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Erich Poppe and Regine Reck (eds), *Selections from Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009). Pp. xxv, 125; £18.99. ISBN 978-0-7083-2171-3.

The second volume in the Library of Medieval Welsh Literature series provides a scholarly edition of a thirteenth-century Welsh adaptation of the Anglo-Norman *Geste de Boeve de Haumtone*. The Welsh text is extant in five manuscripts (only two of which are medieval) and Poppe and Reck have based their edition on the oldest extant Welsh manuscript version, the White Book of Rhydderch (Aberystwyth NLW Peniarth 4–5) c.1350. A selection of the most significant manuscript variants from the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford Jesus College 111, c.1382) are provided in a list at the end of the edition in such a way that it does not interfere with one's enjoyment of this intriguing medieval tale. Since *Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn* is a particularly lengthy text, the editors have carefully selected sections of the Middle Welsh adaptation for their edition which amount to approximately 40 per cent of the complete text and English summaries of the missing sections fill in the gaps in the narrative. The edition provides a valuable Introduction which introduces the reader to the genre of medieval Welsh translations, detailed scholarly notes on the text, a full glossary and a list of personal names and places.

It is refreshing that the editors have chosen to highlight the importance of a Middle Welsh adaptation of a 'foreign' secular narrative rather than focus on the better known

and widely acclaimed 'native' legends. The story of Boeve de Haumtone, which was extremely popular in the Middle Ages, was adapted into various languages including Middle English, Old Norse, Yiddish, Russian and early modern Irish. The Welsh version appears to be a thirteenth-century translation of a late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman text. *Ystoria Bown o Hamtwn* has two different beginnings in the White Book (both of which are provided in this edition) and the sections selected trace the biography of Bown, the heroic Christian knight, from infancy and exile through his heroic wanderings and final reunion with his family. Episodes highlighted in this edition include (i) Bown's military exploits (such as the slaying of Rodefion and his triumph over Bradmwnd); (ii) his relationship with Iosian (who strangles her second husband with her chastity belt on their wedding-night because she has already been promised to Bown) and (iii) episodes which place particular emphasis on Bown's adherence to the Christian faith (for example, he only kisses Iosian when she converts to Christianity: prior to this he feigns loud snoring and pretends he is asleep when she visits him).

It is argued that one of the peculiarities of the Welsh tale is that it places even greater emphasis on Bown's Christianity. However, although the content of the Welsh tale remains for the most part unchanged, the narrative structure and style of the Anglo-Norman source are altered quite significantly by the Welsh redactor as he adapts the text to meet Welsh literary traditions and the expectations of a Welsh audience. The Introduction to the text provides a fascinating account of the process of textual transmission, noting interesting examples of the tensions between imitation and adaptation in the Welsh version. The first two thirds of the text appear to contain more elements typical of the repertoire of native Middle Welsh narrative than the final third of *Ystoria Bown o Hamtwn*. Whilst the same idiomatic Middle Welsh expressions for oaths and exclamations occur in *Ystoria Bown* as the native Four Branches (for example, *y rof a Duw* 'between me and God'), *Bown* also includes examples of imitations of the Anglo-Norman source which appear awkward in Welsh, such as *myn vymhen* 'by my head' (Anglo-Norman *par mun chef*).

It is entirely appropriate that Erich Poppe and Regine Reck have published an edition of *Selections from Ystoria Bown o Hamtwn*, given that they are the current acknowledged experts on this particular text. Their Introduction to this volume provides a useful summary of some of their ideas concerning the processes of medieval translation and the Welsh adaptation of *Ystoria Bown* previously published in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* (2006 and 2008): readers whose interest is ignited by the Introduction are directed to these two excellent articles which discuss the text in considerably more detail.

Capitalization has been added throughout the edition and punctuation and paragraphing has been supplied in accordance with the editors' interpretation of the narrative structure. Word division is discussed in detail in the Introduction and further linguistic features of interest are highlighted in meticulous detail in the notes. Although the edition follows the White Book of Rhydderch, the editors have deviated from this to the Red Book of Hergest on a few occasions and this is justified in the notes. The reader is directed to Morgan Watkin, *Ystoria Bown de Hamtwn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958) for a diplomatic edition of the complete text in the White Book and a full list of variants in the Red Book. Poppe and Reck, throughout their selection, provide references to the line numbers given in Watkin's edition as well as Albert Stimming's edition of the Anglo-Norman poem so that the texts may be compared. However, whilst readers of Middle Welsh interested in the Anglo-Norman version can turn either to this edition or Judith Weiss's modern English translation of the text, non-Welsh-speaking scholars who

may wish to compare the Welsh text with other vernacular versions will still find it difficult to follow the Welsh text (albeit with the excellent critical apparatus provided by the editors).

Selections from Ystoria Bown o Hamtwn provides a most welcome, accessible edition of a particularly interesting medieval tale. The text is ideal for study on courses relating to Middle Welsh prose and makes a valuable addition to the repertoire of texts available. The volume more than fulfils the aim stated by the editors in their Introduction: 'to introduce students with some knowledge of Middle Welsh to an important and interesting but still somewhat underrated genre of medieval Welsh literature'. It is likely that the publication of this volume in such an easily accessible format will encourage further research in this field and the editors are to be congratulated on their edition which will no doubt be used as an exemplar for further editions of other Welsh adaptations of 'foreign' texts.

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