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978-0-521-17066-6 - Robert Estienne Royal Printer: An Historical Study of the Elder Stephanus
Elizabeth Armstrong
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ROBERT ESTIENNE
Royal Printer

ELIZABETH ARMSTRONG
ROBERT ESTIENNE
ROYAL PRINTER

AN HISTORICAL
STUDY OF THE ELDER
STEPHANUS

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE
WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES IN THE ALLIED CAUSE
ON SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN FRANCE
1940–1945

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For permission to have photographs taken for these illustrations I am indebted to the authorities of the following libraries: the Bodleian Library (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, and Plates 1, 4, 5); the British Museum (Fig. 11); the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Geneva (Plate 3); and the Stadt- und Hochschulbibliothek, Berne (Plate 7). The photograph for Plate 8 is an enlargement from a microfilm taken by kind permission of the Director of the Archives de France.

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PREFACE

THE research embodied in this book was conducted with the assistance of postgraduate scholarships awarded by Westfield College, London (1941–2), by the British Federation of University Women (1942–3) and by my old college, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford (1945–6), and of a Research Grant by the Trustees of the Leverhulme Research Fellowships (1950–1): the early stages of drafting it in its present form benefited by a dispensation from lecturing granted by the Board of the Faculty of Modern Languages in Trinity Term 1951.

I am indebted to the authorities of the Archives Nationales, the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the Library of the Séminaire Saint-Sulpice at Paris; the Archives d'Etat and the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire at Geneva; the Department of Printed Books of the British Museum; the Bodleian Library, the Taylorian Library and many College Libraries in Oxford, for access to material for this book. I have tried to acknowledge all instances of personal help as I come to them, in the text or footnotes, but I am very conscious how much more numerous they have been than I have been able to record, and I ask all those who have given me advice or information to believe how grateful I am to them. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking particularly Sir Maurice Powicke and Mr Strickland Gibson for allowing me to consult them and to attend their post-graduate classes in the first terms of my research, and my husband for the encouragements, suggestions and criticisms with which at every stage he has assisted its progress.

Finally I take pleasure in expressing my gratitude to the Cambridge University Press, in whom I have met as a living tradition the skill, the learning and the courtesy which contemporaries admired in Estienne himself.

ELIZABETH ARMSTRONG
(A. E. TYLER)

SOMERVILLE COLLEGE
OXFORD
April 1954

TRANSLATIONS, TRANSCRIPTIONS, NAMES AND DATES

PASSAGES cited in the text from sources written in sixteenth-century French or Swiss-German, or in Latin, are given in translation; the original text is supplied in a footnote (or in some cases in the Appendices) if hitherto unpublished or accessible only in a rare book. Terms describing French institutions, officials, etc., are translated if a corresponding term exists in English, unless the English term would be misleading (e.g. I have retained *Parlement*, as this institution under the *ancien régime* was a court of law, unlike the English Parliament, in which legislative functions took precedence of judicial).

In citing the original sources I have resolved all contractions (except a few standing for titles), and made the modern distinction between U and V, I and J. Accentuation in French, where found in the original, is reproduced; for the reader's convenience apostrophes and cedillas have been supplied, also grave accents on the adverbs *où*, *çà*, *là* and *jà* and on the preposition *à*, and acute accents on final E. The spelling of the Geneva documents is frequently so haphazard as to make the text appear ungrammatical; these peculiarities have been passed over without comment, as constant use of the word *sic* would appear in this case unnecessarily pedantic. The original punctuation (or lack of it) and use of capitals are retained, unless likely to cause misunderstanding.

Surnames at this period can appear in at least three forms: the vernacular family name, a latinized name (not always based on the former) and a vernacular adaptation of the latinized form, e.g. Chauvin-Calvinus-Calvin, Du Chastel-Castellanus-Castellan. It is not always the first by which a man was most generally known. I have tried to select the form most readily recognizable to English readers, rather than aim at an artificial consistency of practice.

Dates are given according to the New Style (year beginning 1 January) unless otherwise stated. French official documents still followed the Gallican Style (year beginning at Easter), but it was going out of use in ordinary life. (See my note in *The Library*, 5th ser., IV (1949), no. 1, pp. 64–8.) At Geneva the New Style was in official as well as private use.

For all editions published by the Estienne family mentioned in this

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TRANSLATIONS, TRANSCRIPTIONS, NAMES AND DATES

study, details of title and format may be sought under the appropriate year in A. A. Renouard, *Annales des Estienne*, unless otherwise stated. A short-title catalogue of Robert Estienne's Paris editions, giving shelf-marks of the copies I have used, listed alphabetically under authors, can be consulted in my thesis 'The Press of Robert Estienne at Paris 1526–1550' (ff. 496 *et seq.*), copies of which are deposited in the Bodleian Library, the British Museum, and Harvard College Library. Estienne's Geneva editions,¹ which are for the most part rarer, are not included in that catalogue; I have therefore given the shelf-mark of the copies I have used, for the reader's information.

