The complete Enochian dictionary: A dictionary of the Angelic language

Dee (1527–1608) was ‘mathematician and Astrologer Royal to Queen Elizabeth I, author of the main introductory textbook on mathematics of his age, and innovator of many of the navigational aids which enabled the Elizabethan explorers to discover the New World’ (7), who ‘exercised a powerful intellectual influence on the greatest minds of the time’ (19), and whose collection of over 2500 books and manuscripts on ‘mathematics, magic, alchemy, philosophy, cryptography, classical literature, geography, and the qabalah’ (17) was one of the most important of the day. His obsessive search for knowledge utilized magical as well as rational means: ‘His avowed aim was to establish contact with the angels, to discover that knowledge which was not to be had either from books or from experiment’ (11). Communications from the angels were naturally exotic.

This book represents the results of analysis of Enochian, a set of angelic communications which is amenable to study because Dee provided explanations of pronunciation along with free translations. Most of the book (175 pages) consists of an ‘Angelic–English’ dictionary (e.g. abraasa, abraassa, aberaasasa, abra ‘provide, provided’) prepared by Laycock, followed by an edited version of the Enochian Calls (e.g., Adgt upaah zong om faaip sald ‘Can the wings of the winds understand your voices of wonder’).

In his 49-page introduction, L traces the history of Dee’s linguistic corpus, obtained by means of his ‘skryer’ or medium, Edward Kelley. He also describes the writing system, illustrated with facsimiles from manuscripts, and the ways in which Enochian resembles (or differs from) languages relevant to Dee’s experience: ‘The 21 letters of Enochian are ... almost exactly the minimum required to write English without any ambiguity’ (47), and in both its phonology and grammar Enochian is ‘thoroughly English’ (41).

There is a minimum of critical analysis in the book, apparently because it is not aimed at a scholarly market [although L is an Australian linguist, specializing in languages of Papua New Guinea—Ed.] L’s chapter, in fact, is entitled ‘Enochian: Angelic language or mortal folly?’ His conclusion is that ‘we still do not know whether it is a natural language or an invented language’ (19), and that no one can be dogmatic about the matter (63). People involved in the occult—e.g. members of the Church of Satan (62), among whom Enochian has long been used—will undoubtedly find this book helpful. It is, however, not without interest to linguists. I was, for example, pleased but not surprised to find some data that might be glossolalic (33). Of wider interest is the fact that Dee’s activities are clearly related to intellectual concerns of his day with Primitive, Universal, and Natural Language (for which see Paul Cornelius, Languages in 17th and early 18th century imaginary voyages, Geneva: Droz, 1965). It was widely believed, for example, that Enoch, the antediluvian Biblical character of Genesis, had written many important books. There are interesting things here for those studying the ethnography of writing, language and religion, calligraphy, and cryptography.

Although this book may have been meant for the serious student of the occult, it undoubtedly represents a great deal of serious work. L apparently even submitted the Enochian Calls and some Latin, Hebrew, and English texts to a computer analysis of letter frequencies per thousand (58). [WILLIAM J. SAMARIN, University of Toronto.]