PRESTER LES OREILLES AU CHANT DE LA SIRENE, POLYPHONIES, DETERRITORIALIZATION AND TRANSLINGUALIM IN MEDIEVAL FRANCOPHONIA

Delphine Demelas

Abstract: This article examines medieval francopolyphonies – the intricate interrelationship of languages, voices and perspectives underpinning medieval Francophonia. Dimensions of linguistic fluidity and hybridity in the medieval period are explored through two case studies: analysis of vegetable-lamb variants in continental and insular copies of John Mandeville's *Le Livre des merveilles du monde*, and the glossing of *mermaid* in multilingual glossaries from the British Isles. Examination of Mandeville manuscripts reveals porous boundaries between continental and Anglo-Norman French, challenging modern conceptions of medieval language taxonomy. The rendering of the Anglo-Norman term *cahourdes* prompts glossing and adaptation by continental scribes, illuminating limits of intercomprehension c.1400. Exploration of deterritorialization and reterritorialization illuminates the linguistic transformations unfolding through medieval translation practices. Meanwhile analysis of *mermaid* glossing practices demonstrates the conceptual fluidity between medieval French and English. Interchangeable use of *gallice/anglice* to gloss vernaculars underscores the equivocal status of languages in insular manuscripts. This parity is reinforced through visual analysis, as interlinear glosses occupy symmetrical placement on the folio, embodying hybridity. Overall, this article problematizes applying modern linguistic categories to appreciate medieval heteroglossia. It advocates adopting enriched theoretical paradigms like *translingualism* to capture medieval textual fluidity. The analysis prompts reassessment of modern ideological frameworks underpinning language classification schemes. Ultimately it encourages interdisciplinary dialogue regarding the contingency and multiplicity of multilingual representations across time and space, while linking medieval and modern Francophonia.

Keywords: Medieval Francophonia, Anglo-Norman, multilingualism, translingualism, deterritorialization

Medieval Francophonia encompassed a broad spectrum of linguistic and textual practices across continental Europe and the British Isles[1]. While traditional conceptions parse medieval French into separated varieties like Anglo-Norman, Lorrain, Picard, Franco-Italian versus *Francien* (the variety of French from Paris), textual evidence reveals more fluid boundaries between vernaculars in the multilingual environment of medieval Europe[2].

[1] About Medieval Francophonia see (Haar & Schoenaers, 2021; Kleinhenz & Busby, 2010; Morato & Schoenaers, 2019; Tyler, 2011).

[2] For a discussion of the development of the Francien myth and the various factors that contributed to the emergence of a standard form of French in the Middle Ages, see (Glessgen, 2017).

Glossaries and manuscript traditions provide unique insight into medieval language ideologies, showcasing the porous linguistic boundaries and interconnected francophone networks operating during this period.

This article will explore how the concept of *francopolyphonies* can apply to medieval Francophonia (Saint-Loubert, 2016). Francopolyphonies refers to the intricate plurality and interrelationship of voices, languages, and identities that exist across different francophone contexts. It points to the verbal polyphony and diversity of expression found within spheres of Francophonia, where multiple varieties of French and other languages intermingle. This term highlights the porous nature of linguistic and cultural borders in settings where French encounters and intersects with other languages and traditions. Francopolyphonies thus convey the hybridity, heterogeneity and multiplicity underlying certain francophone literary and linguistic practices that challenge traditional understandings of French as a discrete, monolithic entity. This article aims to unpack dimensions of medieval francopolyphonies by revealing the plurality of voices embedded in some manuscript traditions and glossaries from the period, and the consideration of French among other vernaculars it was in contact with.

Francopolyphonies can be positioned as textual zoophytes, with the intermingling of voices and porous lexical boundaries reflecting a medieval impulse to imagine and depict combinations that transcended rigid categories. In the history of biology, organisms once classified as zoophytes blurred the lines between animal and plant due to their seemingly ambiguous characteristics. Similarly, the metaphor *textual zoophytes* is invoked here to describe texts that defy categorization by blending various dialects and/or languages. Just as zoophytes challenged biological classification, these textual hybrids transcend established linguistic boundaries, inhabiting a liminal space between, or even beyond, them. The medieval linguistic zoophytes, like their organic counterparts, invite reflection on the contingent limitations of our classification systems when applied to past multilingual contexts. This research highlights how the medieval francopolyphonies participated in broader zoophytic efforts to conceptualize hybridity that blurred boundaries. Finding linguistic fluidity and hybridity in medieval artifacts prompts reassessment of modern language taxonomies, just as observing zoophytes complicated medieval biological categories. Uncovering these acts of medieval boundary crossing, whether organic or linguistic, reveals the impulse to test the permeability of systems of order. This drives home the need for nuanced and context-specific paradigms to appreciate hybridity in the medieval world[3].

[3] On medieval hybridity see (Cohen, 2016; Gasse, 2023).

This article examines two case studies that problematize modern taxonomic divisions between medieval French languages and vernaculars: the manuscript tradition of John Mandeville's *Le Livre des merveilles du monde* and the glossing of French and English terminology in medieval insular manuscripts. Analysis of these artifacts illuminates the complex dynamics between Continental French and Anglo-Norman, and between Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English in medieval writing[4].

Moreover, examining medieval translation practices within the francophone world through the lens of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, concepts pioneered by Deleuze and Guattari, sheds light on fascinating processes of linguistic and cultural transformation.[5] This framework reveals how the text transmission process was not simply a matter of information transfer, but rather a dynamic interplay of disruption and reconstruction. Deterritorialization, the uprooting and displacement of existing boundaries, occurred through the introduction of new concepts, forms, and values from source languages. This challenged established linguistic norms and destabilized the meaning of the original text within the new context, but not as an act of destruction. Reterritorialization followed, characterized by the integration of these borrowed elements into the target language and culture. Translators adapted them to specific needs and purposes, fostering the generation of new meanings and interpretations. This enriched the linguistic landscape and shaped the target culture, demonstrating the agency of translators in driving cultural and linguistic exchange. By moving beyond a simplistic view of copy as mere transmission, we can appreciate the profound impact scribes had in shaping the medieval francophone world. Their work, analysed through the lens of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, reveals the dynamism and complexity inherent in these transformative acts of cultural exchange.

