MEDIEVAL HERBAL REMEDIES

The *Old English Herbarium* and Early-Medieval Medicine

ANNE VAN ARSDALL
Illustrated by Robby Poore

Second Edition

ROUTLEDGE

MEDIEVAL HERBAL REMEDIES

Featured here is a modern translation of a medieval herbal, with a study showing how this technical treatise on herbs was turned into a literary curiosity in the nineteenth century. The contours of this second edition replicate the first; however, it has been revised and updated throughout to reflect new scholarship and new findings. New information is presented on Oswald Cockayne, the nineteenth-century philologist who first translated the Old English medical texts for the modern world.

Here the medieval text is read as an example of technical writing (i.e., intended to convey instructions/information), not as literature. The audience it was originally aimed at would know how to diagnose and treat medical conditions and knew or was learning how to follow its instructions. For that reason, while working on the translation, specialists in relevant fields were asked to shed light on its terse wording, for example, herbalists and physicians. Unlike many current studies, this work discusses the *Herbarium* and other medical texts in Old English as part of a tradition developed throughout early-medieval Europe associated with monasteries and their libraries.

The book is intended for scholars in cross-cultural fields; that is, with roots in one field and branches in several, such as nineteenth-century or medieval studies, for historians of herbalism, medicine, pharmacy, botany, and of the Western Middle Ages, broadly and inclusively defined, and for readers interested in the history of herbalism and medicine.

Anne Van Arsdall, Ph.D. (ret.) Publications include papers, book chapters; and (ed.) *Herbs and Healers from the Ancient Mediterranean through the Medieval West* (2012) and *The Old French Chronicle of Morea* (2015), a translation of a crusade chronicle set in Greece.

Praise for the second edition

"I was delighted to see a revised edition of Anne Van Arsdall's *Medieval Herbal Remedies*. For two decades, her book has served as an example of how to make medieval herbalism accessible to readers beyond just specialists in the field, through a much-needed modern translation of the *Old English Herbarium*, a study of the nineteenth-century antiquarian Oswald Cockayne and his own, curious 1864 translation of the *Herbarium*, and a fascinating comparison of early medieval herbalists to modern folk-healers. A welcome update to this edition is Van Arsdall's placement of the *Old English Herbarium* in a broader European context, as an heir to Galenic, monastic, and vernacular medical traditions."

Winston Black, *St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia*

"In the nineteenth century T. Oswald Cockayne introduced Old English medical texts to the modern world. In her 2002 edition Anne Van Arsdall reintroduced Cockayne and his work to the twenty-first century. Now, a valuable second edition dramatically expands the story of the man whose tragic life reads like a 'bittersweet Victorian novel' and whose scholarly work has gone largely unrecognized. More, it dramatically re-envisions the Old English medical texts Cockayne valued only for the vocabulary they contributed to the Old English lexicon. By resituating them, not in an 'Anglo-Saxon' context, but in the larger early medieval European tradition and by reading them as technical medical texts based on herbalism, Van Arsdall charts a promising new path for the study of *The Old English Herbarium* and its textual kin."

Dabney A. Bankert, *Professor Emerita of Medieval Literature, James Madison University*

"This significantly revised text offers a thought-provoking introduction to medieval medicine through the Old English *Herbarium*. Van Arsdall vividly shows how early medical texts were long thought to be of little value except for studying Germanic philology or folklore. The substantial introductory chapters and notes to the translation presented here show how we need to rethink such texts as technical literature – and indeed a literature that grew out of rich cultures of medical knowledge and practice across Christendom rather than just among the English. The crisp translation of the *Herbarium* makes this fascinating and complex world of learning further accessible. *Medieval Herbal Remedies* will be a valuable resource for teaching new histories of premodern medicine and encouraging new research in the field."

James T. Palmer, *Professor of History, University of St Andrews*

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Anne Van Arsdall

Illustrated by Robby Poore

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To Jay, for patiently keeping the boat on an even keel

Disclaimer

Neither the author nor the publisher recommends or advises using any of the remedies provided in this book. Instead, we advise considering them as historical documents. Please consult a medical professional for relief from medical conditions.

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FOREWORD

It is a curious situation when a medieval text stands twice in need of rescue if it is to be understood and valued by modern readers, but that is the case for the *Old English Herbarium*. This medical and botanical treatise, written in the language of the Anglo-Saxons at the end of the first millennium, requires an accurate and lucid translation if it is to be used by those who value knowledge of the science and healing arts in an earlier era. Happily, Anne Van Arsdall has produced for this volume such a skilled and readable translation, based on the 1984 De Vriend edition.

Van Arsdall has, however, provided us with more than a useful translation from the Old English. She also has made clear why the *Herbarium* has been for more than a century neglected at best and misunderstood at worst, for the work has been available to those lacking specialized expertise in Old English only through the strange but influential 1864 translation and commentary by the Rev. T. Oswald Cockayne. Van Arsdall has rescued this text not only from the barriers presented to modern readers by Old English but also from the obfuscations and confusions of Cockayne's translation in his *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*, the only modern English version available until the twenty-first century. In the process she has brought to light striking information about the sad life and death of this Victorian London schoolmaster. Cockayne's story calls to mind the sufferings of Dickens' fictional world as well as the intellectual milieu depicted in K.M. Elisabeth Murray's *Caught in the Web of Words* and Simon Winchester's *The Professor and the Madman*.

