

CATALAN REVIEW



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CALAFORRA I CASTELLANO, Guillem. *Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke i Das Katalanische. Introducció i traducció*. Biblioteca Filològica XXXIV. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1998. 237 pp. Paper.

This volume, which began as Calaforra's 1993 *tesi de llicenciatura* at the Universitat de València under the direction of professors Antoni Ferrando and Albert Hauf is, in reality, two books in one: the first, a study of the scholarship and method of Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke (1861-1936), one of the great figures of Romance linguistics in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century; and the second a Catalan translation, the first of its kind, by Calaforra of M-L's volume *Das Katalanische. Seine Stellung zum Spanischen und Provenzalischen* which was published in 1925 by Carl Winter's Universitäts-buchhandlung (Heidelberg). Both books, or their combination as presented by Calaforra, should have appeared in Catalan, or at least in another Romance language) more than half a century ago. The delay in the case of *DasKat*, as Calaforra observes, has resulted in this work's having been discussed and cited in some scholarly circles during the years since its publication, if actually read by very few individuals due in large part to the fact that it was originally written and published in German. There apparently was no demand in 1925 nor in the years following the appearance of *DasKat* for a Catalan (or other Romance-language) translation, in contrast to other works by M-L such as his *Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen* (1890-1902; French translation 1890-1906), *Einführung in die romanische Sprachwissenschaft* (1901; Spanish translation 1926), or *Italienische Grammatik* (1890; Italian translation 1901). The result has been that *DasKat* has remained relatively unknown, if not completely ignored, by many language scholars due primarily, though certainly not exclusively, to the linguistic barrier noted, and perhaps as well to the subject of the work itself: the status of Catalan as a dialect or an independent language and its linguistic affiliation, that is as a member of the Ibero-Romance or Gallo-Romance groups.

The history of the polemic concerning the identity and affiliation of Catalan, similar to *DasKat*, is well known today only to a handful of scholars since, as in the case of many controversies, once resolved or set aside they, like fashions, quickly fade from memory. Clearly in the Catalan debate important factors were the lack of an independent modern—or medieval—political state which bore its name (cf. Italy : Italian; France : French, etc.), the early use of Provençal by Catalan poets and troubadours (e.g. Guillem de Berguedà, Cerverí de Girona, etc.), the geographic situation of the greater part of the Catalan-speaking lands within the political territory of Spain, and, among other historical variables, centuries of calculated political and cultural campaigns designed to restrict or eliminate the use of Catalan within the states in which it was natively spoken, helped to relegate Catalan to the sidelines and to cause no little confusion regarding its identity as a distinct Romance language. Calaforra correctly qualifies this entire controversy as “[U]na de les polemiques lingüístiques més curioses i ensem més inútils de la ‘hispanística’” (19), while situating at the forefront of this discussion M-L’s *DasKat* in which Catalan is compared to Spanish (Castilian) and to Provençal (Occitan) and is determined to be an independent language which shares with the latter a similar Vulgar-Latin base, and, therefore, with Occitan and French pertains to the Gallo-Romance group of languages as opposed to the Ibero-Romance family (Castilian, Galician-Portuguese, Leonese, etc.).

In his Introduction (11-76) Calaforra provides a detailed overview of the historical and scientific contexts in which *DasKat* was written, and he furnishes an insightful evaluation of M-L’s contribution to the study of the Catalan language as well as to the Romance vernaculars in general, in which he points out the latter’s methodological departure from the school of the Neogrammarians and his acceptance, at least implicit, of such theoretical notions as linguistic interference (i. e., sociolinguistic factors) or geographical variation (i. e., geolinguistic factors) in the case of phonetic or morphological change. Calaforra even finds evidence in *DasKat* of what he terms “[P]etites intuïcions que podríem anomenar ‘preestructuralistes’, tot i que [M-L] no les desenvolupa ni les fa servir com a font metodològica” (56). Missing from the Introduction however is a more fully developed discussion of the extent to which M-L’s familiarity with and analysis of Catalan may have been influenced by the latter’s friendship with Joaquim Balcells, to whom *DasKat* is dedicated, as well as by his experiences while visiting Balcells in Alforja (Baix Camp).

Regarding his translation of *DasKat* (77-234) Calaforra notes (75-76) a number of modifications made in his Catalan version vis-à-vis the original German text, such as the standardization of the form of bibliographical references, adaption of M-L’s complex syntax to a more fluid and natural Romance structure, and the use of the international phonetic alphabet for transcriptions, among other changes affecting more the style than the content of the work.

Calaforra’s book constitutes an important and long overdue contribution to a much debated chapter in the history of Catalan linguistics and philology, one which today may seem largely irrelevant but which may indeed still remain open on a more popular level, as when even among academic circles an

otherwise informed individual may occasionally still be heard to inquire whether Catalan is more closely related to Spanish or to French.

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