¹ The following entries in A. A. Renouard, *Annales des Estienne*, are open to doubt, as they remain unconfirmed after careful search in Geneva and other Swiss libraries: 1554, no. 4; 1555, no. 4; 1557, no. 4; 1558, nos. 1 and 3; 1559, nos. 1, 6, 7. In this connexion I have to acknowledge the kind help of M. Henri Delarue, Director of the B.P.U., Geneva.

ABBREVIATIONS

LIBRARIES

- B.M. British Museum, London.
B.N. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
B.P.U. Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Geneva.

MANUSCRIPTS

- R.C. Registre du Conseil, Geneva.
R.P. Registre du Conseil pour les affaires particulières, Geneva.

PERIODICALS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- B.S.H.P.F. *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français.*
C.R. *Corpus Reformatorum.*
Hu.R. *Humanisme et Renaissance.*
M.D.G. *Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Genève.*
M.S.H.P. *Mémoires de la Société d'histoire de Paris.*
R.E.R. *Revue des études rabelaisiennes.*
R.H. *Revue historique.*
R.S.S. *Revue du seizième siècle.*

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Fig. 1. 'Robert Estienne, Parisien, Imprimeur du Roy.'
(See footnote on opposite page†.)

INTRODUCTION

IN studying any period of history, it is natural to examine the use which men made of the weapons at their disposal.

The armoury available in the sixteenth century had been enriched by two relatively recent discoveries: gunpowder and printing. We might imagine these to have appeared to contemporaries of their launching as objects of wonder or foreboding no less than bombs and broadcasting to our own age. But printing, like radio, seemed at first dedicated to the improvement of communication between men, and the dissemination of instruction and amusement on a larger scale than had hitherto been possible; if the difference in scale was so great as to constitute a difference in kind, the fact was not realized until the new technique went to war.

Luther's revolt was spread by an incendiary assault of books and pamphlets from the presses of his supporters. The authorities of the neighbouring states were faced with a conflagration. The sparks of heresy or sedition could no longer be stamped out within the range of the spoken or hand-copied word which had kindled them. But the attempt might be made. With the first realization of the press's power came the first attacks on its freedom.

Henceforth, the fortunes of the book trade are always relevant to European history, but never more plainly than in the middle decades of the sixteenth century, when the full import of the discovery of printing had for the first time been understood by everyone concerned.

This period, in France, coincided with a generation extremely prolific in intellectual and artistic endeavour, which reflected also the religious revival of the age, if not universally, at least in a remarkable range of opinion and sentiment.

Robert Estienne, the 'elder Stephanus' of classical and biblical scholarship, was the most outstanding figure of the Paris book trade at that time. He has never received the honours of biography, and the last comprehensive work on the Estienne dynasty as a whole is more than a century old. Antiquarian research on early French printers and literary research on French Renaissance authors have since then brought to light and published

† There is a marked similarity between the portrait of Robert Estienne on the facing page and the engraving by Leonard Gaultier reproduced by A. A. Renouard (*Annales des Estienne*, p. 24). I hope to make this the subject of a separate paper.

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much material bearing upon Estienne’s story, which invites an historian’s attention; moreover, the resources of Paris and Geneva archives (never systematically investigated for information on Estienne) might be expected still to offer some unpublished documents. Estienne’s own publications also deserve closer inspection in relation to their context. I assumed, therefore, at the outset of the present work, that a full-scale study of Estienne was likely to produce some results of historical interest, though I made no assumptions as to what those results would be.

Robert Estienne’s family belonged to a typographical aristocracy which overlapped with the lay learned professions; his brother Charles qualified as a doctor, his sister married a Paris attorney. Family life, lived ‘over the shop’ in the heart of the University quarter, could not fail to bring him into contact with clients of his father, a successful academic printer-book-seller. Those cultural advantages were the birthright of many of his colleagues. What appears to be unique in his case is that he happened to be a printer-bookseller of that excellence by birthright, and by vocation a scholar, as well as a printer, in the grand manner.

That vocation shows itself perhaps most clearly in his earliest project, a critical edition of the whole Latin Bible, a project entirely original, though in the spirit of the Quintuplex Psalter published by his father for Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples, and linking the new classical learning with the older preoccupations of Paris scholarship. Unimpressed by the authority of the text in circulation, he determined to establish, by the methods applied to any other Latin author, as nearly as possible what the translator, St Jerome, actually wrote. Under the accumulations of the ages he found, in the libraries of colleges, monasteries and cathedrals, manuscripts dating from the eighth century, and notes for revision of the text prepared by scholars of the thirteenth. Successive editions from 1527 embodied the results of his research. The project was so ambitious that it defeated Bentley and seems in sight of complete fulfilment only in the twentieth century. Estienne’s attempt was authentic pioneering not only in conception and choice of material, but also in method of presentation, though the execution was defective judged even by his own standards. Less original but more practicable was the plan of a new Latin dictionary, which he undertook at the request of his clients, and which henceforth competed successfully with the Vulgate for his time and energy. He was by Renaissance standards a complete master of Latin, at once widely read and fastidious; he had showed himself a capable though uninspired editor of Plautus, Terence and the Servius commentary on Virgil; he was intelligent, industrious,

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methodical, and—a printer. The *Thesaurus linguae latinae* and the accompanying bilingual dictionaries make him virtually the founder of Latin and French lexicography.