Although Van Arsdall's careful and vigorous translation of the Old English *Herbarium* and the strange story of Cockayne are reasons enough to value this book, her study makes other significant contributions. She sets this Anglo-Saxon work in an early-medieval medical context, and she clarifies its uses with recourse to contemporary practice of herbal medicine in Hispanic America that derives from medieval Europe.

The *Herbarium*, attributed wrongly to Apuleius Platonicus, was one of a number of Old English texts—occupying some thousand manuscript pages—that mark the first flowering of vernacular medical writing in medieval Europe. It is an expanded version of a late Roman treatise that survives in Old English in four manuscripts, one of them strikingly illustrated (British Library Cotton MS, Vitellius C. iii). This text is by no means a mindless translation of Mediterranean herbal remedies; rather it displays practical knowledge of plants widely available in Anglo-Saxon England through cultivation and import. Van Arsdall adds to our understanding of the uses of this text by drawing on present-day *curandera* practices in the south western United States. She makes a cogent argument that texts like the Old English *Herbarium* served as aide-mémoire for the apprenticeship system that trains traditional healers.

This volume provides insight into the origin and uses of this remedy book of some 185 plants. It also explains its vexed reception since Cockayne's mid-nineteenth-century translation, situates the *Old English Herbarium* in the context of living traditions of healing, and allows the reader to encounter it directly in a clear and graceful translation.

Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 2002

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I thank my family for support and love through it all, and for the humor that keeps me from taking myself too seriously. Special acknowledgment to my brothers Clyde and Bob, my sisters-in-law Sybil and Inez, my sons Robby and Jonathan, and daughters-in-law Lynne and Stacy; and last but not least, Mephisto, for your long

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Summer 2022

INTRODUCTION

This book began as a translation and study of the *Old English Herbarium*, an early-medieval herbal containing 185 medicinal herbs and terse instructions on their use. Almost immediately, however, the study began to morph into something larger. Naturally, I first consulted the only existing translation of the work, which was by a British minister named Oswald Cockayne. In the mid-nineteenth century, he had in fact translated and annotated all the Old English medical texts in a three-volume set he titled *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*. As I unearthed more and more about this largely overlooked scholar and his voluminous undertakings, I began to see him as the epitome of an outsider in academia, the everyman in a community with unwritten but ironclad rules concerning the hierarchy of its members.

For that reason, when *Medieval Herbal Remedies* first appeared in 2002, I could not let Cockayne's life go. As much as space allows, decades of additional research are included in Chapter 1 of this new edition. His story becomes ever more poignant: his name is seldom mentioned in studies of nineteenth-century philology; his works exist on the margins of early English studies and many of his handwritten transcriptions are unpublished; many of his literary remains have long lain unnoticed, mixed with the papers of W.W. Skeat, a much more famous scholar; and he lies buried in an unmarked grave, deemed a suicide.

In addition, as I began to work on the translation intended to replace Cockayne's and to look into medieval herbals and the medicine they represent, I found that most studies said such works were impossible to follow and medically useless. It was a verdict Cockayne himself promoted. Yet everywhere around me in New Mexico, where I lived at the time, were living traditions of herbalism, both in the Latino community and as alternative practices, some of them with similarly imprecise texts. As a non-practitioner, I began to study Latino *curanderismo* and medical herbalism, and a new door to understanding the medieval texts seemed to be opening,

as I mention in the first edition. In this update, I also include added insight that members of the Herbal History Research Network have given me about modern medical herbalism and its ancient roots. That insight, coupled with my experience as a science writer, led me to understand medieval medical texts as technical writings, which by necessity have both written and unwritten (explicit and tacit) components. This too is folded into Chapters 2 and 3.

This second edition, as its updated title implies, turns from a somewhat "Anglo-Saxon" focus to a broader and more inclusive understanding of these texts in the early-medieval world, a period now largely decoupled from the fall of Rome. The *Herbarium* is removed from a primarily secular Anglo-Saxon context and situated within in a medical tradition that developed throughout Western Europe from about 500–1000 CE. In almost all histories in languages other than English, this tradition has long been explained as created and spread by the Benedictine Order. It was an ill-defined system of medicine and texts, existing during a long period of political turmoil, without formal schools, using a miscellany of information taken from books carefully salvaged from libraries, whose practitioners are virtually unknown; yet one with a spirit of invention and purpose.

The contours of the book remain the same as before, beginning with a chapter about the Rev. Oswald Cockayne (1807–73), who introduced the medical works of early-medieval England to the modern world. His editions and translations of Old English medical manuscripts appeared in print between 1864 and 1866 under the fanciful title he gave them. His main interest in them was philological; he thought their contents were useless in terms of medicine. Knowing who he was and what else he studied and published helps in understanding, perhaps forgiving, Cockayne's bias toward the system of healing he was turning into literary nonsense. He was a man with the best intentions—and outsized ambitions—inside a circle of famous nineteenth-century British scholars, such as Henry Sweet and W.W. Skeat. Cockayne never achieved the fame he craved and his life's story is the stuff of a bittersweet Victorian novel. The revision adds a great deal of new information about his life and aspirations, his publications, philological interests, and it includes the final report about the circumstances of his death.

