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Jane Gilbert, Simon Gaunt, and William Burgwinkle, *Medieval French Literary Culture Abroad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. x + 290 pp. Maps, figures, bibliography, and index. \$85.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 978-0-19-883245-4.

Review by Anne-Hélène Miller, University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

This multi-authored book is the result of the AHRC-funded research project *Medieval Francophone Literary culture outside France* (www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk) conducted from 2011 to 2015, which produced a database focusing on the late medieval dissemination of six late-twelfth century textual traditions, namely *Alexandre*, *Guiron le Courtois*, *Histoire ancienne*, *Lancelot*, *Tristan*, and the *Roman de Troie*. Some of the goals of the project were to show that these texts must be read in their various reiterations and cultural contexts of reproduction over time, and the project represents useful testimonies of the existence of a rich and dynamic medieval francophone literary culture in which the kingdom of France or Paris are not at the center. According to the authors, this monograph supplements their digital initiative in the sense that, while the consideration of those works in the database has its own usefulness, the book allows the incorporation of a more theoretical approach and nuanced, including literary, interpretation of such dissemination.

The introduction to the book not only lays out effectively the current state of the field of medieval francophone literature, but also provides some essential definitions and delineations. For instance, we are still bound to use an all-too-French-centric modern terminology about France or French language (inherited for the most part from nineteenth-century medievalism) that is difficult to apply to the medieval period. The maps provided are a tangible illustration of such an argument. This reviewer would have liked to hear more in the introduction about the choice of “abroad” for the title of the monograph, which retains some form of ambivalence—as does the phrase “outside France” in the digital project. To turn away from these notions of center and periphery, the authors draw on the concepts of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to think about medieval French culture and literature. They approach the latter as structured by networks—economical, topological, geographical, historical—and successive interactions of humans and non-humans, suggesting newer ways to think about displacement for people, but especially for texts or textual traditions. With this approach, the manuscripts and the literature found in those manuscripts function as “actants” in a larger interconnected francophone world that links the British Isles, the Low Countries in Northern Europe, and the kingdom of France, to Italy and the Latinate States in the Mediterranean.

The book is divided into six chapters. Each chapter considers some textual traditions as case-studies in specific regions and/or along certain networks, and each chapter brings some of the texts that are part of the digital project into dialogue with others. In the introduction, some of these chapters are presented under titles that are slightly different (chapter one and four) or completely different (chapter two), from the actual titles of the chapters inside the book which can be confusing.

The first chapter, “Local French outside France: Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis* and the second *Mise en Prose* of the *Roman de Troie*,” examines the dissemination of these two textual traditions as part of the important reception of francophone texts that came initially from Medieval England and “migrated” to northern Italy. According to the authors of this study, the *Estoire des Engleis* “is every bit as foundational for Francophone textual culture as the Oxford *Roland*” (p. 36). The second *Mise en Prose* of the *Roman de Troie* as found in Grenoble 861, was produced about a century later in Italy, thus attesting to the reception in thirteenth-century Italy of the *Troie* tradition that is connected with Benoît de Sainte-More’s *roman de Troie* in twelfth-century England. French is presented here in both instances as a “supralocal language,” (p. 36) as defined by Gaunt in a previous study, that develops with regional and even hybrid traits, but that has the capacity to be read by a wider audience beyond the boundaries of that region.[1] This chapter serves overall as a reminder of the role of twelfth-century England in the emergence of French literature, and it is primarily concerned with historical matters.

The second chapter, “Francophone Literary Culture on the Move: Northern Italy,” reconsiders the dissemination of francophone historical romances in Italy within larger networks that encompassed Britain, but also the kingdom of France, the Low Countries, and the eastern Mediterranean. These networks are examined as reflections of contemporary commercial situations as well as within the political context of the Italian city-states, especially following the fall of Acre in 1291. In such a context, the authors see the processes of compilations, such as Rusticiaus’ Arthurian romances, as traveling textual traditions. Not only might this literary corpus return to an “original” site of production, but it is also transformed linguistically by its circulation. This transformation explains the hybrid language, essentially of the “Picard-inflected variety,” as evidence of language contact “on the go” during that time (p. 60).

Chapter three, “Living History: Pierre de Langtoft and London BL, Royal MS 20 A II,” discusses a particular compilation found in MS 20 AII and its important manuscript tradition well into the fourteenth century. MS 20 AII includes a history of the British, a history of the English, and a section devoted to the reign of Edward I, which was significant for the rich political, cultural and linguistic context of England during that period, including its relationship with Scotland. In order to explore linguistic phenomenon of diglossia in Britain, as triggered by Langtoft’s choice of languages of expression, the authors turn to Derrida’s concept of linguistic otherness in monolingualism (“je n’ai qu’une langue, or ce n’est pas la mienne”).[2] The language Derrida spoke, French, carried intrinsically with it forms of alienation and thus functioned as a colonial phenomenon. In turn, by addressing the epic forms and tones of Langtoft’s *geste*, or deviations from it, and its ensuing continuation as romance in the later fourteenth-century, the authors debunk the-all-too-often accepted notions about romance as a dialogic genre, but especially epic as a monologic one.

