

DEALE 'TAKE NOTE' IN ANCRENE WISSE

DEALE is an old crux in *Ancrene Wisse*, where it occurs three times, as noted by *OED*. The author says on humility that *Deale drue spritlen* bear grapes; on anger (addressing his charges), *Deale* you are not so angry as to try to rob God; and, on the Passion, *Lo deale* what it says, that Christ should suffer to enter his kingdom.

Deale has been variously explained. *OED*, which adds the instance 'O dele, said the kyng, this is a fole Briton' from Robert Mannyng, suggests it calls attention, perhaps being an interjection like English 'Lo!', or a verb in the imperative like 'See!', 'Mark!', or 'Note!' Salu sees it rather as an intensive. She thus translates the expressions in *Ancrene Wisse* as 'Precious few twigs bear grapes', 'Surely you are not so angry', and 'It was necessary, it says'.¹ Shepherd, who cited another dubious instance from *Seinte Marbarete* (perhaps by *Ancrene Wisse*'s author), had an ingenious explanation. He asserted that the sense was 'Distinguish the premisses of the argument carefully to understand its force' or 'Let us get this quite clear', and that there seemed an inescapable (though complex) link with the verb *dealen* 'to separate, share'. He therefore posited a variant infinitive **dealin* ('a Class II weak verb'), its sense influenced by Latin *distinctio* in technical scholastic terminology. *Deale* thus served 'as a call of attention to a point of logic or method'.²

Smithers made no reference to this, but added a supposed instance (*Qe dele estes vous*, where the first words substitute *Maleure irrus* 'Wretched, pitiless') from *The South English Legendary*; Norman Davis, doubtfully comparing Old

¹ *The Ancrene Riwe*, tr. Mary Salu (London, 1955), 123, 127, 160.

² *Ancrene Wisse: Parts Six and Seven*, ed. G. T. Shepherd (London, 1959), 39.

French *dea* and English *la* 'lo', translated the form as an interjection 'What!'³ Wada now takes the first instance as *Deale? Drue spritlen* 'Really? Do dry twigs...' and the second, *Deale! Art tu se* 'Incredible! Are you so', etc.⁴

This note offers a quite new etymology: that *deale* is a loan from the Welsh second person imperative *deall* 'Understand!' *Deall* 'to understand, perceive, apprehend, discern; infer, deduce; realize' (a bisyllable and in Middle Welsh often appearing as *dyall*) is a common Welsh verb, so we need not quote attestations.⁵ It fits the required sense exactly, and the etymology seems neatly confirmed by Mannyng's 'O dele, said the kyng, this is a fole Briton' in *OED*. If *dele* here is a Welsh loan, the reference to a stupid Welshman implies it was used to communicate with uncomprehending Celts, like Modern English *savvy* (from Spanish *¿Sabe Usted?* 'Do you understand?') with Hispanics.

Deale should thus surely be translated as 'Understand!', 'Take Note!', used as a Middle English weak verb imperative in *-e*. The explanations of Shepherd and Davis can be seen as unfounded. However, it is possible that Smithers's supposed instance in *The South English Legendary* means 'understand', as may *dayly* (rhyming with *fyayle*) in line 313 of *Pearl* (cited by Shepherd), both forms having the same origin. More significantly, one may note how *OED*'s nineteenth-century account, as often, is nearer the mark than some later ones: a tribute to the stature of its editors and the perceptiveness and honesty of their learning.

Andrew Breeze

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³ *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1968), 411, 465.

⁴ "Temptations" from *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Osaka, 1994), 110, 111, 120, 121.

⁵ *Gŵriadur Prifysgol Cymru* (Caerdydd, 1950-2002), 908.