By scrutinizing modern assumptions about medieval language categories, this research also aims to advance more textured understandings of multilingualism during this era (Jefferson et al., 2013; Pahta et al., 2018). It prompts reconsideration of traditional paradigms that delineate medieval Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English as discrete linguistic systems. The intersections between code-switching, borrowing, translation, and shifting orthographic practices across manuscripts underscore the limitations of applying modern taxonomies of language uncritically to medieval evidence.

Ultimately, attention to the permeability and fluidity observed in these textual examples provides critical perspective on language contact situations more broadly across time and

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[4] For a discussion about Anglo-Norman, language-mixing and multilingualism see (D. Trotter, 2011, 2013).
[5] See (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972).

space. This study illuminates the nuances of medieval Francophonia while encouraging enriched theoretical engagement with issues of language variability, change, and boundary-making that resonate both within and beyond medieval contexts. The porosity between languages evidenced in manuscripts encourages re-examination of modern ideological frameworks that reify discrete named language communities. In turn, medieval artifacts prompt interdisciplinary dialogue regarding the complex factors shaping medieval Francophonia and translingual practices across cultures.

1. Francopolyphonies in Madeville's voyages: the vegetable-lamb and the francophone boundaries

This zoophytic fluidity between categories is embodied in medieval manuscript traditions like the *Le Livre des merveilles du monde* of John Mandeville (Mandeville, 2000). It follows in the tradition of earlier medieval travel accounts like those of Marco Polo and William of Rubruck, which introduced European audiences to the *mirabilia* and diversity of Asia[6]. The text circulated throughout England and France in the 14th century, and analysis of its manuscript tradition reveals telling insights into medieval multilingualism. A passage in the insular tradition describing a vegetable lamb growing in the distant land of Cadhille illustrates the francopolyphonic intermingling of languages and cultural perspectives. The various French variants used to describe this zoophytic fruit exhibit the permeable boundaries between Frenches in the medieval period. Examination of the manuscript variants for this passage will demonstrate the plural voices and perspectives underpinning medieval Francophonia, while also testing the limits of intelligibility and revealing fault lines in intercomprehension. The complex manuscript tradition of Mandeville's Travels provides a compelling artifact to unpack dimensions of medieval francopolyphonies and appreciate the nuances of medieval language conceptualizations.

The Travels of John Mandeville, penned in the 14th century, recounts Sir John Mandeville's alleged travels throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia, encountering diverse peoples and places. Despite its implicit claims of authenticity, the work is now considered pseudonymous, though enormously popular in the late medieval period with over 300 manuscript copies surviving. The original was likely composed around 1357 in Anglo-Norman French, possibly by an English knight residing in Liège, though the earliest complete

[6] About European medieval travel narrative travels, see (Alburquerque-García, 2011; Castro Hernández, 2013; Ladero Quesada, 2020; Zumthor & Peebles, 1994).

version is in Continental French[7]. Analysis of the rich manuscript tradition reveals complex processes of textual transmission and adaptation as scribes rendered and reinterpreted The Travels across linguistic and cultural space. Mandeville's Travels was actively copied and circulated throughout England and France in the 14th - 15th centuries. Insular versions often served as exemplars for Continental copies, and vice versa. This entailed negotiating between the variant medieval French dialects. Close examination of manuscript differences provides insights into the interwined and plural perspectives underpinning medieval Francophonia.

For instance, the insular tradition contains a curious passage describing a fantastic zoophyte – a vegetable lamb said to grow in distant Tartary. The text refers to a peculiar gourd-like fruit that grows in Tartary: when the fruit was ripe, it was sliced open, showing what appeared to be a lamb in flesh and blood but lacked wool, and all parts were edible. Analysis of the variant continental French terms employed to designate this animal-plant in manuscripts reveals fluid relationships between vernaculars in the period that problematize modern conceptions of medieval languages, and plural perspectives underpinning medieval francopolyphonies. Analysis of the variants for this fantastic beast in the work's manuscripts reveals boundaries between Insular and Continental French, problematizing modern conceptions of medieval language taxonomy:

> La (=in Caldilhe) croist une manere de fruit aussy come cahourdes (var.: coudres, Lo8; gourdes, Lei, Lo9, 02, Lon, P3, P5; coudes, Lyo; couhourdes, un fruict de aignel ; couhourdes, courges en françois, P12; cocodrilles, P7, C2.), et quant ils sont maures homme les fent par my et troeve homme dedeinz une bestoille en char et en os et en sanc auxi come un petit aignel sanz laine qe l'em mange, et le fruit et le bestoille […] Nient purtant jeo lour dis qe jeo ne le tenoie mie a mult grant mervaille, qar aussy bien y avoit il arbres en notre pais qe portent fruit qe deviennent oisealx volantz et sont bons pur manger. Et cils qe cheiont en l'eawe vivent, et cils qe cheiont en terre moerent tantost. (Mandeville, 2000, pp. 427–428)
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> Here grows a kind of fruit like gourds, and when they are ripe people split them open and inside find a little beast with flesh and bone and blood like a little lamb without wool that people eat, both the fruit and the beast [...]. Nonetheless, I told them that I did not find it particularly remarkable, for in our country too

[7] The Travels of John Mandeville has a rich manuscript tradition spanning multiple languages and centuries. There are nine medieval translations, including two in German, two in Dutch, several in the Iberian languages (Catalan, Aragonese, Castilian), one in Italian, one in Czech, one in Danish, and six in English. The English versions gave rise to Irish and Welsh translations in the late 15th and early 16th centuries (Chotzen, 1937). This vast manuscript corpus has been meticulously documented by scholars like Seymour and Deluz (Mandeville, 2000, pp. 28–84; Seymour & Seymour, 1963, pp. 38–49). The text has a complex narrative structure, with Jerusalem at the symbolic centre but many other shifting centres that disrupt linearity, as analysed by Akbari (Akbari, 2009, pp. 20–66). The identity of John Mandeville has been a source of mystery and debate. Modern scholars agree it is likely a fictional persona not a real individual, yet the name is presented with the weight of a legal oath, complicating simple notions of fact versus fiction as Deluz argues (Mandeville, 2000, p. 92). Overall, the work has a rich reception history crossing languages and cultures in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages.