Chapter 2 discusses several modern misconceptions about medieval medicine and magic that can be linked to the *Leechdoms*, which should be considered transformations more than translations. The transformations resulted from Cockayne's arcane style of language, his biased evaluations of the medical practice of early-medieval England, and his out-of-date and often prejudicial historical viewpoints. Modern translation theory and studies of nineteenth-century philology help explain how the biases of his time slipped into many aspects of his translations and the notes to them, resulting in the healing practices of early Europe being portrayed as ludicrous. For many years, these were the only translations of medieval medical texts that were readily available. The chapter touches on recent upheavals in the field of early-medieval English studies (earlier Anglo-Saxon studies), suggesting that the changes promise to affect in a very positive manner future research on the Old English medical texts.

The third chapter focuses on why/how the *Old English Herbarium* was created and how it might have been used. Appeals to the long-lived *curandero* tradition and to modern medical herbalism shape the approach this chapter takes in weighing how these texts might have figured in the practice of healing. The study takes the *Herbarium* out of its customary "Anglo-Saxon" context and situates it in the broader pool of European texts from which it derives, notably *Rezeptliteratur*. It is a herbal with several sources; it was created in a world within or affected by Benedictine monasteries in the West. Moreover here, it is discussed as an example of technical, not literary writing. As such, it requires knowledge appropriate to its subject matter to supplement existing historical and philological studies concerning its contents. The chapter briefly touches on whether its medieval remedies actually "work."

The fourth chapter provides details about the *Old English Herbarium*, including the manuscripts in which it is found, their dates, the existing and planned modern editions, and studies of the one illustrated manuscript in which the medicinal plants are depicted. Two other vernacular medical texts from the same period are mentioned, with a discussion of their dating and relationship to each other and to the *Herbarium*. Briefly discussed is who the users might have been and how the text figured into medical treatment and knowledge transmission. The chapter underscores the need for alternatives to Oswald Cockayne's nineteenth-century translation.

The final chapter is a modern English translation of the *Old English Herbarium*. Like the Old English original and unlike Cockayne's version, it uses plain English for what could be called a first-aid manual, a reference for a practicing medieval herbalist/healer who already was familiar with medicinal plants, and how to make medications, to diagnose and treat common conditions. It contains 185 medicinal plants, many of which are still used, brief notes about the conditions each one benefits, and equally brief instructions on preparing and administering them. This is a revised and corrected version of the translation found in the first edition, the major changes outlined in a section of notes preceding it. Original drawings mimic some of the plant and snake illustrations in one early manuscript containing the *Herbarium*, emphasizing the centrality of living plants to this healing tradition. The snakes are quick markers for treating any kinds of conditions caused by poisonous bites or beverages.

About the illustrations: Through the many centuries of the late classical and medieval periods, it was traditional for manuscript illustrators to base their renditions of plant, animal, and other figures on earlier works. We continue this ancient tradition here. With the facsimile edition of the *Old English Herbarium* by D'Aronco and Cameron on a drafting table beside him, artist Robby Poore (manager at UNC Creative, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill) took up the challenge of making original drawings of 30 plants from the *Herbarium* and a representative snake and scorpion to accompany this translation. We hope the anonymous compilers and illustrators of yore will smile on our work.

1

OSWALD COCKAYNE

The scholar whose long shadow hangs over medieval medicine

In a listing of nineteenth-century British philologists by importance, somewhere toward the end, but certainly present, would be the Rev. Oswald Cockayne (1807–73). Cockayne was the first person to transcribe and translate all the major Old English medical manuscripts, and they appeared in three volumes between 1864 and 1866 titled *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*.[1] This is now virtually the only work for which he is known.

His *Leechdoms* came out in the Rolls Series, a government enterprise established to preserve the earliest writings of Great Britain. Cockayne's subtitle outlines the contents: "A Collection of Documents, for the Most Part Never Before Printed, Illustrating the History of Science in this Country Before the Norman Conquest." These three volumes are unusual in the series because of their subject matter; nearly all others are histories or literary works.

Cockayne found Old English medical works in manuscripts from the period around 1000 CE, naming them the *Old English Herbarium* (a herbal featuring medicinal plants), *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* (medicines using animal parts), *Bald's Leechbook* (a physician's manual), and *Lacnunga* (remedies, charms, etc.).[2] Thanks to him, these important early-medieval texts on healing were rediscovered and their unique vocabulary added to the Old English dictionaries being compiled in the nineteenth century.[3] Knowing the details of his life, his profession, and the scholarly milieu to which he belonged is important to understanding, perhaps forgiving, the legacy he left behind in the history of medicine and pharmacy. That legacy included slipping the negative biases of his time into the words he chose for his translations and into his notes about the native healing practices of early Europe. He was a man with the best intentions—and outsized ambitions—inside a circle of more famous British scholars. Cockayne never achieved the fame he craved and his life is the stuff of a bittersweet Victorian novel.

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A poor curate's son makes good

On January 20, 1809, the Rev. John Cockin, curate of St. John the Baptist Anglican Church, Keynsham, baptized his first child, Thomas Oswald. By 1825, he would baptize nine more of his own offspring and bury one.[4] A small town in Somerset between Bristol and Bath, Keynsham is described as being quite poor in the first quarter of the nineteenth century when Cockin was ministering to a dwindling flock.[5] In 1824, son Oswald won a scholarship to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he had a stellar career and earned a bachelor's degree in 1828. While at university, he changed the spelling of his last name to Cockayne, the reasons rumored to be a rift with the father.[6] As an adult, he seldom if ever used his first name and always signed himself "Oswald Cockayne."