As these publications proved popular, Estienne concentrated upon them; his other publishing was in most respects merely supplementary to them during his most prosperous period. The business remained, however, a normal commercial enterprise, similar in size and efficiency to those of the other academic printer-booksellers. His reputation was thus founded on the successful collaboration between his scholarship and trade, which, if destructive of the single-mindedness conducive to real greatness in either, made him a man to be reckoned with in both.

For reasons which can be guessed but not proved at this distance of time, he stood from the first outside the sphere of University patronage which had enrolled all heads of the firm down to his stepfather as *messagers jurés* and his brother Francis as one of the twenty-four official *libraires jurés*. At a time when the capital was dominated by University and *Parlement*, united for the most part in opposition to the growing claims of royal power, this independence on the part of a distinguished academic printer-bookseller has potentially a certain political significance. The impression is confirmed by certain clues such as the history of his privileges, and becomes a certainty if we examine the programme of printing which he undertook for the King's publicists from 1537, a prelude to his appointment as King's Printer in 1539. That appointment was justifiable on his proper merits, but it fell to him no less readily because he was known at court to be well affected. The practical effect (at least in his own eyes) was to make of him almost a royal official.

His work as King's Printer in Greek gave him opportunities for editing hitherto unpublished Greek manuscripts collected by the King's Librarians, and here he achieved some spectacular publications. Meanwhile as King's Printer in Hebrew and Latin he continued to publish editions of the Bible or portions of it, in which zeal to instruct the reader steadily came to the fore as the amount of fresh research on the manuscript tradition receded. Until the last five years of his Paris career, these received the licence of the University theologians, necessary by law for publications of this kind. In 1546, however, representations from Louvain encouraged the Paris Faculty of Theology to begin a campaign against this series of editions in order to secure their suppression (with or without suppression of the author).

Unwilling to abandon these publications (the corner-stone of his fame and prosperity), yet reluctant to go 'underground' or abroad, he offered

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to print any necessary corrections and circulate them as errata with each copy. This suggestion secured the royal support. It now became a test case of the principle, ‘expurgation rather than destruction’, which was a topical issue, and of the royal authority, which was more topical still. The Faculty’s correspondence records a determined attempt to remove the case from the Privy Council to the ‘Chambre Ardente’, the ill-famed special court instituted in the *Parlement* for the trial of heretics. Confrontation of these letters with Estienne’s own account of his case suggests that his escape was due to the Guise interest. The conclusion of the affair found him safe as to his person for the moment, but surrounded by perils and faced with a total ban on his biblical editions. He now began to consider emigration.

Everything pointed to the French-speaking communities of Geneva or Lausanne. Early in 1550 he owned a house in Geneva, bought from a compatriot who had already thought better of a short-lived adhesion to Calvinism. In November 1550 he moved.

There is no evidence that he had previously considered his convictions incompatible with membership of the Roman Church, in spite of his feud with the local theologians. It seems to have been the spectacle of an already existing Protestant community, discovered only when he was forced to reconnoitre possible refuges, which first shook him. The Faculty by its intransigence did the rest.

At Geneva he concentrated upon popularization of biblical study, facilitated by his own invention of numbering the verses, and upon dissemination of the Latin works of Calvin. He had ample opportunity for comparing practice in Paris and Geneva in the matter of the censorship and of trade privileges. Always fated to raise issues of general policy, he became involved in a particularly intricate case of piracy, the counterfeiting of Bèze’s New Testament at Basle and Zürich by a syndicate of Genevese and French booksellers, which precipitated the proposal of a ‘copyright’ agreement between Geneva and Basle.

Only one great work of scholarship is associated with this last period of his life, the *Thesaurus linguae graecae*, still in the early stages at his death in 1559, and destined to be counted among his son Henry’s achievements.

For his claim on posterity’s interest to be properly assessed, at least two further studies are required: one written by a theologian, and the other written by a typographer.

Provisionally it may be said that his career, modest as it is, adds something characteristic to the golden age of French printing and the heroic

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age of French scholarship; there are nuances in his scholarly interests, in his dealings with the censorship issue and the ‘copyright’ issue, in his conception of his duty as citizen and as publisher, which deserve attention. Of these the most significant is perhaps his religious position before he moved to Geneva, at once so evangelical and so conservative as to suggest the class of layman upon which Francis I or Henry II and their prelates could have relied had the often threatened breach with Rome opened and left room for a wisely reformed Gallican Church to rally round the monarchy.

Mrs Florence W. Barton’s *The Sage and the Olive* (Muhlenberg Press, U.S.A., 1953), came to my notice after I had written this introduction and at the time of sending the book to Press.

A. E. A.