> there are trees that bear fruit that become flying birds and are good to eat. And those that fall in the water live, and those that fall on the land die at once[8].

In this passage, Mandeville describes a zoophyte element, a vegetable lamb that grows in the Cadhille region, an area farther away than China and still difficult to locate. He indicates that this fruit, when ripe, contains a hairless lamb that can be eaten. However, this wonder of nature is immediately mitigated by the narrator, indicating that Europeans are also familiar with the animal-plant concept and the text insists that a similar hybrid can be found in Europe. One Anglo-Norman manuscript even indicates that this animal-plant is to be found in England. This time, it's not a tree-lamb, but a tree-bird, whose fruit transforms into a flying creature when ripe, provided it can fall into the water and not onto the ground, as a reference to the myth of the tree-goose. Neither of the two zoophyte elements is named directly in the text, but both are described by analogy and by the different elements of which they are composed. This passage is rich in information about the status of Anglo-Norman between the 14th and 15th centuries, as well as the limits of Francophone intercomprehension at that time.

To designate the lamb-vegetable growing in Cadhille, Anglo-Norman and Continental manuscripts almost all compare the fruit to a gourd, without specifying on which seme the comparison is based on. Anglo-Norman manuscripts use different spelling variants of the French word 'courge' for this comparison: *gourdes* (Lei, Lo9, O2); *coudres* (Lo8); and *cahourdes* (Lo2). This last variant, which includes an internal *-h* that sometimes marks the loss of a Latin letter in insular French, has given some continental copyists a hard time.

The variant of the Continental manuscript P12 is particularly revealling[9]. The continental copyist keeps the Anglo-Norman form *'couhourdes'*, but adds that this word designates *'courges en françois'*. The need to gloss a word that is in fact French tells us something about the spread of intercomprehension in the medieval French-speaking world. The translation implies that the scribe is aware that potential readers of P12 may not understand this Anglo-Norman form of the word *courge*. As D. Trotter demonstrated, the passage of texts from one side of the English Channel to the other often requires the scripta of a document to be adapted to local standards, particularly when it comes to the circulation of diplomatic documents (D. A. Trotter, 2011). In the insular zone, it is common to find evidence of an awareness of a strong separation between insular French and continental

[8] The translation is mine.
[9] Ms. Paris, BnF, français, 25284.

French in the British Isles, some text referring to the Continental French as *doux françai*s (Lucken, 2015). However, the continental scribe's remark in P12 pushes the dissociation further. By adding the words *en françois*, he calls into question whether the Anglo-Norman scripta belongs to the French-speaking sphere. His mission as a copyist of Mandeville's insular text is not just to adapt the text to a different scripta, but to transform it into a translation operation. Some Anglo-Norman particularities are no longer familiar to P12's readership, but foreign, and requires a copyist capable of translating the text *en françois*.

The continental copyists of P7 and C2 also adapt the passage in a different way[10]. Rather than keeping the Anglo-Norman forms *cahourdes/couhourdes*, they transform the word into *cocodrilles*. The transformation of gourds into crocodiles gives rise to several comments. If we follow P12's remark, this change can be made to avoid misunderstanding for readers of these continental copies. The choice of a reference to a familiar yet exotic animal such as the crocodile perfectly suits to a passage discussing the existence of a lamb-plant in a foreign land. Indeed, the crocodile is an animal frequently cited in medieval bestiaries, yet one that remains relatively unknown (Kuhry, 2022; Malaxecheverria, 1981). The equation between familiarity, exoticism and understanding is resolved by erasing the Anglo-Norman variant and adding a reference to an animal rather than a vegetable, the fruit bearing the beardless lamb also having an animal form. He adds another link between animality and vegetality by means of a comparison, reinforcing the zoophyte character of the lamb-vegetable.

The replacement of *cahourdes* (or a similar form) by *cocodrille* is perhaps evidence of what the copyist of P12 and his gloss suggest: the non-understanding of the Anglo-Norman form and its replacement by a variant that is both familiar and foreign to the copyists of P7 and C2. The change would therefore not have occurred for the readers, but rather reflects the scribe's need to use a different word in the face of a form that is totally foreign to him, and which he resemantizes in another animal reference[11]. In any case, these continental versions show a desire or the necessity to totally erase some Anglo-Norman aspects of their models, which is perceived as alien.

The relationship therefore seems one-way: while Anglo-Norman scribes adapted their continental models with great ease and freedom (which earned them the wrath of many scholars until very recently), this was not the case for continental scribes faced with adapting Anglo-Norman texts in the mid-14th century. Mandeville's continental copies are full of

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[10] P7: Paris, BnF, français, 5635; C2: Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, 23.

[11] Of course, a misreading of the Anglo-Norman form cannot be ruled out, which would still be evidence of a continental lack of understanding of the insular variant, without however seeing it as an agency on the part of the scribe.

misunderstandings and often require the translation of certain insular words or forms[12]. Although all these scribes use a variant of medieval French, we are here witnessing the limits of intercomprehension in the French-speaking world[13]. Anglo-Norman, like a lamb-plant, becomes both familiar and alien to continental scribe and/or readers in the 14th century, when the kingdoms of France and England clashed for over a hundred years. Like the goose-tree, Anglo-Norman becomes difficult to categorize, earning it its compound name: a French hybrid wedged between English and a dialectal variety of French from the continent, it had to be glossed or translated to ensure understanding across the Channel. While zoophyte elements test the limits and permeability of natural categories, Anglo-Norman scripta tests the limits of cross-comprehension and permeability in the French-speaking world.

The case of *cahourde* highlights the relationship of sameness-otherness within the French-speaking world. The self-conscious distinction of insular French from the French spoken on the mainland already testifies to a distance (intended or not) from continental norms since the 13th century. Alternatively, the replacement of *cahourdes* could reflect individual scribal choice rather than broader incomprehension. However, while the case of *couhourde*' is the most telling, it is not the only example of the need for translation when adapting the Anglo-Norman text to the continental language. In addition to *cahourdes*, textual analysis of Mandeville's insular tradition reveals other Anglo-Norman words that continental scribes need to adapt, suggesting a more widespread unfamiliarity. In her edition of the text, C. Deluz notes numerous examples of the translation of insular terms or forms by different words in continental French (Mandeville, 2000, pp. 33–35). For example, the adverb *courtaignement* ('quickly, without delay'), attested only in Anglo-Norman, is transformed in all continental versions into *courtement*, *briefment* or *tantost*[14]. As with *couhourdes*, some continental copyists seem to understand the meaning of the term perfectly but feel the need to translate the insular adverb to help their readership understand.