Like many university men of the time, he turned to his church for a living. Attending seminary or divinity school prior to ordination in the Church of England was not a requirement then, only a university degree. Bishops would review the records and personal information of prospective clergy and then invest them, first as deacons, then priests, or higher. Cockayne was ordained a deacon and returned to Keynsham in 1833 as curate of his baptismal church. On October 10, 1834, he became a priest and four days later married Janetta, daughter of Roger Edwards, the town's surgeon.[7] On November 6 a year later, Cockayne baptized their daughter, Florence Louisa. By now, in addition to his church duties, he was also teaching and the family was living at Tucker's Academy. (It closed soon after he left it, and the property was auctioned in May 1837.[8])

Cockayne soon managed to rescue himself from his father's path as a poor curate in a poor town. In January 1837, he beat out 43 competitors for a position as assistant schoolmaster at King's College School in London, requiring him to leave Keynsham and begin teaching that spring. Janetta, Florence Louisa, and their infant daughter Alice Eden remained behind and lived with Janetta's father; in fact, the census of 1841 shows mother and daughters still in Keynsham.

Now part of the University of London, King's College has massive stone walls that enclose a cavernous basement area, now divided into a warren of subterranean hallways and rooms. King's College School, a junior school for boys, was housed here before it moved to Wimbledon in southwest London in May 1897. The Thames is to its south, the Strand to the north, and Strand Lane to the east. From the spring of 1837 until November 1869, Cockayne taught Latin and Greek here six days a week.

Sabine Baring-Gould (1834–1924), cleric, folklorist, and prolific author who attended the school for two years (1844–46) when Cockayne was there, wrote about his alma mater:

> A more depressing set of buildings could hardly have been contrived. The College and School form the east wing of Somerset House, and were built by Smirke in 1828, fossilized ugliness. We had to descend stone stairs and pass through an iron gate in which the gas was always burning. The windows,

> however, did look out onto the hard paved play yard, surrounded by high stone walls, in which not a blade of grass showed, and not a leaf quivered in the air. The place exercised a depressing effect upon the spirits, and the boys in the playground appeared destitute of buoyancy of life, crushed by the subterranean nature of the school and the appalling ugliness of the buildings.[9]

In their history of the school, authors Frank Miles and Graeme Cranch say that pupils regularly broke out windows of neighboring houses and went wandering into the nearby theater district, which was infamous for its loose morals. In fact, one of the school's neighbors was a bordello, and the occupants could beckon when the 400 or so boys were on the school's playground. The area around the school was dimly lit, crowded, and noisy. Dickens was describing the London to which it belonged at this very time, and in fact his eldest son, Charley, went to King's College School for one term; he left because of a serious attack of scarlet fever.

Cockayne's first 20 years in London receive scant attention in his biographies, as do the publications from that time.[10] However, these were busy years: he was a prolific writer of books for the general public and scholar of Greek philology, all the while teaching. Beginning in 1847, he is to be found living at 11 Howland Street with his wife, daughters, and three boarders.[11]

He began to write books for popular consumption as early as 1838 when, newly arrived in London, he contacted the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).[12] Begun in 1698 as a missionary arm of the Church of England, the society brought Christian education to the poor in England, founding schools and training teachers for that purpose. To further its ends, the society published books that met strict suitability criteria; they were inexpensive, widely available, and on a range of topics. Handwritten SPCK ledgers at Cambridge University Library first mention "… the Rev'd Mr Cockayne as a Gentleman well qualified to afford some assistance in the preparation or examination of works" on March 3, 1838.[13]

A nearly 15-year publication relationship ensued, one more slanted toward financial gain for the society than for the author. The society paid lump sums for works it published, then kept the copyright to them.[14] Cockayne earned on average about £20 per book, a nice addition to his salary from the school (despite the fact that the school strictly forbade its masters taking on any outside work, according to Miles and Cranch). Early on, he negotiated a contract for four classbooks; readers filled with instructive stories and poems from various named sources.[15] All four saw several revisions and reprintings, in years afterward. He was paid to prepare the changes, generally £15; revisions were an on-going responsibility for years.

During the 1840s and 1850s, he proposed several more books, some of whose fate, and even authorship, is hard to determine anywhere outside the often terse SPCK committee minutes. For example, Cockayne submitted the manuscript for a book named *Margaret Trevors* to the committee on December 20, 1839, and it was approved April 3, 1840 (SPCK.MS A15/3). The minutes show the book's being sent out for printing then for reprinting, but few copies are now to be found.

Curiously, the one archived copy I located lists Jane Alice Sargant as the author; however, no name appears on the title page, just as with *Short Stories from English History*, discussed below.[16] Equally odd and nowhere to be found is *The Widow Gray* of 1846 for which he was paid £2:2; see the Council Minutes for December 4, 1846 (SPCK.MS A15/3).

Previous biographies (mine in 2002 included) have failed to identify what was certainly one of his most widely sold and long-lived SPCK books: *Short Stories Founded on English History*, 1844 ff. The small book with its winsome etchings was often reprinted with various configurations of stories, but generally without an author's name.[17] Cambridge University Library holds several copies, and its catalog attributes it to Cockayne. I found "TO Cockayne" penciled inside the cover or on several of the title pages; however, in 2004 the library could not readily explain why the name had been added. Fortunately, SPCK committee minutes prove that Cockayne is indeed the author.[18] The ledger for February 20, 1846 (Cambridge A15/3) shows: "'Short Stories from English History' (forwarded by Rev'd O Cockayne). No. 1 to VI to be set up and sent round." On May 1, it was ordered for publication and on October 16, Cockayne submitted a second series of short stories for consideration. That too was approved on November 20 and a check for £20 signed over to him for it.[19]

Even absent the ledger entries, autobiographical details tie *Short Stories* emphatically to Cockayne. In a frame story, a beloved aunt relates stories about English history to a group of well-mannered children who live in Backwell, a town in Western England a few miles from his home town of Keynsham. They are Alice, Florence, George, and Edward, the names of Cockayne's daughters and two of his recently deceased brothers.[20] The aunt's name is Louisa, surely after Cockayne's own mother. The stories are unique among Cockayne's publications because of the personal family details they reveal and their conversational style. Whether his wife and/or daughters played some role in creating this work as well as the other short-story histories, so different from his other publications, is a possibility to consider.

