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FRENCH LITERATURE OF THE BRITISH ISLES AFTER THE NORMAN CONQUEST: A DIGITAL, DATA-DRIVEN INVESTIGATION

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It was once held that the Battle of Hastings of 1066 led to a significant transformation of the linguistic and literary landscapes of the British Isles. According to this traditional model, the primary language of culture and administration shifted from English to French (which was the language of the ruling elite), and English only began to regain its status in cultural and administrative domains in the second half of the thirteenth century.[1] A growing body of scholarship has revealed that this model is flawed, both factually — in the sense that French was used in England for years before the Norman Conquest of 1066 and persisted for centuries after it — and ethically — in the sense that it has been shown to

I compiled the dataset used in this investigation thanks to a 2017 Europeana Research Grant, for which I am deeply grateful. I would like to thank Olivier Thuong and the two anonymous reviewers of this article for their contributions. I would also like to thank the many librarians and staff who supported the codicological work behind this dataset by making their collections available for research. I am also very grateful to Ben Companjen, who wrote the script used for counting the folia dedicated to each language and created the framework for the website used to present the project catalogue. A discussion of the technical aspects of the project, including its approach to metadata and some preliminary findings, is available in Krista A. Murchison [Milne] and Ben Companjen, 'Manuscripts, Metadata, and Medieval Multilingualism: Using a Manuscript Dataset to Analyze Language Use and Distribution in Medieval England', *DH Benelux Journal*, 1 (2019), 25–39.

[1] For an overview of those who argue that written production in English started to decline after the Norman Conquest, see Elaine Treharne, 'Categorization, Periodization: The Silence of (the) English in the Twelfth Century', *New Medieval Literatures*, 8 (2006), 247–73. The idea that writing in English declined after 1066 is so pervasive that it is put forth even by careful scholars such as Michael Clanchy, who writes that 'In the century after 1066 the writing of English was depressed and devalued by the Norman conquerors'; M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 18. For a critical history of this traditional narrative, see Linda Georgianna, 'Coming to Terms with the Norman Conquest: Nationalism and English Literary History', in *Literature and the Nation*, ed. by Brook Thomas (= special issue, *Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*, 14 (1998)), pp. 33–53. The idea that writing in French began to decline and give way to English in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is also pervasive; among the best-known examples of this view is found in Douglas A. Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely: The French Language in England, 1000–1600, Its Status, Description and Instruction* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 1991), p. 57.

be grounded in a legacy of linguistic nationalism that can be traced back to the fifteenth century.[2]

Work by Serge Lusignan, Michael Clanchy, and others has shown that for centuries following the Norman Conquest, French persisted as the dominant language for legal affairs and international trade. Indeed, its role in these domains, according to Clanchy, should not be attributed to the Conquest itself, but to the status of French as the lingua franca of late medieval Europe.[3] And French persisted even outside of these domains. Groundbreaking sociolinguistic studies have indicated that even in the fourteenth century French was, for some, a 'living' vernacular — in the sense that it was still being both spoken and transformed by local language communities.[4] These studies and others provide overwhelming evidence that French had a significant foothold on the British Isles for centuries after the Norman Conquest.

Yet the status of French in this period, which includes the breadth, contexts, and implications of its use, is still not fully understood. It is not clear how often French was used outside of mercantile and legal domains, the degree to which it operated as a vernacular, or living language, and what its role was relative to English and Latin. These matters are central to medieval literary and linguistic history since, as Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne have noted, the role of French in the wake of the Norman Conquest

[2] Kibbee has remarked that the Normans at the time of the Conquest had long-established cross-Channel connections, the most well-known being Emma of Normandy's 1002 marriage to Æthelred the Unready (Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely*, p. 8). For the role of French in England prior to the Norman Conquest, see, for example, Elizabeth Tyler, 'From Old English to Old French', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c. 1100–c. 1500*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 164–78. For an overview of those who have pointed to factual flaws in the traditional narrative of language use in Great Britain, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's 'General Introduction' to *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, ed. by Wogan-Browne, pp. 1–13. See also the sociolinguistic works listed below. Georgianna identifies the ethical flaws in the 'triumph of English' narrative in 'Coming to Terms with the Norman Conquest'.

[3] The classic study of French as a language of administration in England is Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record*. More recently, Claire M. Waters has described the role of French for international affairs in medieval Europe in *Translating 'Clergie': Status, Education, and Salvation in Thirteenth-Century Vernacular Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. xi. Serge Lusignan provides an in-depth discussion of the role of French within administrative and royal contexts in *La Langue des rois au Moyen Âge: le français en France et en Angleterre* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004). I am grateful to Keith Busby and several other participants at Fordham's 'French without Borders' conference for pointing me towards this source.

