Two books from the library of Claudius Miltherius

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Amongst the group of sixteenth-century French grammarians, Claudius Miltherius stands out in several ways. Not much is known about this humanist and his list of publications is modest. He was trained as a lawyer, but there are no legal publications to his name. He was involved in philology, but apparently as a kind of hobby. His main involvement in the field of French grammar lies in etymology and finding kinship between French and Hebrew words. His main publication on this subject is the *Epistola de vocabulis quae Galli e commensuribus in Gallo ludendi differentes, in usumque receptors*, which was published as an appendix to Robert Estienne's *Hypomnemata de gall. lingua, pergrlatinam sive distinctionem necessariae quaedam sero quaestis etiam Gallicum modum profanum*, published in Geneva by Henri Estienne in 1582.

The Mother of all Languages

Claudius Miltherius or Claude Miltherius was 'juge royal (also *Lettres d'Ami* de la province de Vienna) who took his doctorate degree on 8 August 1573 at the University of Vienna. In Vienna he had studied under the French legal expert Jacques Cujas (1520-1590) and the town councillor and law professor Claude Rogier. Among his contemporaries he was generally known as a Hellenist who added notes on the 1576 edition of Valerius Maximus' *Dictionary factorialis memorabilium ad Tebromim Aug. Lib. IX De by the Dutch humanist Stephanus Piglius (1520-1604). This book consists of a series of anecdotes for the use of authors. One year later he wrote his epistle on the kinship of French and Hebrew words which were introduced by the Jews living in France. The conviction that Hebrew was the mother of all languages was by then widespread and accepted by many scholars.

The epistle was addressed to his colleague Jérôme de Châlons, the first president of the Parliament of the region of La Dombes near Lyons, and was published in the *Hypomnemata* by Estienne. In this epistle he presented, according to B. Ackles in 1957 'an interesting series of partly foolish, partly clever (but therefore not always true) Hebrew-Romanic etymologies'. For example, he mentioned the French word for cable (chôde), which he thought to be derived from the Hebrew *chabad*; the French word *jambes* which was taken from the Hebrew *séhab* (forest) and a verb being derived from *séhab* (to battle). On other occasions he tried to tie French words with the Syriac language (for instance the French *asq* (foot) with the Syriac *sot*). With this epistle Miltherius demonstrated what modern historians have described as 'naive passion and an inexperienced way of etymologizing'.

An Important Testimony

Contemporaries of Miltherius must have thought differently about his work. Even Josephus Juven Sculler had a certain interest in Miltherius’ experiments. Sculler involved himself with similar experiments on the kinship of some Dutch, German and Persian words in his Leiden period (see *Omslag* 2007, n. 1). Unfortunately I have not been able to find his opinion on the kinship of French and Hebrew words as described by Miltherius (although after 1600 Sculler emphasized regularly that not all languages were derived from the Hebrew language), but the two scholars were evidently in contact with each other: they must have met in Vienna in the 1570s when Sculler was studying with Jacques Cujas. As Miltherius lived in Vienna, only 80 kilometres from Vienna, a meeting in this town can certainly also have taken place there. Both books are rare material testimoines of the relationship between both scholars. The name of Miltherius is mentioned only once in the correspondence of Sculler. But in this one letter by Sculler of 12 August 1590 to Sévère de Sainte-Marthe (1452-1554) an account is given on Miltherius. Sculler is characterizing Miltherius as ‘un des plus doctes es langues et antiquité romaine de nos jours’. According to Sculler Sainte-Marthe had erroneously omitted the name of Miltherius and of the medical doctor Louis Duret (1517-1586) in his edition of the *Pompei et Elegia* of 1587.

Books as Testimony

In the oriental legacy of Sculler there are two books that were once part of the library of Miltherius. Both books bear the inscription ‘C. Miltherius Vien’ on the title page. The two books are:

- **Abraham ben David ha-Levi (et al.)**, *Sefer Yezirah ha-meyyudot le-Abraham ha-Levi ha-Levi (et al.)*, 1569, with the owners inscription by Miltherius and Hebrew annotations to an unknown hand. (875 f. 94).
- **Philon of Alexandria**, *Demmutum ex antiquo philosophico ex libro haec in herodiadem traditum* (et al.), 1507 E 31. These are the daily vocal prayers in Hebrew.

This copy not only bears the signature of Miltherius but also an inscription by Sculler which reads ‘Domon doc-tissimi CL. Mettlerii Vienensis provinciae Iuridicii et Euchologium Judaeorum’. According to Sculler this book is a ritual on the customs, ordinances and sacraments of the Jews. The book is bound in a early sixteenth-century calf binding by the Leiden book binder J.A. Lobech jr. (1689-1697), imitating a late Gothic binding.

Both copies bear annotations in Hebrew and Latin on the endpapers and in the text, partly by Sculler and by other unknown, possibly oriental, hands. It will take some further research to establish how Miltherius got his hands on these rare books and whether or not he used them for proving his own texts. They were certainly of interest to Sculler, always eager for new books and new information on the Hebrew language and customs.

The two books in the Sculler collection are new pieces in the puzzle of the sixteenth-century Republic of Letters. They are testimonies of the interaction between two scholars, which lead to new questions to be answered, and new territories to be explored.