In addition to the SPCK books and numerous scholarly papers he wrote for the *Philological Society*, Cockayne authored a number of books for the general public that could be generally characterized as educational histories. He wrote a *Civil History of the Jews*, printed in 1841, which became a best seller for several years. In many ways it is a lively travelog to the Holy Land, with a detailed account of Jewish history, tracing the Jews in their wanderings and enslavements to creating a nation, to their near-final destruction by the Romans between 133 and 136 CE. Cockayne describes Old Testament stories and places vividly, with firm faith that they happened as described and that the miracles in them can be explained and precisely dated. He provides a list of dates at the end of the book, beginning with the Creation in 4138 BC. He often cites Roman historian Josephus and a "Mr Clinton's Fasti," which were *Fasti Hellenici* and *Fasti Romani* by Henry Fynes Clinton; popular histories that appeared during Cockayne's lifetime. In addition, he wrote a *History of France* (1848; rev. ed. 1850), *History of Ireland for Families and Schools* (1851), and a

Life of Marshal Turenne (1853; repr. 1856, 1857). Raises were extremely rare at King's College School; schoolmasters depended on per-student stipends (capitation fees), taking in boarders, and the like, so the additional income from his publications may well have been essential to Cockayne and his family.

New interests, new directions, new aspirations

Perhaps weary of producing so many books for relatively little pay, during the 1850s his contributions to the SPCK gradually dwindled, finally ceased. The 1861 UK census shows Cockayne, his wife and daughters, as many as seven boarders, and servants living in a large townhouse at 17 Montague St., near Russell Square, around the corner from the British Museum and its well-known reading room.[21] However, by that year he was no longer attending meetings of the Philological Society, which he had joined soon after its founding in the early 1840s and which he had chaired several times.[22] From the outset, the society had fostered scholarly papers on classical philology and on newer comparative studies of language. For some 15 years, Cockayne had remained with the classical, as the titles of his papers demonstrate.

Yet as detailed below, Cockayne's post-1860 publications show that he had been extremely busy for quite some time with very different kinds of studies. This personal change in focus mirrors changes within the Philological Society itself, from a preference for classical subjects to greater enthusiasm for Germanic languages, older forms of English, and exploring new concepts of what constituted philology. Members of the society fit into a large, diverse group of scholars in England who were at this time shaping "… the new philology of the 'long' nineteenth century, spanning roughly 1775 to 1925."[23] Few of them were university professors, though most of them had masters degrees from Oxford or Cambridge, many like Cockayne were ordained, and they worked in a variety of professional fields.

New linguistic studies, in particular those coming out of Germany, had been suggesting that ancient Sanskrit underlay and linked not only Latin and Greek, but even Germanic and Slavic languages. With this came the realization that a vast number of languages throughout the world—and by implication their speakers—were ultimately related, raising fundamental cultural and religious issues. Many Western Colonial nations, England certainly a major one, held biases about local populations in their colonies, and it adversely influenced how they esteemed local languages and culture. To say the Westerners looked down upon native civilizations and history would be mild. This background is important to consider, because the new philology was part of a complex story fraught with implications for understanding the thinking of the time.[24] It was not restricted to philology.

In addition, biblical literalism prevailed in the Christian West and it hindered clear-eyed language study, particularly for clerical philologists like Cockayne. One major concern was ascertaining the language Adam spoke (the date of his creation had already been precisely determined), and then ascertaining how and when the Tower of Babel account fit into the new concept of language change. Such

undertakings were also affected by undercurrents of racial bias in the West.[25] These were pre-Darwin years, when fossil finds and geological strata posed enormous intellectual challenges to biblical literalism, which the new philology tended to raise as well.

First publications on Germanic philology

Cockayne's publications show that by 1861, he had clearly abandoned classical pursuits and was engaged in the new philology. In that connection, he was mastering a generally unknown language he liked to call "Saxon English," which had evolved across former Celtic Britain beginning around 450 AD out of dialects spoken by invading Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. Separate studies were developing at this time in several European countries as well concerning the evolution of the various languages of Europe. Particularly in Germany and England, the studies prompted a small number of dedicated individuals (primarily men) to seek out and transcribe manuscripts written in this early form of English. Based on these manuscripts, they wrote grammar books and dictionaries for a language they named Saxon or Gothic English, and finally and most lasting, simply Anglo Saxon.