[4] As John Spence notes, linguists once held that French was not a living language in England after the thirteenth century and that it was acquired as a second or third language; John Spence, *Reimagining History in Anglo-Norman Prose Chronicles* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), p. 3. But Richard Ingham has argued convincingly that there were active language communities that persisted in late medieval England; Richard Ingham, 'The Persistence of Anglo-Norman 1230–1362: A Linguistic Perspective', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, ed. by Wogan-Browne, pp. 44–54. This idea is also supported by the work of Jean-Pascal Pouzet, who finds evidence to suggest that there was regional variation among French communities in Britain in 'Ideas for Localisation and Correlated Dialectology in Manuscript Materials of Medieval England', in *The Anglo-Norman Language and Its Contexts*, ed. by Richard Ingham (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2010), pp. 102–129. Other sociolinguistic studies pointing to the persistence of French in medieval England include W. Rothwell, 'The Trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 16 (1994), 45–67. Ardis Butterfield has shown through detailed literary and sociolinguistic analysis that language-learning guides point to a rich, living tradition of spoken French in late medieval England; Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 317–35.

stands as a 'case of great interest for the interrelations of literacies, languages and literatures'.[5]

Quantitative corpus analysis offers one promising approach to these issues. Since it is aimed at the collection and analysis of a large number of examples, it can help identify general patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed — or offer additional confirmation for patterns that have been noticed. Of course, quantitative analysis can only reveal so much; as A. R. Bennett has noted, this type of analysis requires a 'a kind of flattening', in which specific cases are deliberately set aside in favour of general patterns.[6] To mitigate some of this 'flattening', the present study combines both quantitative and more qualitative approaches.

This study is centred on a catalogue of medieval manuscripts containing French literature that were copied on the British Isles. Manuscripts were chosen as the focal point of this analysis because they offer unmatched information about language use. Since each manuscript is handmade and contains distinct features, each stands as a witness to a particular language-use case, reflecting the desires, interests, and needs of the individuals or communities who inspired its creation.[7] For this reason, each manuscript can be treated as an individual data point — or, in the case of manuscripts compiled in stages, a set of data points. These data points can then be plotted to shed light on broad patterns of language use over time.

Methodology

Before these patterns can be explored, some discussion of the methodology used here is valuable. The dataset selected for analysis was based on Ruth J. Dean and Maureen B. M. Boulton's list of manuscripts in *Anglo-Norman Literature*.[8] This source was chosen for being the most comprehensive list of Anglo-Norman manuscripts available until now. Some comments about its scope are helpful. First, Dean and Boulton define the category of Anglo-Norman literature broadly; it includes works originating from anywhere on the British Isles. This means that their list includes works from the areas that are now England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Manuscripts from these last two regions are relatively rare but are nevertheless accounted for in Dean and Boulton's list — and also included here.

[5] Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'The French of England: *The Compileison, Ancrene Wisse*, and the Idea of Anglo-Norman', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 4 (2004), 35–59.

[6] A. R. Bennett, 'What Do the Numbers Mean? The Case for Corpus Studies', in *Manuscript Culture and Medieval Devotional Traditions*, ed. by Jennifer N. Brown and Nicole R. Rice (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2021), pp. 48–83 (pp. 51–52).

[7] For the question of the extent to which manuscripts can be thought to reflect the aims, intents, and/or circumstances of their creators, see, for example, Stephen G. Nichols, 'What Is a Manuscript Culture? Technologies of the Manuscript Matrix', in *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches*, ed. by Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 34–59. It is of course important to keep in mind that while many acts of compilation reflect the goals of a compiler in a seemingly straightforward way, others (such as a scribe copying two texts together that happened to have been on hand) do not. But even these latter acts of compilation provide insight into language use and status, and they are therefore valuable for the purposes of the present analysis.

[8] Ruth J. Dean and Maureen B. M. Boulton, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999).

Dean and Boulton also include some manuscripts that were copied on the continent, but they make no attempts to be comprehensive with these, and continental manuscripts are therefore omitted from the dataset here. Books brought to the British Isles from abroad — and which may or may not have been designed for the insular market — have not been included. The dataset therefore models the use of French on the British Isles in terms of production and design and may not necessarily reflect readership or use. It is also worth noting that since manuscripts copied after 1500 are included only occasionally in Dean and Boulton's guide, they have been omitted from the dataset used here.[9]

A few modifications have been made to Dean and Boulton's list for the purposes of this study. Some relevant manuscripts that have been identified since Dean and Boulton compiled their list have been added to the dataset; these additions have all been noted.[10] On the other hand, manuscripts from Oxford's libraries have been omitted from the dataset since their online catalogue entries were being updated at the time this dataset was being compiled. To account for this particularity, Oxford manuscripts have been taken into consideration in instances in which their omission could plausibly skew the results.