The textual adaptation practices of Mandeville's continental copyists might contribute to the perception of Anglo-Norman as a distinct, even incomprehensible, language for outsiders. While evidence suggests insular efforts to acquire *doux français*, some divergences from continental French may have posed challenges for wider comprehension within the

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[12] C. Deluz's description of Mandeville's manuscripts frequently reveals that the continental copies of the insular version include many misunderstandings ("*incompréhensions*") with their Anglo-Norman models (Mandeville, 2000, pp. 36–58).

[13] For an overview of this subject see (Gooskens, 2017). For some studies of medieval intercomprehension and intelligibility see (Blanche-Benveniste, 2008; Carlucci, 2020, 2022).

[14] See the entry *courtaignement* in (*AND - The Anglo-Norman Dictionary (AND2 Online Edition). Aberystwyth University.*, 2023)

French-speaking world[15]. However, relying solely on a single word like *cahourdes* to demonstrate broad-scale incomprehension has limitations. Scribal training, textual genre, and intended audience significantly influence lexical familiarity and perceived translatability. Examining individual words like *cahourdes* offers glimpses, but a more nuanced picture of medieval Francophonia requires considering these contextual variations. While the Mandeville example is suggestive but limited, it hints at potential divergences between insular and continental French warranting further investigation. Examining a broader range of manuscripts and lexical items across genres and regions will be crucial to determine the extent and nature of intercomprehension within medieval Francophonia. Such research could reveal a spectrum of intelligibility, rather than a straightforward binary division between distinct languages.

2. Mermaid, mermen, and siren: insular polyphony and multilingualism

The complex translation and transmission of Mandeville's Travels reveals dimensions of medieval francopolyphonies, as continental scribes grappled with rendering insular French variants. A parallel set of insights emerges from examining some insular glossaries featuring Latin and French and English vernacular glosses[16]. In particular, the glossing of words for mythical creatures like mermaids showcases the porous conceptual boundaries between dialects. Much as Mandeville describes zoophytic beings that confound categories, the mermaid herself represents an organic hybrid that blurs taxonomic lines. Analysis of the context of vernacular terms used to gloss Latin *siren* in medieval glossaries provides another window into the plural voices underpinning medieval multilingual writing. The visual and textual treatment of these glossary entries reveals the impulse towards heteroglossia and polyphony within medieval multilingual frameworks[17]. Examining the francopolyphonies within these glossaries encourages reconsideration of modern linguistic assumptions when conceptualizing medieval language mixture.

A century before Mandeville's *Voyages*, we can observe a parallel phenomenon relating to translation in the francophone zone. It concerns another hybrid being, perhaps the most famous: the mermaid. Described as part woman, part fish and/or part bird, this mythical being is a major figure of the medieval European imaginary, illustrating both polyphony and

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[15] On Learning French in the medieval British Isles, see (Critten, 2023; Ingham, 2014; Rothwell, 2001).
[16] For a recent study about Medieval Western glossary practices see (Seiler et al., 2023; for some insights about Anglo-Norman glossaries see pp. 333-42).
[17] To learn more about of the concept of heteroglossia, see (Bailey, 2007, 2012)

hybridity through the texts in which it appears and its pictorial representations[18]. Three terms co-exist in Anglo-Norman to denote this 'sea monster': *seraine*, the same word used in continental French derived from the Latin *siren*, as well as *mermayde* and *mermen*, both borrowed from English.[19] The two terms appear in different discourse traditions: while the term *'sirene'* is mostly used exclusively in literary texts or bestiaries, the English borrowings are used in glossaries or inventories[20].

The term *sirene* was widely used in Anglo-Norman compositions and *remaniements* from the 12th to 15th centuries. It even appears in insular glossaries since the 13th century [21]. With such a wide range of representation, the word *sirene* appears to have been prevalent in the British Isles during the Middle Ages, raising the question of the necessity of employing English terms like *mermaid* to fill vocabulary gaps in nonfictional writing. Yet we find the English borrowing *mermen* glossing Latin *syren* in a 13th century glossary, with *mermen* preceded by *gallice*, which typically indicates French words, not English[22]. Additionally, the Anglo-Norman Dictionary contains an inventory example using *mermyns* for mermaids. Such interchangeable uses of established terms like *sirene* and English borrowings like *mermen* reveal fluid boundaries between vernaculars in medieval insular writing. This problematizes conceptual divisions between medieval languages, as traditional French words intermingle with English despite no apparent vocabulary deficiency motivating borrowing.

If the word *mermen* is preceded here by the word *gallice*, English terms are most often preceded by Latin 'anglice' in glossaries. However, examples of cross-use of the terms *gallice* and *anglice* are commonplace in insular glossaries, too numerous to be catalogued as mere confusion. Indeed, as Rothwell and Hunt have noted in their respective studies of medieval insular glossaries, *gallice* and *romanice* can both be used in front of words of English origin in glossaries to translate a Latin term (Hunt, 1979c, 1979b, 1979a; Rothwell, 1980). However, they analysed these frequent usages as 'confusion' on the part of scribes unable to correctly dissociate the three languages. Perhaps this stems not from scribal error but from modern

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[18] For an overview of representations and influences of the Mermaid figure in Western Cultures, see (Müller et al., 2022). For recent studies about Medieval Mermaids, see (d'Inca, 2022, 2022; Frojmovic, 2023; Kay, 2020)

[19] See the entries *mermayde*; *mermen* and *seraine1* in (*AND - The Anglo-Norman Dictionary (AND2 Online Edition). Aberystwyth University.*, 2023).