Chapter four, “History, Time and Empire: The *Histoire ancienne* in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem,” discusses more particularly the textual tradition of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César*

(a modern title) as it was compiled in Acre in the Latinate States before 1291. The chapter explores its Flemish origins or connections, as well as those with the Italian city-states, and how the French language of the manuscripts produced in the scriptoria of Acre presents traits of a supralocal *koine* that substantiates the authors' argument in favor of such types of transregional networks. The *Histoire ancienne*, as a universal history, offers juxtapositions, overlapping, and abolition of past, present, and future times, which provides a fertile ground for the authors to discuss the interconnectivity of history with textual tradition, and manuscripts in their material reality. The text itself in this case is like a *memento mori*, they claim; and the city of Acre, with all its rich historical background and unique role in history, functions as a powerful agent in the transmission of this historical literary corpus. To supplement their argument, they conclude with an examination of the universal sense of history in the iconography of the earliest extant manuscript of the *Histoire*, Dijon BM 562, in correlation with the Chantilly manuscript musée Condé 43, also made in Acre.

Chapter five, "The Movement of Books: Two manuscript Studies," tackles the actual physical movement of codices across regions and their implications, using as case-studies two manuscripts: Aberystwyth, NLW MS 5667E, which contains a single *Tristan en prose*, and BL Royal 20 E1, considered a source for the so-called second redaction of the *Histoire ancienne*. Building directly upon the theory of ANT, the authors show how overall these textual traditions function as "actants" in the networks. These manuscripts experienced noticeable material and textual changes during their journey from northern France/ the Low countries to Italy in the case of the former, and Italy to France via Spain, in the case of the latter. This situation permits the authors to offer deepened intertextual literary and iconographic analyses of the *Tristan* and the *Troie* traditions in this chapter.

The sixth and last chapter, "Dark Networks: Prehistories, Post-histories, and Imagined Geographies," shows how movement can be problematized through literary rendering of *translatio* within the storylines, as in the *Tristan* prequel. The authors suggest thinking about what they call "dark" networks, in which what is not apparent or not evidenced by the scientific material approach to manuscript studies, can shape the networks. Referring in particular to the notion of "hostipitalité" as coined by J. Derrida and A. Dufourmantelle in 1997, which argues that hospitality can carry forms of hostility, they consider Jean de le Mote's *Le Parfait du Paon*, which is not in Bodley 264. *Le Parfait du Paon* plays such a role in the "dark" network in order to read MS Bodley 264, supposedly from the Low Countries, which contains the *Alexander* tradition as well as other *Paon* texts--the *Restor du Paon*, the *Voeux du Paon*. Such reading helps, in turn, remap the ambivalent place of the Low Countries in the production of a medieval francophone literary culture. Essentially, both textual traditions, the *Tristan* and the *Alexander*, present questions of orientation and re-orientation and, just like their respective eponymous characters, Tristan and Alexander, travel across the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean--and its corollary, the Mediterraneanizing--is thus also a significant textual, historical, and geographical locus, which for the authors, stages western European concerns with prophecies of political hegemony and Christian universalism.

Finally, while this book presents medieval francophone literary material as the expression of a "supralocal" language and culture that does not explicitly present itself as French, at least in the modern sense, the authors in their conclusion open the question of how this literature may reflect a sense of community, even possibly a linguistic "community to come" (p. 247). Hence, by proposing to resituate various medieval textual traditions in their multifaceted historical and

material contexts, the authors propose also a newer way of thinking of medieval Francophonie. The authors of this book have opted for an approach that forces us to think of medieval French literature in terms of interconnectivities: such networks make “visible the infrastructures and intermediary stages of interpretation” (p.203). This methodological approach is not only sound but quite rich in possibilities.

To that end, the authors consider many different manuscripts as the basis of their investigation. Although one can consult the digital project to have a more comprehensive overview of the main manuscripts, this reviewer would have found it useful to have had a comprehensive list of all the manuscripts under consideration or mentioned, as they are numerous, either at the end of each chapter or in an appendix. Despite this quibble, this book by three prominent specialists of medieval French literature should serve as a reference, in more ways than one. It is a significant contribution to the history of French literature. Far from exhaustive, especially regarding the textual traditions, this study attests to the current vibrancy of francophone medieval literary studies and contributes to the ongoing discussion in the field that asks us to look at medieval texts in French in a broader context than that defined by national boundaries. The authors equip us with invaluable tools for reading francophone medieval literature in a way that is dynamic and invigorating.

NOTES

[1] Simon Gaunt, “Philology and the Global Middle Ages: British Library Royal MS 20 D1” *Medioevo Romanzo* 40 (2016), 27-47.

[2] Jacques Derrida, “Le monolinguisme de l’autre: Ou la prothèse d’origine (Paris : Galilée, 1996), 13.

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