Literature in the broad sense adopted by Dean and Boulton includes not just secular romance, lyric, and epic, but also chronicles, scientific writings, devotional works, theological guides, and letter-writing manuals, while excluding most legal and more documentary texts such as charters and wills. As such, the findings here are generally focused on, and reflect, the uses of French writing outside of the legal domain, although it is clear from various texts, such as the glossary of law terms on Dean and Boulton's list (no. 316), that Anglo-Norman written production exhibits a great deal of crossover between literary and legal domains. It is also worth noting that many manuscripts that contain French legal texts were included in the dataset because they also include literary texts.

Information about each manuscript and its contents was gathered manually, drawing wherever possible on traditional catalogue records. It is to be expected that some of the dates and other information in this dataset will prove to be inaccurate, given that manuscript descriptions are often subject to revision, and given the high possibility of human error that accompanies the process of manually compiling hundreds of catalogue descriptions. Yet since the dataset contains hundreds of items, revisions to individual items are not likely to call for revisions to the broader results.[11]

[9] Dean and Boulton discuss the scope of their guide in their Introduction to *Anglo-Norman Literature*, pp. ix–xii.

[10] The dataset also omits manuscripts from Dean and Boulton's list that do not contain any Anglo-Norman. See Krista A. Murchison [Milne], 'Intercultural Dialogue and Multilingualism in Post-Conquest England: A Database of French Literary Manuscripts Produced between 1100–1550' (2018), <https://leidenuniversitylibrary.github.io/manuscript-stats>. The input and results files of the dataset have been archived in the DANS EASY repository; see K. A. Murchison [Milne], 'French Literary Manuscripts in England, 1100–1500' (2018), <https://doi.org/10.17026%2Fdans-zxr-juar>.

[11] For a sensible justification of quantitative approaches, see Bennett, 'What Do the Numbers Mean?' Further information about the scope and process of compiling the data is available in the dataset documentation and in Murchison [Milne] and Companjen, 'Manuscripts, Metadata, and Medieval Multilingualism', pp. 29–32.

To explore how often French circulated alongside other languages, I sought to determine each manuscript's linguistic profile — the relative distribution of each language in a given manuscript. Each linguistic profile was determined by identifying the language(s) and starting and end-points of each constituent text in a given manuscript, and then calculating the number of folia dedicated to each language.[12]

Some additional policies were established to ensure that the data would reflect various complexities of medieval textual culture. So, a folio side is assigned to a language only when the side contains more than two lines of that language; exceptions were made for image captions that were under two lines but represented a significant language-use situation due to the otherwise limited amount of text on a given folio. Where a single side contained more than one language (in the case of a bilingual text, for example), it was assigned to each language proportionally; a side containing Latin and French, for example, was counted in the dataset as 0.5 Latin and 0.5 French.[13] The folio ranges of each text were then calculated to determine the total folia dedicated to each language in a given manuscript, which provided the basis for calculating the percentage of each language in a manuscript. To illustrate using a simple example, if a manuscript were to contain a Latin Psalter on fols 1r–90v and an Anglo-Norman prayer on fols 91r–100v, the manuscript's linguistic profile would be described as 90 per cent Latin and 10 per cent Anglo-Norman.

Linguistic profile data of this nature, while offering unique large-scale insight into language use, must nevertheless be approached with caution. Changes in written language use can provide but limited insight into changes in spoken language use.[14] And we cannot unreflectively take the body of surviving manuscripts as representative of manuscript production due, in part, to the vicissitudes of manuscript survival. Yet I tend to agree with Michael Sargent, who argues that although the relative survival rates of manuscripts may not offer unmediated insight into medieval textual culture, they are nevertheless worth considering in the absence of any better body of evidence.[15] Despite its limitations, linguistic profile data about manuscripts is valuable because it offers unmatched insight into language use for a period with no surviving oral record.

[12] In some cases, all noted, end-points had to be approximated based on the following tract's starting point. Since this problem was limited to Latin and English tracts, and since most end-points are within a folio of a subsequent text's starting points, these guesses are in almost all cases accurate within a single folio, and are therefore not expected to skew the data in any statistically significant way.

[13] While this method of dividing folia with multiple texts may skew the results in one direction or another, the relative rarity of such folia — and especially of such folia that contain multiple languages — means that the method is unlikely to skew the dataset in any significant way.

[14] Clanchy, for example, notes that the increase of French writing in the thirteenth century does not necessarily mean an increase in spoken French (Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 208).

[15] See Michael G. Sargent, 'What Do the Numbers Mean? A Textual Critic's Observations on Some Patterns of Middle English Manuscript Transmission', in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2008), pp. 205–44 (p. 207).