[20] I am following the Poplack's definition of borrowing as "the process of transferring or incorporating lexical items originating from one language into discourse of another" (Poplack, 2017, p. 6). For an overview of the distinction between *borrowing* and *code-switching* see (Treffers-Daller, 2023). About discourse traditions in medieval European vernacular contexts see (Selig, 2022).

[21] See the different examples in the *seraine1* entry in (*AND - The Anglo-Norman Dictionary (AND2 Online Edition). Aberystwyth University.*, 2023).

[22] The DMLBS defines *gallice* only as "in French". See (*DMLBS - The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, 2023)

definitions of medieval language categories. As Amanda Roig-Marín suggests, our notion of distinct languages may not accurately reflect the Middle Ages, where vernaculars intermingled:

> Overall, this lexical analysis by semantic fields has endeavoured to showcase some of the lexical conventions of administrative writing as produced in medieval Britain and show how the classification of such texts as being written in Latin (as they are regularly indexed in catalogues) should be reassessed: our modern conceptual category of a language as a clearly delineated entity no longer applies in the Middle Ages. (Roig-Marín, 2019, p. 252)

What applies to Latin texts can no doubt be applied to the Anglo-Norman examples seen above[23]. Perhaps the confusion stems not from the insular scribes, but from our modern definition of language classifications. We must certainly admit that in these examples, the terms *gallice* or *anglice*, rather than referring to the same reality of what we consider to be French or English, refer more broadly to the idea of vernacular and not to a particular language[24].

The textual treatment of terms like *mermaid* in medieval glossaries only provides one angle for appreciating the francopolyphonies within these multilingual artifacts. An equally fruitful perspective emerges from examining the visual and spatial relationships between languages within the glossaries. Applying these lenses to inspect the interlinear glossing of languages reveals telling insights into medieval language conceptualizations. Much as the mermaid's split anatomy resists categorical separation, the interwoven presentation of Latin, French, and English resists distinct linguistic divisions. The visual symmetry and consistent spatial relationships between vernaculars in glossaries mirror the hybridity embodied by mythical creatures. An analysis of the visual dimensions of medieval glossaries elucidates the equilibrium and reciprocity between languages, further highlighting the limitations of modern linguistic taxonomies when interpreting medieval evidence.

The idea of vernacular equivalence in insular glossaries is reinforced by visual analysis of the manuscripts. Recent scholarship has utilized visual analysis of medieval manuscripts to elucidate the complex relationships between languages on the page. Frameworks like Mark Sebba's Language-Spatial Relationships model examine the physical positioning and layout of vernaculars within texts.[25] Specifically, this approach analyses the spatial arrangements and

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[23] To a discussion about Anglo-Norman boundaries see (D. Trotter, 2013).
[24] Although, these examples do not call into question other cases where languages are clearly separated.
[25] The 'Language-Spatial Relationships' is defined by Sebba in (Sebba, 2013). For its application to medieval manuscripts see (Rogos-Hebda, 2023; Seiler, 2023).

symmetry between language units in code-switching contexts. It considers how much relative space is allotted to each tongue and whether they share equivalency in placement. Sebba also proposes assessing the degree languages convey shared linguistic content through close proximity and intermingling on the page (Sebba, 2013, p. 107).

The use of mermen as a *gallice* term appears in the manuscript Oxford, Corpus Christi College, (E) 62, f.18v, containing a complete version of the *Graecismus* and its vernacular glosses. According to the glossary editor's description:

> the text is written in single columns, surrounded by commentary in both margins and with many interlinear glosses and there are red and blue initials (Hunt, 1979d, p. 22).

The manuscript in question uses a particular type of gloss, interlinear glosses. In her study of Language-Spatial Relationships in medieval insular glossaries, Seiler concludes that:

> generally, the interlinear space is used for vernacular translations and the outer margins for encyclopaedic information (Seiler, 2023, p. 40).

In interlinear glossaries, there is an equivalence between vernacular glosses, which generally appear visually separated from the Latin text, and encyclopaedic glosses. This layout may provide clues as to the consideration given to different vernaculars by insular scribes.

Examination of medieval insular glossaries reveals visual equivalence between French and English vernacular glosses. On the interlinear level, terms glossed as *gallice* and *anglice* occupy symmetrical placement, with neither language prioritized over the other[26]. This parity of positioning reflects conceptual equivalence, rather than confusion, on the part of multilingual scribes and readers in the medieval period. This equal status afforded to French and English in insular glossaries mirrors patterns observable in other contemporaneous writings. Charter formulae like *francis et anglis* treated the two groups jointly by linking them rhetorically (Sharpe, 2013). As Richard Sharpe has observed, vernacular Latin terms like *anglus* and *engleis* came to denote both French and English speakers interchangeably in the decades after the Norman Conquest (Sharpe, 2013, p. 27). This suggests a fused linguistic identity emerging on the British Isles in the wake of the dynastic shift, as the elite adapted to new multilingual norms.

Other scholars have noted French articles *le/la* being prefixed to English words in some Latin administrative and ecclesiastical texts composed in medieval Britain (Ingham, 2012).

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[26] However, Seiler observes that French glosses tend to appear before English glosses (Seiler, 2023, pp. 51–52).

This type of mixing indicates code-switching to a shared insular vernacular space, signalling a shift to the vernacular register rather than to a specific language per se. Taken together, these various usages point to the fact that for many multilingual scribes and clerics active in the medieval British Isles, English and French were not perceived as wholly distinct but could intermingle fluidly, as languages or identities. This is embodied in textual practices like the visual symmetry of *gallice* and *anglice* glosses in insular glossaries.

The glossary evidence ultimately resists modern tendencies to conceive of medieval languages as bounded, discreet entities with stable norms. Instead, it reveals more porous relationships between prestige vernaculars that likely reflected specific sociopolitical contexts. In post-Conquest Britain, the fluidity between tongues mirrored the increased contact between speakers of English and variety(ies) of continental French, as newcomers adjusted to communicating across difference. This encourages scholarly reconsideration of modern language categorization schemes frequently, and sometimes anachronistically, imposed when interpreting medieval textual artifacts emerging from multilingual milieux.

