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Thierry Dutour, *La France hors la France: L'identité avant la nation XII^e-XV^e siècle*. Paris: Vendémiaire, 2022. References and index. x + 362 pp. €24.00 (pb). ISBN 9782363583758.

Response by Thierry Dutour, Sorbonne University.

Many thanks to *H-France Review* for once again giving me the opportunity to respond to a book review, and to David Murray for taking the time to draw out the book's essential points. The book envisages a French diaspora that created a space for the use of the French language--the dialects of Oïl--stretching 4000km from east to west, from Dublin (where the city's customs were written down in French in the thirteenth century) to the kingdom of Jerusalem. Taking account of this diaspora, forgotten in French historiography, "invites a different way of thinking about what it meant to be *français* in the medieval world [and necessitates asking] searching questions about deeply rooted ways of thinking about France as we know it and as it has been constructed by historians and others."

Criticisms have been levelled at the book and will be considered in the order in which they are presented, distinguishing between substantive judgements, which may be open to discussion, and misunderstandings, which need to be dispelled.

I understand the regret expressed by Murray that "the actual detail of language usage are not brought to center stage, which would have served Dutour's arguments well. Instead, the treatment of pre-modern French fits a larger pattern of talking about language and language ideologies rather than showing them." But this approach is justified by the very nature of the discourse on language in the book, which is set out clearly so as to avoid any misunderstanding: "il est question ici non de l'histoire de la langue mais de celle de sa conception par ses utilisateurs" (p. 184). Examination of the former is therefore necessary but is limited in its usefulness for the latter. The works of Laura Minervini and Cyril Aslanov are on the right side of the boundary, but Murray's regret that they are not used is unfounded: they have been. A reading of the notes confirms that the former is used five times, including the article mentioned by Murray, which is present in the book's select bibliography; Aslanoy is mentioned six times, including reference to his main book, which, again, appears in the select bibliography. Murray also regrets that "Old French quotations are translated into modern French prose". It should be pointed out that quotations are not translated in the book but modernized by adding punctuation and adopting contemporary spelling for words that would have been difficult to understand in their original form. When modernization alters the original text too much, I have sometimes asked the publisher to indicate this. This is found in the notes, for example in a quotation of eight lines from a rhyming political pamphlet from the 1260s, which refers to the original text: "Douce

France n'apiaut l'en plus ensi,/Ançois ait non le païs aus sougiez,/Une terre acuvertie..." (pp. 261, 344). But it is all about being understandable. In his famous *Anthologie de la poésie française*, Georges Pompidou, President of the French Republic (1969-1974), but also an *agrégé* in classical literature, confronted with poems that "ne seront accessibles qu'à quelques érudits capables de rétablir dans leur sens et leur vigueur première des mots et des tournures devenus incompréhensibles (will only be accessible to a few scholars capable of restoring to their original meaning and vigor words and turns of phrase that have become incomprehensible)," chose to "moderniser l'orthographe et la langue (modernize spelling and language)".[1] And that is what I have done—not without regrets but there is no choice without regrets.

That said, I cannot agree with the assertion that the book operates a "distinct terminological slippage between *français* and francophone, one never properly resolved" and that "the question of how 'French' people and culture *within* the hexagon are, is less present." Let us clarify this point (and in passing, quickly set aside "the hexagon" as a term for a medieval kingdom whose borders were, and long remained, the Meuse, the Scheldt, the Saône, and the Rhône). The book criticises—and this is one of its major arguments—"l'impossibilité de concevoir une identité française en dehors du cadre de la construction politique appelée royaume de France. Elle se concrétise par l'incapacité à admettre, dans le cas de la France, la distinction entre identité politique et identité culturelle—et donc à concevoir cette distinction et à en faire un objet de réflexion et d'interrogation" (p. 121). To make it an object of interrogation is to emphasize that for a long time the French language, that is the dialects of the langue d'oïl, were in the minority in the kingdom (up to and including the nineteenth century): "La *natio* française, qui est une communauté de langue et de culture, n'est pas la seule présente dans les États francophones, royaume de France compris—et cela, même à Paris" (p. 161). It also underlines the fact that political identity (being the subject of a king) and cultural identity do not necessarily coincide, or even coincide very often. For example, "ainsi a-t-on négligé que, pendant longtemps, on n'a vu aucune contradiction dans le fait d'être anglais et de parler français, d'affirmer comme John Gower qu'il était Anglais, tout en écrivant en français, de vivre une identité conçue à des points de vue différents comme à la fois anglaise et française" (p. 110). Yet "on peut être Français de façons différentes: comme sujet du roi de France, comme participant à une communauté de langue et de culture. Certains sont Français des deux façons, d'autres le sont d'une seule" (p. 155). The book thus sets out to demonstrate that between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries language was a constitutive element of a political reality, but not a political subject. One could be a subject of the king of France without speaking French, and speak French while being a subject of the king of England, the emperor, or the king of Jerusalem. It is therefore appropriate to take a fresh look at the political history of the language, a history which is too often marked by anachronistic considerations of contemporary conceptions of the nation, and to highlight the geographical scope of its use, its perennial fragmentation into dialects, the birth outside France of its conception as a language, and various phenomena that are too often neglected, for example, the fact that French as a literary language was born in England in the twelfth century and the fact that practical writing appeared in regions where French and other languages came into contact, that is essentially outside the borders of the kingdom of France.[2] English-speaking readers interested in these perspectives on the language will find them discussed in English in an article by the author available online.[3]