Cockayne was among those dedicated philologists and he was not alone in veering away from the classics and toward what he called the "harsher climes." Being at Cambridge in the 1830s, his long-term position in a school closely associated with language professors at King's College, and membership in the Philological Society since the early 1840s placed him personally close to major players in language and philology, as well as to those who would soon shape early-English studies.[26]

In 1861, Cockayne published two works whose contents were based on "skin books" as he called medieval manuscripts. *Narratiunculae Anglice Conscriptae: De Pergamenis Exscribebat Notis Illustrabat Eruditis Copiam* (London: JR Smith) is a collection of short pieces he transcribed from several Old English manuscripts, one of them on a medical topic.[27] That same year his second book appeared, titled *Spoon and Sparrow, ΣΠΕΝΔΕΙΝ AND ΨΑΡ, FUNDERE and PASSER; or, English Roots in the Greek, Latin, and Hebrew*.[28] The book was obviously intended to be a major contribution to linguistics and philology, drawn as it was from numerous languages. It consists of 1,000 paragraphs filled with dense explanations for affinities and changes among languages rather than anything resembling a method. A typical exposition follows:

> Some instinctive tests exist by which to discriminate between borrowed words and true parallels. Thus compounds can hardly be accepted [as true parallels?] … Affromative letters added to the visible root afford a strong ground of suspicion. Yet I would say 'instinctive tests' rather than rules, for it is not reasonable to suppose but that old roots had acquired some affromative letters while still some of the kindred nations were undivided from each other.
>
> *Spoon*, 7

> One or two principles may seem here sometimes to be tacitly assumed without proof; one is, that in the same syllables, or more exactly, in varied forms of equivalents, that which retains the greater number of letters is the more ancient …
>
> *Spoon, 8*

Cockayne provides no footnotes, no explanation for the reasons behind his pronouncements, and makes no appeal to any authority but his own judgment. He makes significant use of a somewhat unique approach, which is to "plot" the position of sounds in a syllable. Phonetics provides much of the underlying argument, for which he uses unfamiliar linguistic terms such as "anlaut," "auslaut," "inlaut." No specific phonetic theory is quoted as the source of Cockayne's ideas, but there are parallels with phonetic practices from the late eighteenth century onward.[29]

He often cites words and phrases heard in spoken English that are not to be found in any dictionary, very likely here echoing R.C. Trench's emphasis on the study of words, not etymology or comparative grammar.[30] And this appears to be a major reason Cockayne chose to transcribe and translate Old English medical/herbal texts; in them he was finding vocabulary used in Saxon medicine, pharmacy, and botany. Quite correctly, he thought that many ancient "Gothic" words (i.e., language of the Goths) still remained undiscovered in the manuscripts:

> How many must have been the words that Ælfric never heard, how many that he refused to admit when he did hear them, how many that did not present themselves while compiling a glossary. A small examination of unpublished manuscripts will soon convince any one who can read the language, that the admirable industry of Lye and Manning had not completed the whole task: nor has any one equal to the undertaking yet appeared[31] … Modern lexicon makers are not to be named in the same page as the old heroes of this battle.
>
> *Spoon, 10*

The modern "lexicon maker" to whom Cockayne refers was Joseph Bosworth, whose well-known *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* had appeared in 1838. Like many philologists, Cockayne included, Bosworth was a biblical literalist, at one point stating: "The minute investigation of language is not only important in examining the mental powers, but in bearing its testimony to the truth of Revelation, and in tracing the origin and affinity of nations."[32] Bosworth explained that at Babel, the Lord confused the **pronunciation** of an original language so that people could not understand one another, an explanation Cockayne seems to have at least partially accepted.

Bosworth's *The Origin of the Germanic and Scandinavian Languages* (1836) uses numbered paragraphs, and it was surely no coincidence that Cockayne chose the same format for a book in which the "lexicon makers of old" are taken to task. Obviously, Cockayne expected his book to establish him as a recognized philologist,

like Bosworth. Found in his exposition of Semitic in paragraph 975 is a particularly revealing statement:

> … convinced also that I should best win the confidence of the reader by treating of well-known words and a few of them, I set myself to examine the numerals and some proper names of common occurrence. That I am surprised at the results would be a small thing to say; though they are imperfect and partial, *I trust that they will win the assent of all scholars in Europe: and if so, they cannot fail to lead on to an application of the ordinary principles of philology* in the case of the hebrew, and to bring it more or less within the reach of illustration from other tongues [emphasis added].
>
> *Spoon, 264–5*

Only two contemporary reviews have been found for *Spoon and Sparrow*; one cursory, the other more detailed. The longer one, in *Athenaeum*, says:

> There is much less of general principle and more of detail—indeed, it is almost wholly composed of detailed matters of fact, and may be described as rather containing the raw material of a satisfactory work than a finished production … the volume has too much the air of being a transcription of brief notes from a commonplace-book.[33]

Spoon and Sparrow is now available free through Google Books for all to read (as are almost all of Cockayne's writings). Anyone considering reading it might consider Olender's advice: "The best way to understand them [nineteenth century philologists] is no doubt to take them seriously, to succumb to their spell … rather than to impose a logic alien to their time."[34] The work never sold well; for years he sold it from his home address, together with other lesser known self-published works. Sales ledgers in archives of the printer, Longman's Publishing Co. at Reading University, show that five copies were sold between 1864 and 1874, when his entire remainder was auctioned off for just under £2. It included his Greek Syntax, and some of his "histories," whose titles are not given but are surely those discussed above. Those "histories" sold regularly, were reprinted several times, and obviously added at least a modest amount to his income. (The SPCK volumes and these would have been separately handled.)