Examination of the visual and spatial dimensions of medieval glossaries provides further evidence that complicates modern conceptions of linguistic categories when interpreting medieval manuscripts. The consistency in positioning and graphic symmetry between Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English in interlinear glosses underscores the equilibrium and reciprocity between these vernaculars. Rather than discrete separations, the layout emphasizes fluid intermingling of languages. This analysis reinforces how applying modern taxonomies fails to capture the intricacy of multilingualism within these medieval artifacts. The visual balance and hybridity observed mirrors the organic zoophytes described in the texts themselves, which fused animal and plant forms into an organic whole. Just as those category defying creatures necessitate contextual paradigms, so too do the (franco)polyphonies within medieval glossaries resist and exceed modern linguistic classification schemes[27].

The voices entangled in glossaries, like those of the mermaids, blend together and confuse the modern listener, separated from the manuscript and the medieval multilingual situation by centuries of history. The mermaid, as S. Kay mentioned in her study of the representation of the creature in medieval manuscripts, help us to hear medieval polyphonies (Kay, 2020). In the same way, the glossary is the ideal place to perceive the insular multilingual polyphony. The interlinear glosses in English, French and other languages, like a musical notation, allow us to listen to medieval multilingualism and to perceive the porosity

[27] For a visual analysis of Middle English manuscripts in multilingual context see (Putter et al., 2023).

of the linguistic categories we try to apply to it. Like the mermaid, the definition of medieval vernacular languages (sometimes?) escapes categorization. Like a medieval siren who is at once fish, human and bird, English and Anglo-Norman often elude contemporary definitions. However, like a polyphony, each voice should not be listened to separately, but all at once.

The interlinear blending of languages in medieval glossaries bears comparison to the interwoven melodies found in musical scores from the period. Medieval musical notation wove multiple vocal lines together on the page, with interchangeable voices working in concert to create polyphony. Similarly, glossaries interject Latin with intermittent French and English, intermingling languages to produce heteroglossia. Just as the eye parses intertwining musical lines to perceive harmony, the reader tracks interlinear glossary terms to appreciate verbal polyphony. This polyvocal arrangement resists discretely separating languages, instead encouraging holistic comprehension. Moreover, the consistent visual rhythm of interlinear glosses creates a lyrical fluidity akin to musical phrasing. The striking parallels between textual and musical notation reveal analogous medieval outlooks on hybridity across artistic forms. As interlinear glossaries yield francopolyphonies, so too does interwoven musical notation yield polyphony. Understanding these notations as kindred efforts to convey plural voices through innovative graphic arrangements deepens interpretation of medieval multiplicity[28].

This analysis of vernacular glosses in medieval Insular manuscripts reveals the complex interrelationship between Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English in this multilingual context. The interchangeable use of *gallice* and *anglice* to signal vernaculars suggests that scribes didn't necessarily differentiate between French and English. Moreover, the visual symmetry between these interlinear glosses indicates that the vernacular languages occupied an equivalent status in the minds of scribes. While modern scholarly categories parse these as distinct languages, the porous linguistic boundaries in medieval Britain enabled fluidity between Latin, French, and English. Glossaries provide a unique window into this verbal polyphony, where multiple voices intermingle within the margins of the manuscript page. This study demonstrates that Insular scribes operated within a different conceptual framework of language that allowed for hybridity, asymmetry, and overlap between the written vernaculars.

[28] A deeper visual comparison of the two systems of notation must be realised to extract deeper insights.

3. Medieval Francopolyphonies, deterritorialization and reterritorialization

The fluidity between vernaculars observed in medieval glossaries underscores the porous nature of language boundaries in multilingual manuscripts. This linguistic permeability mirrors the hybridity embodied by mythological creatures described in these texts. Just as mermaids combined animal and human features, medieval francopolyphonies blended fluid vernacular dialects. These fusions resist separation into discreet categories.

The processes giving rise to such medieval hybrids can be illuminated through philosophical frameworks like Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972). Deterritorialization refers to the detachment of something from its original territory, context, or framework. For instance, ideas can be removed from their initial philosophical systems and reinterpreted anew. Reterritorialization involves creating new connections after deterritorialization has occurred. It establishes new meanings, statuses, and purposes as deterritorialized elements become situated within emerging domains. For Deleuze and Guattari, these interconnected processes continuously reshape systems and structures. Globalization, for example, deterritorializes culture from geographical and national spaces. Yet globalized cultures also become reterritorialized within new transnational configurations. Overall, deterritorialization liberates objects, concepts, and peoples from stable bonds, while reterritorialization reconstitutes relationships within novel territories, generating shifts in significance and identity.

We can apply this framework to analyse the medieval translation and adaptation of Anglo-Norman texts like Mandeville's Travels into Continental French. This translation deterritorialized the original text from its linguistic and cultural origins, unmooring idioms from their initial territories. Yet it also reterritorialized the work by mapping it into new linguistic and literary settings within the broader francophone world. Although transformations occurred, reterritorialization recoupled the text to altered systems of meaning and expression. Thereby, deterritorialization from its original domain enabled reintegration into wider francophone circles. The text was imbued with new significations through this continuous interplay between deterritorialization and reterritorialization processes across medieval francophone spaces. It destabilizes the text from its original insular territory but also recouples it to meaning and expression in a new linguistic and cultural domain, even if it is. The text is transformed and takes on new significations through this process and join the francopolyphonic circle[29].

[29] For an application of the concept to other Medieval European linguistic situations, see (Rougier, 2022).

The processes of linguistic transformation at play in the translation and adaptation of medieval glosses and texts within Medieval Francophonia can also be analyzed through the theoretical lens of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The translation of an Anglo-Norman text like Mandeville's Travels into Continental French deterritorializes the work from its French linguistic and cultural context, removing idioms from their initial territory. Yet it also reterritorializes the text by integrating it into new literary and linguistic settings to redefine the borders of the medieval francophone world. Although changes occur through this process, reterritorialization recouples the deterritorialized work to alternative networks of meaning and expression. Thereby, deterritorialization enables reintegration into wider francophone systems, albeit in a transformed state. Through the interplay between these twin concepts, texts become imbued with new significations as they circulate across medieval spaces[30].

