basic manuscripts. Whenever the item examined presents difficulty, we may also include two more manuscripts in our investigation, one in Middle English and one in Middle French. These additional manuscripts are most frequently referred to in the discussion of the most delicate areas: earliest occurrences, unique occurrences, phraseological influence. The parallel quotations are followed by the presentation of the available information on a given word or phrase. These data are then contrasted with the evidence obtained from the Mandeville-texts. A summary concludes the treatment of each individual word or phrase.

Before entering into the detailed discussion of French influence, we devote a chapter to Sir John Mandeville and his *Travels*. We then examine the *Travels* from a linguistic point of view and describe the manuscripts we use. Another chapter discusses the problems that arise in our work. Then we classify the techniques that allowed French words to enter English. Foreign influence is most easily measured by the number of borrowed lexical items. Instead of attempting a proportional breakdown of native and foreign lexis, we prefer to choose particular areas that we discuss in detail. Special emphasis is laid on the earliest occurrences of borrowings from French. A small number of words are recorded in one single attestation in the Cotton Version. A closer look at them may

help our understanding of paths of borrowings that did not prove viable. Some words – especially those denoting geographic concepts – tend to recur with great frequency throughout the book and impart a French flavour to it. One of these terms is the word *isle* often used the sense ‘distant land’. This is by far the most Mandevillian word. We suggest that the name of the French historical province *Île-de-France* can be explained with the use of this word attested in the French original of the *Travels*. However, we also advance a conflicting explanation. The lavish use of learned words is typical of medieval writing. Within that area we examine learned adjective phrases of French origin. The double scales of synonymy in English will be amply illustrated in the Cotton translation, which exploits this stylistic device.

The French-derived English vocabulary of the *Travels* does not coincide exactly with the corresponding French text. The analysis of lexical disagreement views French influence from a new angle. It is difficult to provide irrefutable evidence of French phraseological influence on English. We will make an attempt by studying a selection of examples where that might be supposed. Sample passages will provide examples to illustrate the extent of French lexical influence.

There has arisen a certain amount of special literature on Mandeville. The first monograph was written by Malcolm Letts: *Sir John Mandeville: The Man and his Book* (1949). Letts discusses authorship, retraces and comments the journey and discusses manuscripts and printed editions. Letts also edited the Egerton Version in modernized spelling and the Paris Version in Middle French.

The second monograph on Mandeville is *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* by J. W. Bennett (1954). Bennett tries to establish the identity of the author and treats the reputation and the influence of the *Travels*.

*Le Livre de Jehan de Mandeville: Une « géographie » au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* by Christiane Deluz (1988) is the first monograph on Mandeville in French. Deluz also studies the question of authorship. She reintegrates the *Livre* into medieval geographical literature. She insists that the book is not plagiarism but conscious rewriting.

Higgins adopts a similar approach in *Writing East: The “Travels” of Sir John Mandeville* (1997). Higgins’ general editor R. M. Karras writes in the presentation: “Higgins views Mandeville not as fiction or fraud but merely as an example of the ceaseless rewriting characteristic of medieval text-making.”

The concise treatise by Michael Seymour (1993) on *Sir John Mandeville* is the opening volume of the recent series *Authors of the Middle Ages*. Seymour has published extensively on Mandeville. He has edited four critical editions of various English manuscripts including the Cotton Version we use in the present work.

Giles Milton’s (1997) *The Riddle and the Knight: In Search of Sir John Mandeville* is a travel-writer’s account of his own travels to places Mandeville pretends to have visited.

Letts, Bennett and Deluz focus on the identity of Mandeville, the history of the Mandeville legend, his sources and his influence. Letts, Bennett and Seymour list manuscripts and editions. Letts and Deluz touch upon problems of vocabulary, but this is not their main concern. Deluz discusses geographical vocabulary – through the geographer’s eyes.

There exist two published doctoral dissertations of linguistic interest on Mandeville. One of these two books is devoted entirely to the vocabulary of any of the extant



Mandeville versions in English: R. H. Fife's *Der Wortschatz des englischen Maundeville nach der Versionen der Cottonhandschrift* (Leipzig, 1902). Fife worked from Halliwell's edition of 1839. Halliwell simply reprinted an earlier edition without studying the available manuscripts. Halliwell's edition contains serious defects. Fife lists "etwa 3000" words of the Cotton Manuscript. Each lexical item is briefly explained in German. Corresponding forms are sometimes supplied from the Egerton Manuscript and Warner's French text. Page/line references are provided. This work could be put to practical use as a checklist.

The shortcomings of Fife's dissertation are severely criticized by Osgood (1907: 91–94): "He seems to have worked with no scientific end in view. No deduction is made, no inference drawn, no synthesis nor generalization is attempted. [...] If it is to serve as a word-list only, what need of so many obvious definitions? If it is to be a concordance, the references should be complete..."

The other published thesis on the *Travels* was written by H. J. van der Meer in *Main Fact Concerning the Syntax of Mandeville's Travels* (Utrecht, 1929) based on the Cotton Manuscript.

Ralph Hanna III (1984: 125) draws the attention to unexplored areas of the Mandeville studies: "No scholar has yet undertaken even such basic tasks as Mandeville's propensity to neologisms and gallicisms, habits typifying well-known fourteenth-century translators. [...] The most basic philological tasks have yet to be performed upon the English Versions." The present work hopes to contribute to remedy at least some of these shortcomings.