
In their preface to this volume of twenty essays on the subject of the relationship between Latin and the vernaculars in the early medieval West, the editors define the background to this relationship as being the choice of Latin as the language of the Western Roman Empire and the Roman Church (viii). This definition, with its emphasis upon the prestige enjoyed by Latin as the language of colonial power, whether that colonising force be imperial or ecclesiastical, is in fact strangely at odds with the picture that emerges from the essays themselves, which portray a less clean and coherent image of the Latin used ‘on the ground’ in both the written and oral traditions. The Vulgar Latin current in much of the early medieval West was evidently affected by the various vernaculars of the peoples by whom it was written and spoken, a fact which in itself would suggest a blurring of linguistic boundaries. It is not clear, however, that this blurring is necessarily a symptom of either the breakdown of Latin or of a growing interest in national literatures at Latin’s expense. Rather, it suggests a need to reassess the traditional model in which Latin and the vernacular languages are set in opposition, in a position of tension and conflict, in favour of a more complex model that takes into account the realities of pragmatic literacy in a multilingual environment. The choice of Latin as a *lingua franca* may have ‘entailed the possibility of a shared literary culture and heritage across Europe’ (viii). But it also served to highlight regional differences, as the indigenous vernaculars and the various cultural contexts into and from which Latin was transmitted contributed towards the creation of multiple varieties of medieval Latin in those areas in which it operated.
That Latin, and even the Latin used for such sacred works as the Bible and the liturgy, was not a static entity is demonstrated by Aprád Orbán in his discussion of Greek influence on the christianised Vulgar Latin of the *Vetus Latina*, and by Els Rose in her analysis of the *Missale Gothicum* (the third and eighteenth chapters, respectively). Orbán analyses three specific categories of vulgarisms used by the translators of the *Vetus Latina*. The resulting text, with its *infinita varietas* of Vulgar Latin, may have been regarded as an abomination by those brought up in the classical tradition of rhetoric, but for early Christians across the medieval West it became the standard that future writers would follow. For her part, Rose offers a compelling piece in which the impact of Vulgar Latin upon the language of the *Missale Gothicum* is considered and Christine Mohrmann’s theories concerning the hieratic, artificial and stylised nature of liturgical Latin scrutinised. The reader is lead expertly through orthographical, morphological and lexical examples of Vulgar Latin found in this early medieval sacramentary, demonstrating that everyday life and daily experiences both pagan and profane influenced the language of the Gallican text. From these and other contributions it becomes clear that even the language of the sacred was not immune from what purists would consider ‘corruption’. And that this transition phase posed dilemmas to those working in Latin is demonstrated by Demyttenaere’s chapter, which focuses upon a specific question raised at the Council of Mâcon in 585 where, as Gregory of Tours records, one of the bishops declared that a woman might not be called man (‘*mulierem hominem non posse vocitare*’, 12). Following discussion of the anthropological and theological implications of this statement, Demyttenaere focuses upon the grammatical context in which such a claim might be made and the linguistic background against which such concerns might be raised. The chapter concludes that the debate reflects
the collision between written and spoken language, the language of the élite and the language of ‘the people’ (41).

The different modes by which Latin texts were transmitted to literate and illiterate audiences is the subject of a number of contributions to this volume, some of which also consider the social functions of writing, or ‘sociophilology’ as Roger Wright terms it (133ff.). Clearly, in practical terms, the experiences of both the literate and illiterate would vary considerably depending on whether one is concerned with those regions in which Romance languages were spoken or with those areas in which Germanic, Celtic or Eastern European languages operated, and it might have been useful had the organisation of the volume reflected this in some manner. Anthony Harvey’s contribution, for instance, follows Rose to the extent that it also is concerned with non-Classical vocabulary, but in this instance the sources are far more numerous as he demonstrates the research potential of the full-text database of Celtic Latin Literature produced by the Royal Irish Academy’s *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources* (DMLCS). In contrast to some of the other contributions, moreover, this is a fully updated description of the DMLCS project, an issue to which I shall return in due course. Michael Herren’s chapter is also concerned with the varieties of spoken Latin spoken, as he considers whether or not Adomnán and Arculf (the Frankish bishop who reportedly told Adomnán of his visits to the Holy Land) would have been able to communicate effectively (and concludes that they would). Similarly, Van Uytfanghe and Banniard consider issues of communication, although in this instance the path of transmission is not between two highly educated Latin speakers from different regions, but between the educated, literate élite of Gaul and Francia and their illiterate listeners. Adopting different approaches, these two chapters reach a similar conclusion: that a certain degree of passive or phonetic literacy must have bridged the gap between written text and
oral delivery, allowing the illiterate listener to grasp a certain amount even if certain subtleties were lost in ‘translation’.

Methods of translation are the subject of Dennis Green’s contribution, ‘Writing in Latin and the Vernacular: The Case of Old High German’, in which he examines the evidence for various co-existing approaches to the theory and practice of translation. Some of these works are skilled ‘free translations’; others are glosses which – as he reminds the reader – ‘do not testify to an interest in the German language (this is how we see them), but to an ignorance of the Latin language with which were addressed’ (227). The glossing tradition is examined in fuller detail by Bergmann and Quak, both of whom are keen to emphasise (following Green) that glosses should be seen not as an attempt to translate texts into the vernacular, but as a tool to aid and improve the teaching and interpretation of Latin.

That the interaction between Latin and the vernaculars was not all one-way is made clear by Hofman and Charles Wright’s chapters, each of which examines examples where Latin models have influenced vernacular literary traditions (both treat Irish texts: the Auraicept na nÉces is examined by Hofman and the Immacallam in dá Thúarad is analysed by Wright). A much bleaker picture of the literary and linguistic capabilities of Latinists is offered by Nicholas Brooks in his discussion of the Latin preserved in Canterbury charters from the ninth century. For Brooks argues that while some of the deviations from classical Latin might reflect the development of Vulgar Latin, Michael Lapidge was probably correct in regarding ‘the invasion of charter Latin with vulgarisms in ninth-century England as a sign of the collapse of formal instruction rather than just a move towards a different form of Latin’ (118). Here, as in Roger Wright’s article on the study of the change to official Romance documentation in Castile, cultural factors further drive the move from Latin to the vernacular, as Brooks argues that the
assumption seems to have been that when writing grants for men Latin ought to be used, ‘but when writing provisions for women or for widows English was the appropriate language’ (128). Adamska and Geuenich are also concerned with the historical, political and cultural interactions that affect vernaculars and determine their interaction with Latin. In a lucid account of the relationship between Latin and Czech, Hungarian and Polish (that touches also upon German speakers operating in Eastern Europe), Adamska’s chapter draws together many of the issues raised throughout the volume and offers a cogent account of a large and complex subject matter that might well be unfamiliar to many readers. In fact, although it is the last chapter, in many respects its discussion covers many of the issues that might be desirable in an introduction.

As the above survey should hopefully indicate, this book contains many valuable contributions to the study of Latin and the vernaculars, but the chapters are quite disparate — in terms of length, subject matter, theoretical approach and the extent to which they have been modified to reflect current research; an introduction by the editors might have helped remedy this. This is particularly true in a volume that represents the proceedings of a conference held fourteen years ago and claims to ‘reflect the state of the art of 1999’ (ix).

Juliet Mullins
juliet.hewish@yahoo.co.uk