Similarly, the work of the Anglo-Norman scribes and glossators led to the reterritorialization of French on the British Isles. After being deterritorialized from the continent by the Normans after the conquest, French is reterritorialized on the British Isles, and becomes the equal of other vernaculars, eventually replacing English as the high variety on the territory. Also, the glossing of vernacular terminology with *gallice* or *anglice* deterritorializes those terms from a single language domain while reterritorializing them within a more fluid conceptualization of Insular vernaculars. This theoretical framing illuminates how linguistic artifacts were reshaped through continuous processes of deterritorialization from original contexts and reterritorialization within emerging multilingual frameworks in medieval England.

Connecting this analysis to these macro theories strengthens the wider applicability of this case study. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari's framework sheds light on the complex dynamics of medieval language contact and change. Processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization appear central to how linguistic and cultural transformations unfold, moreover when these changes are the result of colonisation. Relating these theoretical concepts to the analysis of medieval glossaries and translations demonstrate their utility for unlocking deeper understandings of multilingualism in action over time.

This research provides an empirical case study that enriches and complicates Deleuze and Guattari's model. Attention to how deterritorialization and reterritorialization operated on the ground in medieval England underscores the bi-directional nature of these processes and their interrelationship with socio-political contexts. Connecting micro-level evidence

[30] On the links between politics and translation during the Middle Ages see (Campbell, 2018).

from manuscripts to macro-theories reveals the organic unfolding of linguistic and cultural change, challenging mechanistic applications of these philosophical ideas. Ultimately, putting different scales of analysis into dialogue through this multilingual case study generates more nuanced theoretical insights to advance both medievalist and philosophical scholarship on language contact.

4. Conclusions: towards transligualism

This examination of medieval English glossaries reveals fluidity between the conceptual categories of Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English in the multilingual context of medieval Britain. The interchangeable use of *gallice* and *anglice* to gloss vernacular terms calls into question strict divisions between these vernacular dialects in the minds of scribes and scholars. Moreover, the visual and textual symmetry afforded to Latin, French, and English glosses indicate fluid linguistic demarcations and an equivocal status given to the written vernacular languages. Such evidence challenges traditional assumptions in medieval language studies that posit rigid delineations between Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English. The flexible glossing practices uncovered here prompt a reconsideration of how multilingualism operated on the page in medieval England. Scribes moved fluidly between languages, without adhering to modern preconceptions of medieval speech communities as divided discretely along linguistic lines. This research underscores the necessity of re-evaluating conceptual frameworks that parse medieval Latin, French, and English as clearly differentiated codes in writing.

Insular glossaries provide a window into more nuanced, situational, and context-specific representations of vernacular language use that resist tidy categorization. Mandeville examples question the modern conception we apply to medieval French, rejecting Anglo-Norman from the francophone sphere. This analysis reveals the limitations of applying modern language categorization uncritically to medieval evidence. Instead, a more dynamic paradigm is needed to capture the porous interplay and hybridity governing the written multilingualism found in manuscripts from this period. Insular glossaries underscore how linguistic systems were constructed differently in medieval Europe, necessitating richer frameworks that attend to the complexity of historical language boundaries. This has critical implications not only for medieval studies, but for fields like sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and anthropological linguistics that often rely on applying modern linguistic categories cross-culturally. Problematizing our language classification schemes through

evidence of medieval multilingualism encourages greater reflexivity in how we conceptualize the very notion of named languages and dialects across place and time.

The discoveries yielded through analysis of medieval glossaries and textual traditions do not solely reshape our conception of multilingualism in medieval Britain but have far-reaching implications for the study of language contact situations across cultures and time periods. The examination of code-switching, borrowing, and translation practices between Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English provides a framework to critically evaluate language mixing and permeability in other multilingual settings, both historical and contemporary. Moreover, questioning the applicability of modern language categories based on evidence from English glossaries encourages greater reflexivity in how we approach lexicography and dictionary-making along linguistic lines.

By probing the limitations of modern language ideologies, this study thus furthers critical perspectives on language contact, translation studies, lexicography, and the conceptual mappings of multilingualism across place and time. The implications extend beyond medieval studies to impact wider fields including sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and anthropological linguistics. Unpacking the contingency and porousness of language categories through evidence from glossaries encourages re-examining modern assumptions we project upon multilingual settings cross-culturally.

The modern concept of a mother tongue or native language poses problems when analyzing medieval Francophonia. Monolingualism was not the norm in medieval societies of Europe. Scholars like Yildiz and Léglu have questioned applying mother tongue frameworks to contexts where bi- and multilingualism prevailed, both for modern and medieval times (Léglu, 2010; Yildiz, 2012). This paradigm stems from modern European nation-state ideologies predicated on homogeneous linguistic communities. Yet the medieval evidence shows fluid movement between Latin, French, English, and other vernaculars in textual artifacts like glossaries. Scribes operated as sophisticated multilingual agents, not confined to a single mother tongue.

Yildiz's conceptual frameworks, even if applying to modern multilingualism, offer rich lenses for interpreting the medieval textual evidence of multilingual fluidity[31]. Her notion of *metrolingualism* attends to the porous language ecologies of cosmopolitan urban spaces marked by intersectional diversity. This paradigm transfers well to the heteroglossic glossaries and manuscripts produced in thriving medieval urban context, where diverse people crossed, particularly for business purpose. Yildiz also problematizes mother tongue

[31] About the problematic concept of *mother tongue* and its relation with multilingualism see also (Piller, 2016).

paradigms, arguing this reinforces perceived boundaries between languages. The interlinear blending of Latin and vernaculars in multilingual glossaries supports her critique. The scribes operate skilfully between Latin, French, and English without confinement to a single native tongue. Additionally, Yildiz's attention to *languaging* as contextual social action provides insight into medieval translation practices. Continental scribes grappling with Anglo-Norman terms enact translingual sense-making, illuminating the instability of medieval language boundaries. Their adaptive glossing and borrowing reveal language's emergent nature. At its core, Yildiz's scholarship emphasizes the social construction of language and attendant ideologies. The evidence of medieval francopolyphonies underscores the contingency of linguistic categories. In these artifacts, language exists in a constant state of reinvention through syncretic, hybrid practices that exceed rigid delineation.

Drawing on theorists like Yildiz, who denaturalize perceptions of stable monolingualism, enables deeper confrontation with the complexity of medieval multilingualism. Her analytical frameworks better align with the empirical evidence of fluidity and resistance to classification underlying these fascinating textual traditions.

