

Book Review

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BOOK REVIEWED: Mary Garrison, Arpad P. Orbán and Marco Mostert (eds.), *Spoken and Written Language: Relations between Latin and the Vernacular Languages in the Earlier Middle Ages*, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 24 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013). i-xii. 364 pp. ISBN: 978-2503507705.

This twenty-paper volume is the result of a conference at Utrecht, 24–26 June 1999. The key concept behind the collection is ‘diglossia’: the use in the medieval West of one language for religion and law, and another for everyday speech. Although, as the editors honestly point out in a brief preface, ‘multilingualism’ is now the preferred term to describe the complex relationships between Latin and the European vernaculars in the early middle ages, the use of ‘diglossia’ as an organising principle does not date the research presented here. Instead it provides a welcome focus on the boundaries between Latin and everyday speech, bringing together the individual studies in a way that a volume on multilingualism – a broader concept – would have been unable to do.

As a result, the collection is both subject-coherent and extremely varied, encompassing Anglo-Saxon England, Ireland, Scandinavia, Central Europe, and Francia. Its languages include French and German as well as English, and so despite the omission of Dutch, Italian and Spanish, the volume represents a substantial section of the international scholarly community.

Although subject focus and multilingualism are a great asset to any edited publication and especially to one on language use, the papers in this book do reflect the state of scholarship on the subject as it

was almost fifteen years ago, and while some of them have updated footnote references, it has been considered unnecessary for others. The reader is invited to judge for him or herself the continued relevance of the research presented in each contribution. This is a deliberate decision on the part of the editors that is explained as stemming from the persistent value of the conference papers to scholars of linguistic history today. While much of the material is stimulating, the lack of up-to-date references, as well as several other concerns, seriously reduce the usefulness of this volume. This is discussed below in an overview of the papers, which are not grouped in any way in the volume but which can be divided into three broad clusters by subject matter.

The largest group of papers deals with the subject of various European vernaculars, not including German. It comprises some excellent contributions, including Roger Wright's 'A sociophilological study of the change to official Romance documentation in Castile', though unfortunately there is little material here that has not already been covered by the author in other publications since 1999. A puzzling addition to a volume on the early middle ages is Anna Adamska's 'Latin and three vernaculars in east central Europe from the point of view of the history of social communication', which deals with the period from 1300 to 1500. While this and Inger Larsson's 'Nordic digraphia and diglossia' have intrinsic interest, they are principally historical overviews and present little new research.

The second group of papers focuses on Latin use. These papers range from Walter Berschin's 'Die Figur des Dolmetschers in der biographischen Literatur des westlichen Mittelalters (IV.-XII. Jh.)', in which he simply but usefully lists the known sources of classical and medieval references to translators; to Michael Herren's excellent comparison of Merovingian and Irish Latin in 'The *Cena Adamnani* or seventh-century table talk.' One might wish for more engagement with primary sources in some of the papers, however. One of these is Albert Demyttenaere's 'Qu'une femme ne peut pas être appelée homme: Questions de langue et d'anthropologie autour du concile de Mâcon (585)', which begins with an interesting but almost excessively detailed discussion of the ways in which modern historiography has responded to the question raised at the council of Mâcon: whether or not women can be designated by the Latin word *homo*. Although this and the subsequent discussion of what the question may have meant is both stimulating and valuable, there is little sense of the issue being couched in its wider medieval setting and the discussion becomes almost teleological in places. Demyttenaere points out, for instance, that '...dire que Dieu désigna l'homme aussi bien que la femme par le mot hébreu *Adam*, ne dit rien de l'usage d'un mot latin.' This is true from a linguistic point of view, but it ignores the Christian medieval context of the word *homo*, whose meaning in this debate was extrapolated from scripture.

The third and final large group of papers deals with Germanic dialects in early medieval Europe, taking a broad historical rather than a narrow linguistic view. It is, therefore, welcome as a selection intended not for Germanists but for early medievalists working with some aspect of Old High

German. This is characterised by the late Dennis Green's very lucid 'Writing in Latin and the vernacular: the case of Old High German'. Two final small groups of papers might be added to the three already discussed, their solid contributions dealing with historical linguistics in Merovingian Europe and with Irish texts (the *Auraicept na nÉces* and the *Immacallam in dáThúarad*, discussed by Rijcklof Hofman and Charles D. Wright, respectively).

Although a good deal of the content of this volume is of a high standard, it is clear that there is a very large gap between the strongest and weakest papers. In addition, multiple editorial problems intrude on the reader's attention. There is no index, list of plates or bibliography, either general or at the end of each paper, and an afterword or summary to draw together the primary conclusions and questions would have been welcome. There is no consensus between the papers as to whether or not quotations in different languages should be translated, with the result that some authors translate and others do not; of those who do, some translate in the main text and others do so in a footnote. Lack of proofreading is clear in numerous mistakes of spelling and grammar. The reader stumbles over phrases such as 'in this presentation' (p. 329), a reminder that the piece started out as a conference paper, and 'when Sweden has become Christian during the eleventh century, the Church met a well-established habit among the leading families of documenting important events [...]'] (p. 76). As a result of these obstacles, the volume conveys the impression of a grouping of disparate papers and the unifying effect of the focus on diglossia is much weakened.

A further, less obvious drawback appears to stem from a lack of strong dialogue between the paper contributors. Several of the authors discuss Christine Mohrmann's Nijmegen School and the conceptual questions presented by medieval glossaries, without mutual reference and without ever really reaching a critical level of engagement. Some, like Elvira Glaser in 'Typen und Funktionen volkssprachiger (althochdeutschen) Eintragungen im lateinischen Kontext', while offering a substantial and stimulating discussion of Old High German words, retain the discursive register of a historical overview when describing glossaries and other text types. This seems almost pedestrian in light of the extensive debate and resulting literature on glossaries and glossary-type texts that have emerged in recent years. The issue could perhaps have been remedied at least in part by grouping the papers by subject well ahead of publication to encourage discussion between the authors.

Overall, while this volume offers both coherence and scope, as well as several important studies, its scholarship is both very uneven and out of date. The overall lack of reference to current scholarship does detract significantly from the collection as a whole, despite the interest presented by most of the papers and the updates made to some, and the editorial issues outlined above are disappointing in a book that has been fifteen years in the making. The editors' aim may have been simply to stimulate further research and debate, which this extensive collection is very capable of doing; but it does not altogether convince as a serious academic volume.