

**Albrecht Classen**  
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REVIEW ESSAY:  
**MULTILINGUAL, BEFORE MODERNITY**

*Medieval Multilingualism:  
The Francophone World and Its Neighbours*  
Edited by Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby  
Brepols, 2010. 323 pages.

**M**ultilingualism as a topic does not only interest (post)modern linguists, it has also attracted medievalists to this field, as the current volume illustrates quite strikingly. As we have known already for a long time, the Middle Ages were not simply dominated by Latin as the language of the intellectual elites; instead many different vernaculars (dialects and languages) interlaced with each other, exerting influence on each other, and developed further, either together in symbiosis, or parallel to each other. There were numerous bilingual, if not multilingual conditions throughout medieval Europe, and the contributors to this volume explore, above all, the Francophone world which extended fully to England, to some extent into the Flemish/Dutch areas, and to northern Italy, here explicitly leaving out neighboring cultures, such as Scandinavia and the German-speaking lands. But we can be certain that similar conditions existed there as well.

It makes good sense, as Mark Amsler suggests, to employ the concept of Creolization in order to describe some of specific situations at play, although it is important to keep in mind, as he alerts us, that every language assumed concrete

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functions for individual population groups—an insight that he drew from Michael Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record* (1993). Nevertheless, Middle English increasingly gained in influence in England since ca. 1300, although neither Anglo-Norman nor Latin disappeared quickly. Amsler specifically studies word amulets in Middle English and Latin, and also examines the debate in late medieval England regarding the role model of Latin, which all reflected on the multilingualism as it was practiced at that time. Surprisingly, he never mentions the most famous example, John Gower, who composed his works in all three languages; instead Amsler limits himself mostly to the theoretical reflections offered at that time, which is certainly an important contribution.

Scholars have long discussed the linguistic features in Chaucer's texts, and David Trotter here takes the extra step of isolating and listing the 'foreign' words in the *Canterbury Tales* (mostly French in their origin, but Latin in many cases as well). Trotter thus outlines in some detail the highly complex process by which Middle English emerged out of a multilingual framework. This study is followed by Douglas A. Kibbee's investigation of the use of Anglo-French versus Continental French in fourteenth-century didactic texts, such as Bibbesworth's treatise for the children of Dyonisie de Mounchesny in which he focuses on the essential terms necessary for running a large estate, or William of Kingsmill's *Manière de langage* (1396). All these efforts ultimately led to the grammatization of French in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and this also in England, when French was by then recognized by the bureaucracy as an important but distinct language.

Ad Putter takes us to Wales and its multilingual conditions, as reflected by the writings of Gerald of Wales (ca. 1200), who utilized French and Latin in his preaching for the crusade, since he obviously addressed and appealed to the upper aristocracy. Nevertheless, this does not automatically mean that English was not spoken there, not to mention native Welsh, which was not, however, widely understood (King Henry II, for instance, needed translators). Moreover, as Putter alerts us, there was even a whole colony of Flemish in Wales who did not simply forget their native tongue after they had settled there, which makes the multilingual situation in medieval England even more complex.

All this did not mean, by contrast, that English did not emerge as the language of prestige, as Mark N. Taylor illustrates in his contribution; quite on the opposite, since the aristocracy turned to English as its first language since the end of the twelfth century. The building of a political unity and community strongly relied

on that language, even though French thus did not simply disappear. But thirteenth-century English poetry began to reveal less 'foreign' words and thus strengthened the influence of English at large, as Taylor discusses in light of *The Owl and the Nightingale* and the *Brut*.

With Remco Sleiderink's article we leave England behind and turn to the changing attitude of the medieval Dutch authors toward French literature. Even though they heavily relied on their French role models and sources, trying hard to make those accessible for their Dutch audiences, there were also others who tried to cut those links and turn to Dutch-only culture, such as in the case of Jacob van Maerlant. Language is, after all, as we may say, very political by itself, concerning a people's or a culture's identity.

Subsequently Gloria Allaire examines the evidence for multilingualism in the *Roman de Tristan* in its Italian version, highlighting the multifaceted linguistic conditions in that text, the *Tristano Panciaticiano*. Daniela Delcorno Branca takes a different approach (her article is in French), looking at the libraries of the various aristocratic houses in northern Italy from the late Middle Ages, identifying how much they continued to read and enjoy courtly romances from various provenances, but mostly transmitted via the Piedmont, often in Franco-Italian. Rustichello, who helped Marco Polo create his famous *Il Milione*, was one of those multilingual poets, compilers, and clerics representing this unique intercultural milieu. This research question is then continued by Fabrizio Cigni, who examines (also in French) the manuscript situation in the area between Tuscany and Liguria at the end of the thirteenth century. He notes, above all, the mixing of French and Italian terms, such as for birds, and concludes that the contemporary audiences of those courtly romances must have been at least bilingual, if not trilingual, if we add their knowledge of Latin.

A concrete literary case of multilingualism can be found in Raffaele da Verona's *Aquilon de Bavière* (1379-1407), which Marie-José Heijkant discusses (also in French) in her contribution to this volume. In contrast to many of his contemporaries, Raffaele, whose identity remains rather obscure, advocated a much more open-minded approach to Islam, since he understood that it was also a monotheistic religion and that it certainly behooved the Christians to communicate with their neighbors, as is reflected in the employment of a *Mischsprache* (French and Latin) in his romance.

Returning to historical-linguistic investigations, Francesco Aimerito (this and all remaining articles are in English) studies multilingual phenomena in the states of Savoy in the late Middle Ages, especially among the legal experts in the local governments. Carolyn Muessig considers language mixtures (French, Latin, and Italian) in late medieval sermons delivered, for instance, by the preacher Guillaume d'Auxerre (d. 1294), as reported by a Raoul de Châteauroux, or by the famous preacher Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221-1274). The close interaction between French and Occitan in fourteenth-century Auvergne, where the northern group of Occitan dialects dominated, is the topic of R. Anthony Lodge's study. He concludes that at the end both languages merged and thus formed the newly rising modern French. Finally Michelle Bolduc examines the phenomenon of musical multilingualism in *Le Roman de Fauvel* (B.N. Ms Fonds Français 146, ca. 1316/1317), which was apparently composed by two authors, Gervès de Bus and his continuator, Chaillou de Pesstain. The musical additions reveal remarkably multilingual aspects, as reflected by the charivari episode on fol. 34r-36r., hence by the way how they were arranged on the pages, commonly pairing, for instance, a French motet, a Latin ballad, and a Latin religious chat.

The volume concludes a little abruptly with Bolduc's article. There is no index, no separate bibliography, and no list of short biographies. The introduction by Kleinhenz and Busby offers the relevant theoretical framework, but it does not quite allow us to comprehend the overarching picture which is supposed to emerge from this volume. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Middle Ages, here seen through the lens of the Francophone world, was deeply multilingual, and modern linguists interested in this topic would be well advised to pay close attention to the premodern conditions.