Rather than a framework rooted in confusion or mixing of bounded languages, we can adopt the concept of *translinguality* advanced by Horner and Alvarez to highlight the medieval linguistic situations (Horner & Alvarez, 2019). Rather than distinct linguistic systems, translinguality recognizes languages as inherently open, plural, and intermingled. This concept provides a useful framework for interpreting the fluid medieval language practices observed in manuscripts and glossaries. The concept of translingualism has been used by Hsy to study medieval realities, as "the capacity of medieval writers to employ many languages at once, not simply crossing over from one language or identity into another" (Hsy, 2013, p. 7).

A translingual perspective offers crucial insights for interpreting the medieval linguistic evidence examined in this article, as the findings reveal highly fluid language practices resisting categorization into discrete systems. Rather than stable, uniform language categories, artifacts like glossaries and manuscripts showcase open, pluralistic mixing of Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English. I will argue that a translingual perspective makes more sense than a multilingual one when studying these medieval cases. Indeed, multilingualism generally refers to the knowledge and use of multiple languages by an individual or within a community. It posits languages as bounded systems that speakers draw from in defined contexts. Multilinguals switch between separate linguistic codes. It presumes languages have delimitated structural features and norms of use. In contrast, translingualism

recognizes languages as inherently open, plural, and intersecting. Rather than switching between discrete systems, translingual speakers negotiate meaning through complex discursive practices that transcend structural boundaries. It sees linguistic resources as fluid and intersecting, not contained within one language or another.

This aligns with evidence of porous boundaries and borrowing between vernaculars and Latin in the medieval period. The visual blending of Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English in interlinear glossaries embodies translingual relations on the manuscript page. Translingualism attends to the constant negotiation and interchange enabling this heteroglossia. Likewise, deterritorialization and reterritorialization processes drove creative adaptation as scribes rendered Mandeville's Travels across medieval linguistic borders. This required grappling with unfamiliar terms like *cahourdes*, attesting to the opacity between medieval varieties of French. Rather than deviation, such translingual engagement generated new significations, enriching the conceptual ecology of medieval Francophonia.

Altogether, adopting a translingual lens clarifies that medieval language differences did not preclude intercomprehension success. Translingualism was the norm, an asset enabling deterritorialized modes of sense-making and imaginative expression. Analysing artifacts for evidence of translingual relations and practices can thus significantly advance understanding of medieval francopolyphonies, and European medieval linguistic situation at large.

While this examination of multilingual glossing practices provides new perspectives on medieval language conceptualizations, there remains more to explore regarding the linguistic distinctions between vernaculars in medieval England. Further investigation across a broader range of manuscripts and lexical examples could substantiate whether the patterns found here occurred beyond the specific glossaries analysed. Examining additional metalinguistic contexts like code-switching in marginalia could complicate or enrich the picture of vernacular permeability that emerges from multilingual glosses. Broader questions also remain regarding how permeable boundaries between spoken forms correlated to the fluidity observed in written contexts. Tracking vernacular lexical diffusion in texts across the late medieval period could reveal changes over time as English vernaculars developed. There is also much scope for situating these findings in relation to contemporaneous language attitudes and political relations between Francophone literary cultures.

In addition, this research on medieval Francophonia opens fruitful directions for exploring the evolution of the French-speaking world in subsequent centuries. Comparative studies of Anglo-Norman and Continental French language mixing could further probe the linguistic divisions observed in fourteenth-century manuscripts. Examining later textual

evidence of code-switching and lexical borrowings between French dialects would shed critical light on the shifting boundaries of Francophonia over time. Such diachronic investigations promise to uncover new dimensions of the complex interrelationship between language, culture, and identity across different eras of French language history. This could be complemented by digital perspectives, like comparing contemporary heteroglossia within modern francophone regions and medieval situations. Exploring the porousness between contemporary French dialects could offer insightful comparison points to medieval evidence. Ultimately, bridging medieval and modern eras through the lens of Francophonia will enrich our theoretical models of language change, variation, and contact more broadly.

In conclusion, this examination of multilingual practices in medieval Francophonia makes several core contributions to our understanding of medieval language conceptualizations. This investigation underscores the significance of moving beyond the confines of established language categories like French and English towards a broader lens of vernacular expression within the European medieval period. Such a shift opens avenues for recognizing the nuanced dynamics of meaning-making across diverse linguistic spaces. The evidence reveals fluidity between written vernaculars in insular manuscripts and underscores the limitations of uncritically imposing modern linguistic categories upon dynamic medieval multilingual contexts. The findings prompt renewed approaches to conceptualizing medieval language communities, translation studies, and lexicography through an enriched awareness of the contingency and contextual specificity of linguistic systems. Moreover, the study highlights avenues for advancing interdisciplinary dialogue across medieval studies, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and language philosophy regarding the social construction of multilingual representations. By denaturalizing taken-for-granted assumptions about medieval languages, this research yields critical insights that further evolve scholarly conversations across these intersecting fields. Ultimately, medieval cases provide an illuminating study to advance more nuanced perspectives on language mixture, contact and change that resonate both within and beyond studies of medieval Francophonia. If language distinctions are handy and practical for studies and projects (particularly in lexicography), there are still numerous medieval texts that resist to that separation, and are not Latin, French, or English but all at once, in a harmonious polyphony.

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Delphine Demelas is currently an editor for the Anglo-Norman Dictionary project at Aberystwyth University, a digital resource for studying medieval Francophonia and the evolution of English. She actively contributes to the digital transformation of the dictionary, specializing in digital lexicography, XML encoding, and computational analysis of medieval French texts. Her doctoral research at Aix-Marseille University focused on creating a LaTeX critical edition of the 15th-century French epic La Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin. Previously, she taught medieval literature and digital humanities internationally, sharing her passion with diverse students. In Paraguay, she led an international project to digitize, preserve and describe the 19th c. manuscript 'El Libro de Oro', a national treasure of Paraguay. She is a member of the Digital Medievalist Executive Board. Her academic journey reflects a commitment to advancing Medieval French and Francophone Studies, Digital Lexicography, and Digital Humanities through research, teaching, and international engagement.