For Murray, the book is in two parts, one dealing with language, the other with political history. I would say two *themes* rather than two parts, as the book comprises six chapters that are not organized into parts, and language is the subject of chapters two and four. For Murray, "the move

from the linguistic to the political-historical is a swift one, pivoting on the topic of individual identity” and “[t]he second part of the book turns to another aspect of French identity, that of the strong centralization, not to say often absolutism, of government.” Within this framework comes “an issue that requires specific treatment...Dutour argues that because there was no direct governmental control by the French monarch over those places where French was spoken, the colonial model is inapplicable.” There are three criticisms here, but they call for a common response.

Let us begin by giving specific treatment to the question to which Murray draws particular attention. In fact, there was no control—direct, indirect, or otherwise—by the king of France over French-speaking political constructs such as the principality of Morea or, for example, the kingdoms of England or Cyprus; this is an essential feature of what I call in the book French dispersion (and if the king of France had controlled the kingdom of England, the Hundred Years’ War would not have taken place). But Murray asserts that the prince of Morea and the duke of Athens ended a war between themselves by appealing to the king of France as their common liege lord (“and so they appealed to Louis as their common liege lord”). Unfortunately this assertion is false and a misreading. The book makes no such assertion. It states that “en 1260, le prince de Morée et le duc d’Athènes sollicitent l’arbitrage [arbitration] du roi de France Louis IX dans le différend qui les oppose” (p. 159). Putting an end to a dispute by recourse to an arbitrator or arbitrators was a common customary procedure that marked the functioning of justice in the thirteenth century at all levels of society; it was particularly common among princes, and is well known to those familiar with the social and political history of thirteenth-century Europe. It is studied in another book of which I am the author: the masters of principalities located outside the kingdom of France who, due to geographical or cultural proximity, maintained relations with the king of France, sometimes called upon the king to arbitrate their disputes without this implying any tie of allegiance; this is notably the case for princes of the empire.[4] Let us also specify that in criticizing the anachronistic use of a colonial model by a historiography that is now more than half a century old (J. Praver, J. Le Patourel), I am simply reporting on scholarly developments in the last quarter century.

There remain the questions “of individual identity” and “of the strong centralization, not to say often absolutism”. Examining French cultural identity as conveyed by the use of a language requires us to question a heritage of conceptions and ways of life associated with the culture conveyed by that language. As Robert Bartlett aptly put it, commenting on a fourteenth-century Scottish chronicler who distinguishes between lowlanders and highlanders in Scotland by referring to “the *gens* of this language” (*cuius linguae gens*), “here then, is the fundamental constitutive agency of language and customs—culture creates ethnicity”.[5]

Is absolutism mentioned in this examination? Yes, but in all the chapters to highlight the fact that the French view of their medieval past is influenced by its post-medieval legacy, and thus in critical developments on French historiography, which tends to overlook that the words “France” and “Français” have changed their meaning over the centuries. No, because the authoritarian temptation of power is discussed above all in the sixth and final chapter of the book (“De la modestie du pouvoir à la tentation autoritaire”), which evokes it in its final paragraph (“Du droit de la personne au droit du Prince”) and devotes sixteen pages to the topic. The authoritarian temptation, the subject of these pages, is presented as a contingent evolution—not of necessity—to be firmly distinguished from any consideration of so-called modernity, the conclusion of the chapter stating that at the end of the Middle Ages, the subject of the book, “le pas décisif avec

lequel, d'une nécessité exceptionnelle, celle de l'état d'exception, on passe à une nécessité permanente, celle de l'absolutisme monarchique n'est pourtant pas encore franchi" (p. 269).

