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The Fifteen Oes and Other Prayers. Ed. from the Text Published by William Caxton (1491) by Alexandra Barratt and Susan Powell (Middle English Texts, 61). Heidelberg: Winter, 2021. Pp. xxxvi + 54. Paperback € 44.00.

The Fifteen Oes, a collection of – originally Latin – prayers that each begin with the words “O Ihesu,” were immensely popular in the medieval period. The fifteen prayers are structured around the sayings of Jesus on the cross and the devotion to the Holy Name, but they also include other imagery that can be connected to, for instance, the Cult of the Wounds. In the eleventh prayer, the speaker asks Christ to “hide me euer after in the holes of thy woundes (in the hollow places of your wounds)” (p. 4, ll. 109–10). The last prayer also includes the image of Christ as a mystic vine when the shedding of his blood is represented as if it ‘had be threst out of a rype cluster of grapes’ (p. 5, l. 145).

This edition of *The Fifteen Oes* is not based on the more than hundred Latin manuscripts or the Middle English manuscript translations of the prayers, but on the version of the text printed by William Caxton in 1491 (*STC* 20195). Caxton’s edition was the first

collection of prayers to be printed in England, but even more interesting is that Caxton's colophon records its commissioning by Elizabeth of York and Lady Margaret Beaufort, the wife and mother of King Henry VII. Barratt and Powell focus on Caxton's volume as a whole, which means that this edition contains the "Fifteen Oes" as well as additional prayers in English and Latin that were printed by Caxton and which seem not to have been taken from a single source. In this way, Barratt and Powell stress that the two royal patrons of Caxton's print, as well as the text's other late fifteenth-century readers, were using both Latin and the vernacular for their devotional practices. Moreover, instead of editing *The Fifteen Oes* in isolation, Barratt and Powell provide a direct late fifteenth-century textual context for the prayers.

In addition to the role of Elizabeth of York and Lady Margaret Beaufort, Barratt and Powell also point to the association of Caxton's print of *The Fifteen Oes* with St. Birgitta of Sweden. The editors note that while none of the early Latin manuscripts attributes the Oes to St Birgitta (p. xv), from the fifteenth century onwards – when the cult of St. Birgitta was well established in England and the Fifteen Oes were found not only in English, but also in French, Dutch, Flemish, German, and Swiss manuscripts – the attribution to St. Birgitta becomes much more common. While the current scholarly consensus is that *The Fifteen Oes* were not composed by St. Birgitta, the prayers' frequent attribution to the saint must have contributed to her fame.

After an elaborate and illuminating Introduction, the edition continues with the text of *The Fifteen Oes* and additional prayers from the Caxton print. The commentary that follows the text helps to draw connections between the prayers and their direct quotations and allusions from scripture, as well as references to liturgical texts. The editors also make some notes in the commentary on the translation from Latin into Middle English of *The Fifteen Oes*. The Latin text of the Oes, which is constructed from an edition by Claes Gerjot (2000), is added in Appendix 1.¹ Barratt and Powell write that "for our discussion of Caxton's English translation, we have used his [Gerjot's] edition as a base, while adopting (where they seem appropriate) some of the variants that he records and incorporating a few other conjectural emendations" (p. xxi). It is not completely clear where Barratt and Powell have incorporated variants and/or emendations in Appendix 1. Nevertheless, the addition of both a Latin text of the Oes in the Appendix, as well as the additional prayers of the Caxton print, create a significant textual context for *The Fifteen Oes*.

This excellent edition of *The Fifteen Oes* will be very useful for those who are interested in late medieval devotional culture and spirituality, early print culture, late medieval female patronage and readership. Even though *The Fifteen Oes* were transmitted in a very large number of Latin manuscripts as well as translated in a wide variety of vernacular languages, they are still relatively unknown today. This edition therefore is a very welcome addition to the Middle English Texts Series.

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¹ See Claes Gejrot, "The Fifteen Oes: Latin and Vernacular Versions, with an Edition of the Latin Text", in: *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars*, ed. Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara (The Medieval Translator, 7). Turnhout: Brepols, 2000, pp. 213–38.