Cockayne's *Spoon and Sparrow* now remains on a stack of similar tomes, forgotten or read purely as yet another representative of experimental nineteenth-century philology.[35] He was, however, years ahead of his time in rejecting the term Anglo Saxon (anglosaxon to him), calling it an "uncouth Latinism," which he only used because it had become so established; he preferred using "Saxon English." He often asserted that the earliest Germanic inhabitants of England called themselves and their language "Englisc":

> It is now the custom to talk of Anglo-Saxon, and the term Semi-Saxon has been invented, out of a love of technicality for English between the dates

> 1100 and 1230. Not only, however, was the ancient language English … the whole race of people, whether Angles, Saxons, Jutes, or Friesians, were, when spoken of as one, Angel-cynn, English-kin; and the whole country, wherein they dwelt, from the Grampians to Dover was called England. While on the mainland the name of the Saxons prevailed, it gave way in this island to that of the Angles …[36]

Sadly for Cockayne, the same year these two books came out, he suffered a major personal disappointment. Perhaps bolstered by his publications, Cockayne let his ego affect how he saw his own standing at the school. On June 14, 1861, he asked the Council of King's College to grant him an honorary title, Professor of Comparative Philology. The council turned him down, "… highly as they estimated Mr Cockayne's long and faithful service as one of the Masters at the School."[37] King's College faculty and King's College School faculty were not the same, but the Council oversaw both. Granting such honorific titles would not have been unusual to university faculty. The Council's blunt refusal could be interpreted both as putting Cockayne in his place as a schoolmaster and indirectly censuring him for breaking the school's strict rules prohibiting activities outside teaching.[38]

Attack on Bosworth, lion of Old English scholarship

Despite being turned down for a title he believed he deserved, and perhaps angry as well, in 1863, Cockayne sent a letter to Oxford demanding he be named joint or chief editor of a new *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* Bosworth was then heading up. Cockayne wanted his name on its title page and expected to be well paid for his services. If Oxford did not meet his demands, he threatened to publish a pamphlet outlining its current editor's deficiencies in Old English. (Bosworth had been the Rawlinson Professor of Anglo-Saxon there since 1858.)[39] He even sent Bosworth a draft of the pamphlet. Cockayne received no reply and as a consequence, in 1864 "Dr. Bosworth and His Saxon Dictionary" appeared. It was in a series Cockayne self-published titled *The Shrine, A Collection of Papers on Dry Subjects*.[40] Eleven pages of bitter indictments unfolded, among them the bet that the new dictionary might include philology;

> … it is not comparative philology (filology) nor Bopp nor Pott nor an army of German fanatics in languages, that we want in a Saxon Dictionary.[41] We look for a work that shall reassure young students, that shall shew them their way in old English sentences, that shall convince them that our old tongue was grammatical and that its periods will bear the ordinary tests.
>
> *Shrine, 2*

C.B. Thurston, an Oxford associate, replied in a pamphlet titled "A Few Remarks in Defense of Dr. Bosworth."[42] In it, he said Bosworth heard a Mr. Cockayne was writing a pamphlet against the dictionary and they finally ascertained he was an

under-master at King's College School, London, establishing Cockayne's lowly status vis-à-vis the Oxford Professor. Thurston said he used Bosworth's own notes to reply to each accusation, concluding "It is clear that … his [Cockayne's] Anglo-Saxon studies have not been close, nor minute, nor of long duration, not having commenced before 1855, and perhaps some years later." Thurston claimed the prevailing feature of Cockayne's attack was a depreciation of others and praise of himself.

Cockayne replied in *The Shrine*: "Postscript on Bosworth's Dictionary." "To some private representations, I reply, that in Dr. Bosworth's dictionary I see just the small merit that I admitted; it is no more trustworthy of footing than a Welsh bog." (*Shrine*, 1864, 27). Nothing further happened. Cockayne had taken on a lion of the establishment and did not even merit a personal reply.[43]

His famous pupils, W.W. Skeat and Henry Sweet

As teenagers in high school, well-known philologists Walter William Skeat (1835–1912) and Henry Sweet (1845–1912) were in Cockayne's classics classes at King's College School, separated in time by about ten years. Remarkably coincidental to their being in his classes was Cockayne's interest in early English manuscripts. Yet how much the schoolmaster influenced his pupils' future paths is not easy to establish.

Skeat was in Cockayne's fourth form in the early 1850s; later, in a book of reminiscences, he wrote:

> During part of the time when I was at King's College School, in the Strand, it was my singular fate to have for my class-master the Rev. Oswald Cockayne, well known to students as a careful and excellent Anglo-Saxon scholar, perhaps one of the best of his own date. He was an excellent and painstaking teacher, and it was, I believe, from him that I imbibed the notion of what is known as scholarship. In after life, it was my good fortune to know him personally, and I always experienced from him the greatest kindness and readiness to help. After his death, I acquired some of his books, including his well-known and useful work intitled *Anglo-Saxon Leechdoms*, and some of his carefully executed transcripts. His transcript of Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*, in particular, has often proved useful.[44]

We know too from Skeat that Cockayne had been working on an Anglo-Saxon dictionary:

> At the time of his death, he had actually completed, on clearly written slips, the letters A to E [for a new Anglo-Saxon Dictionary,[45] because he was dissatisfied with Bosworth's]; and these came into my hands with the other papers.
>
> *Pastime, viii–ix*

Here Skeat mentions that he passed along Cockayne's dictionary notes to Professor T. Northcote Toller to use in a supplement to Bosworth, which Skeat called "only a translation of Lye and Manning."