What the book highlights is the fact that in the French-speaking world, from Ireland where a *chanson de geste* was written in French (the *Chanson de Dermot et du comte*) to the kingdom of Jerusalem, where a branch of the *Roman de Renard* was written, a consensual conception of power dominates. This translates into political practice and is reflected in conceptions of customary law (to which, I regret, Murray did not pay attention, although they are an important element of the subject). It sees the relationship between governed and governing as contractual, marked by the reciprocity of obligations, the need for consultation and consent, the necessary respect for the rights of individuals and communities, and a utilitarian, functional, rather than devotional, approach to kingship, based on a conception of the human person whose political importance is underestimated.[6]

The fact that this is the case justifies devoting the penultimate chapter of the book to it (chapter five, and paragraph three of this chapter: "la personne et l'État"). It is with this chapter that what Murray sees as separate ("French language outside France and the evolution of the French state and polity—complete each other fruitfully but are never brought into satisfying dialogue.") is linked, for if language is not a political object, if the kings of England used the French language more than a century before the kings of France for the publication of fundamental texts such as Magna Carta (1215), if nationality does not exist, if the state is conceived as a fictitious legal entity with no rights other than those aimed at the common good, if respect and defense of the rights of the individual are both the condition of possibility for its existence and its *raison d'être* it is because the individual is conceived as prior to the state and defined by free will.[7] "Le fait de l'homme est en la volente", John Gower noted in his great poem *Le Miroir de l'homme* written between 1376 and 1379 (pp. 48, 188, 284). The authoritarian temptation appears, then, not as the announcement of a future and the springtime of a modernity leading to our present, but as an incipient singularity of the kingdom of France, the brutal questioning of a consensus and an established legal order experienced as oppression and contempt for the law, which met with tenacious and lasting resistance, to which we must return their voice. The sixteen pages referred to above seek just such a restoration.

This, then, is the ambition of the book announced in its introduction: to look differently, to avoid anachronism, to restore what we do not see but which nevertheless was, and to stimulate debate. I would like to thank David Murray for emphasizing this point so forcefully.

NOTES

[1] Georges Pompidou, *Anthologie de la poésie française* (Paris: Hachette, 1961), pp. 12, 14.

[2] What Richard Britnell, *Pragmatic Literacy. East and West 1200-1330* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997), pp. 3-24, proposed calling "pragmatic literacy".

[3] Thierry Dutour, "The forgotten political history of the French language," *Pouvoirs. Revue française d'études constitutionnelles et politiques* 186, no. 3 (2023): 19-30, <https://www.cairn-int.info/revue-pouvoirs-2023-3-page-19.htm>.

[4] Thierry Dutour, *Sous l'empire du bien. "Bonnes gens" et pacte social XIII^e-XV^e siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), pp. 252-257. See Ellen Wurtzel, *H-France Review* 17 (June 2017), no. 86. <https://www.h-france.net/vol17reviews/vol17no86wurtzel.pdf>; with my response, Thierry Dutour, *H-France Review* 17 (June 2017), no. 87. <https://www.h-france.net/vol17reviews/vol17no87dutour.pdf>.

[5] Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 39-56, quotation pp. 47-48; quoted in the book p. 152.

[6] There are exceptions: Philippe Buc, *L'Ambiguïté du Livre. Prince, pouvoir et peuple dans les commentaires de la Bible au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1994), has vigorously drawn attention to this reality, in connection with biblical commentaries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

[7] J.C. Holt, *Magna Carta and Medieval Government* (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), pp. 239-257, which republishes J.C. Holt, "A vernacular-French text of Magna Carta 1215," *English Historical Review* 89 (1974): 346-364. See also J.C. Holt, *Magna Carta* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 257, 474.

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