

Towards a grammar of Middle Cornish

Lauran Toorians

De Fakkell: http://laurantoorians.com/?page_id=128

Version 1.1 - April 2014

Introduction

During the years 1987-1991 I have been working in the department of Comparative Linguistics at Leiden University. My assignment was to write a grammar of Middle Cornish (which was to be my PhD-thesis) and in the mean time I was teaching courses in Middle Welsh, Middle Breton and Middle Cornish. Unfortunately, time and money ran out before the grammar was finished and even though I continued the work during the following two years, the grammar – and so the thesis – remained unfinished.

As other assignments occupied me and my interest in Celtic studies shifted away from Cornish grammar, the unfinished grammar remained untouched for many years. This only changed when I was invited as guest-professor for Celtic Studies to Vienna (Winter 2003/2004) where I taught a course in Middle Cornish which inspired me to at least brush up the material I had.

On various occasions it has been suggested to me to hand in the work as it stands and to get my doctorate, but two reasons withheld me: 1. The idea that I had done only half the job; and 2. The notion that a published, incomplete grammar would not easily be taken up by others to be completed. Having a website of my own allows me to find at least a partial solution to this latter problem. By publishing my material on this site it becomes available to all interested. Thus the material was first published on the internet in February 2011. When I moved the website to another url this seemed like a good moment to correct some remaining typing errors as well as to slightly brush up the general presentation and so the version found here is designated 'Version 1.1 - April 2014'.

I would appreciate if reference is made to myself and to this website when using this material in any publication, but for the rest: please feel free to use (and, if possible, finish) this partial grammar of Middle Cornish. Please refer to this work as: Luran Toorians, Towards a Grammar of Middle Cornish; lurantoorians.com/?page_id=128 Further references can be made to chapter and paragraph numbers.

Over the years many people have been helping and supporting me to get this work as far as it got (and further, I must say; I was frequently urged in a most sympathetic way to get the thing finished or at least to get my PhD). First and foremost these are prof.dr Robert S.P. Beekes, prof.dr Frederick (Frits) Kortlandt and dr Kenneth George who supervised my work from the start. Each in their own way they have been great teachers and stimulating friends and I am very grateful to them. Then there are my friends, (fellow) students and colleagues in the department of Comparative Linguistics and those in the field of Celtic studies in general and in Cornish studies in particular. The latter field is extremely small.

Andrew Hawke kindly allowed me to use his digitised text files (something quite new and advanced in 1987!), freely shared his knowledge and provided me with a photocopy of Whitley Stokes' own copy – with handwritten notes and additions – of his edition of 'Pascon agan Arluth'. He also helped me to obtain a copy of the MA-thesis by Mark I. Herniman, 'Pascon agan Arluth. A critical study of the Cornish Passion Poem' (Exeter 1984; an edition of the text which would still merit publication).

Ken George gave me all the help and support he could give and kept a close eye on my advances in a most friendly manner, and Oliver Padel was helpful and supportive

in the background. Many thanks to all of you, as well as to all those not mentioned by name but knowing they are in my heart and mind right now.

A special thanks goes to prof.dr Helmut Birkhan who invited me to Vienna and thus inspired me to look at the grammar of Middle Cornish after a period of neglect of nearly a decade.

Of course all this gratitude leaves unchanged that I alone am responsible for the contents of this work, for the mistakes in it and for the fact that remained unfinished.

Below are links to the pdf-files comprising the chapters of the grammar. My description of the phonology of Middle Cornish is based mainly on the doctoral thesis by Ken George (as stated in the introductory paragraph). All the other chapters are based only on the Middle Cornish texts themselves and it is here that the grammar is incomplete. Only about half of the corpus has been worked through, so that the material from the Charter Endorsement, The Passion Poem and Origo Mundi can be found here. The work stopped somewhere halfway the second play of the Ordinalia (Passio Domini). Since all this work was done well before the discovery of the text now known as Bewnans Ke (edited by Graham Thomas & Nicholas Williams, Exeter 2007) no reference is made to this text at all. For the same reason no reference is made to Nicholas Williams' important work *Cornish Today. An examination of the revived language* (Kernewek dre Lyther 1995) or to the subsequent discussions about the phonology and orthography of revived Cornish (in its many manifestations), nor to his chapter on Cornish in Elmar Ternes (ed), *Brythonic Celtic - Britannisches Keltisch. From Medieval British to Modern Breton*. Münchner Forschungen zur historischen Sprachwissenschaft 11 (Bremen 2011). Yet another important work not used here, and for the same reason, is Talat Chaudhri's thesis 'Studies in the Consonantal System of Cornish' available via cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace

For the first play of the Ordinalia, Origo Mundi, ample use was made of the edition by Phyllis Pier Harris, Origo Mundi. First Play of the Cornish Mystery Cycle The Ordinalia. A new edition. PhD-thesis Washington 1964.

Of course I did also make use of the invaluable work by scholars working before me, including Henry Jenner, R. Morton Nance, A.S.D. Smith (Caradar), E.G.R. Hooper (Talek), Wella Brown and Graham Sandercock and others working for the revival of the Cornish language. I did however deliberately not attempt to actively learn Modern Cornish and used their work foremost to come to a clear understanding of the (contents of the) texts while at the same time trying to avoid to project modern constructs back into Middle Cornish itself.

Added below are also three documents which served as hand-out while teaching Middle Cornish and which may be helpful to get a quick introduction. My article on Pascon agan Arluth (in Dutch) served partly as a test to see if my understanding of the phonology was realistic and if the phonological transcription was workable. This article can now be accessed at fleursdumal.nl/mag/lauran-toorians-passie-lief-en-leed

Lauran Toorians

Loon op Zand, February 2011 / April 2014