Most biographical sources list Harvard University as the major repository for Cockayne's literary remains.[46] Yet in 1999, while searching there for Cockayne's transcriptions of Old English medical manuscripts, I ascertained that the papers Skeat said had come into his hands were not included in the Harvard collection, nor was material for the *Leechdoms* to be found there. Much later I learned that in 2018, Professor M.J. Toswell had discovered several folders of what she suspected was Cockayne material while looking through boxes of Skeat's papers in the archives of King's College London (KCL). Toswell discusses the discovery in her paper "The Lost Women of Old English Studies."[47] After being Cockayne's student, Skeat remained a friend and colleague. It seems reasonable to think he approached Janetta Cockayne after her husband's death about acquiring some of his papers, and that is how they came into Skeat's hands. (Skeat's family donated a portrait of Cockayne to the UK National Portrait Gallery, where it can be viewed on-line.)

Toswell was investigating women in what she calls "Skeat's atelier," women who transcribed and in several instances translated early works for the famous scholar without receiving any pay or much credit. Recent work by Toswell and other feminist scholars is revealing that such unacknowledged women's help was quite common at the time.[48]

In her paper, Toswell notes that in addition to what were believed to be Cockayne's transcriptions, she found "a very neat hand … small, neat, and pointed—not Cockayne nor Skeat" (note 33). On reading this, I immediately suspected that the hand Toswell had spotted in those transcriptions belonged to Cockayne's wife and/or his daughters. The reason was that in 2004 I had found a ledger in the archives of the British Museum titled "Signature of Readers" showing Cockayne there on November 26 and 27, 1858.[49] His signature did not appear again until 1861, and that on November 20, but a librarian at the museum said that if a person were known to the library, it would not be unusual for them not to sign in. Among the reader's cards for that year was the name Alice Eden Cockayne on October 23, her father as sponsor. She renewed the card for several years more, joined in 1862 by sister Florence, and in 1864 by mother Janetta. In 1865, only Alice and her father had reader's cards and the name Cockayne does not reappear thereafter, but they could have continued to use the library. Cockayne's flurry of publications on Old and early Middle English coincides with the period when Alice, Florence, and Jannetta all had cards. If they helped him, he never openly acknowledged it.

Spurred by Toswell's findings, and with the long COVID epidemic subsiding, in April 2022 I verified in the archives of KCL that many of Cockayne's distinctive notebooks and other papers are indeed mixed in with Skeat's. Identical notebooks are in the collection at Harvard; 8 × 9 ½-in. ruled paper pages sewn in signatures, the covers made of cardboard covered in thin leather. Many of the notebooks are complete but missing covers; however, a number of the signatures exist as separate

entities, unrelated to the materials with which they are stored. It is clear that transcriptions of Aelfric's *Lives of Saints* are prominent in Cockayne's notebooks, as Toswell points out.

Boxes at KCL marked Skeat 4 and 6, which Toswell specifically names in connection with the *Lives of Saints*, suggest in their style of notebook, hands, transcription style, and apparent numbering system in some notebooks that more Cockayne material may in fact be scattered throughout the entire Skeat archives. Transcriptions of manuscripts related to the *Leechdoms* were not found in the boxes I saw, save for one small piece of paper folded in four in box KCL Skeat 4/2/1, though other transcriptions of herbal material are present. Much of what I examined in boxes KCL Skeat 4 and 6 that can be securely identified as being Cockayne's are transcriptions of variety of works in Old and Middle English, in several hands but always in the distinctive notebooks, even more strongly bolstering the theory that Cockayne's womenfolk helped with his work.[50] Of particular interest is a transcript of the botanical folios (13–57) from British Library MS Sloane 5, an important Middle English herbal.[51]

The initials "OC" in his hand appear beside many transcriptions, as though they had been checked off for some reason, and several instructional asides can be found here and there; e.g., "Latin and Saxon letters are mixed, so take care." The Cockayne collection inside the Skeat collection awaits a careful sorting out and evaluation, with the potential to add important information to studies of both men, notably the remarkable number of as yet unacknowledged manuscripts that Cockayne chose to transcribe or have transcribed.

Skeat's acknowledgment that he found Cockayne's transcriptions of Aelfric's saints lives "useful" was tucked away in his 1896 memoir. Cockayne's notebooks in Skeat's archives are filled with transcriptions of Aelfric's lives of the saints, homilies, and notes about them as well, as Toswell points out. Yet only scant acknowledgement of using such notebooks appears in Skeat's 1881 two-volume edition of the work for the Early English Text Society (EETS).[52] Evidence points to Cockayne's having been at work on the saints' lives for quite some time; as early as 1864 he vigorously proposed several times and was repeatedly turned down to edit them for the Rolls Series.[53]

A decade younger than Skeat, Henry Sweet was in Cockayne's classes in 1862–63, having entered in 1860 and leaving in 1863 to study philology in Heidelberg.[54] It is interesting that both Cockayne and Sweet often voiced strong disagreement with philologists in Germany. Sweet's work on the *Student's Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon* is said to have begun during his teenage years (MacMahon, 167) and he was 18 years old when he left King's College School for Heidelberg.

Upon his return to England in 1868, Sweet enrolled at Oxford, where Bosworth was revising the Old English Dictionary. We know from Skeat that Cockayne was compiling his own entries for a new dictionary at that very time, obviously undeterred by Bosworth's earlier snub, or perhaps spurred on by it. Might Cockayne have heard that young Sweet was asked to work with Bosworth, as Momma suggests?[55]