A comparison of Latin, French, and English literary production in terms of volume

It is rare to find absolute pronouncements on the relative distribution of Latin, French, and English literary works in the wake of the Norman Conquest, but what pronouncements do exist on the subject tend to claim that Latin works were the most common, followed by French, and, finally, by English.[16] But quantitative data powerfully suggests that French literary production on the British Isles was, overall, more limited than that of both Latin and English. This is true not only in terms of the number of individual literary works produced but also in terms of their manuscript copies. Of course, determining what constitutes an individual work is a thorny matter for the medieval period, when material was regularly interpolated, rearranged, or transposed into other material. The question of whether *Pore Caitif* constitutes one work or a collection of works illustrates the issue plainly. But regardless of how an individual work is defined, it is clear that the number of individual works written in English between 1100 and 1500 exceeds by far the number of individual works written in French.[17]

These English works also survive in far greater numbers of manuscripts than the French ones. Of course, there is at present no definitive count of all manuscripts containing English literature. Yet even a cursory glance at the list supplied by Sargent in his analysis of eight bestsellers of Middle English reveals that these eight works alone survive in almost as many manuscript copies as all of the French literature produced on the British Isles.[18] By any of the usual metrics, then, English literary output of the three centuries following the Norman Conquest towers over French output. The idea that French supplanted English as a literary language in the centuries following the Conquest must be firmly rejected.

The immediate aftermath of the Conquest: relatively sparse French literary production

But were there periods in which French had the upper hand in literary domains? According to the traditional narrative, the Norman Conquest led to a brief period in which French supplanted English as the primary language of high culture

[16] See for example R. M. Wilson, *Early Middle English Literature* (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 25. Wilson's account has been influential; those who draw on it include Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 109. Hugh M. Thomas, describing written production more broadly, claims that 'during the period in which Englishness not only survived but triumphed, French remained a more common language of writing than English (and both were far behind Latin)'; Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066–c. 1220* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 380.

[17] In terms of individual works, a simple comparison of the size of Dean and Boulton's single-volume list of *Anglo-Norman Literature* to Albert E. Hartung's now eleven-volume equivalent for Middle English writings reveals the difference plainly; see Albert E. Hartung, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*, 11 vols (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967–2005). It is true that Hartung's *Manual* contains some types of works that are omitted from Dean and Boulton's guide, but these are relatively few and cannot account for the very significant disparity.

[18] Sargent, 'What Do the Numbers Mean?', p. 206. Sargent lists the eight works of Middle English that survive in the greatest number of copies; these copies alone add up to 862 manuscripts; Dean and Boulton's list contains 958 manuscripts by my count (including the continental manuscripts omitted from this project). An objection might be raised to comparing these lists on the grounds that Sargent's list is not technically limited to literature while Dean and Boulton's is, but the distinction here is irrelevant since all the works appearing on Sargent's list are ones that would meet Dean and Boulton's definition of literature.

and literature.[19] Speaking of the post-Conquest climate between 1066 and 1307, Clanchy describes English as England's 'least used literary language (apart from Hebrew)'.[20] A seemingly small number of manuscripts containing English literature from the century after the Conquest is often explained as a result of French supplanting English as a literary language. Yet the figures compiled for this investigation tell a different story entirely.

Indeed, the surviving records suggest that the century after the Conquest did not lead to a significant increase in French literature at all. There are, perhaps surprisingly, only ten surviving manuscripts containing Anglo-Norman literature that have been dated to the immediate post-Conquest period (*c.* 1066–1150).[21] In stark contrast, there are at least 118 manuscripts containing English literature produced in this same period.[22] These numbers indicate with a strong degree of certainty that in the immediate aftermath of the Norman Conquest, English remained the primary vernacular language for literary composition. The striking paucity of manuscripts containing Anglo-Norman literature from the post-Conquest period raises the question as to why the Conquest had such a relatively minor impact on Anglo-Norman literary production.

[19] For an overview of scholars who have argued that the Conquest led to an immediate decline in English literary production in favour of French, see Elaine Treharne's *Living through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020–1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 94.

[20] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 109. Clanchy also writes that 'In the century after 1066 the writing of English was depressed and devalued by the Norman conquerors' (p. 18).

[21] Manuscripts dated to the period immediately following the Conquest (*c.* 1066–1150) are dataset items 59, 128, 157, 240, and 316. The dating of the second last manuscript is uncertain so it is omitted from the count here; in her catalogue, Françoise Vielliard dates it to the first half of the twelfth century; Françoise Vielliard, *Manuscrits français du Moyen Âge* (Cologny: Fondation Martin Bodmer, 1975), pp. 167–70. More recently, Maria Careri, Christine Ruby, and Ian Short date it to the middle of the twelfth century but indicate that this dating is uncertain; *Livres et écritures en français et en occitan au* xiie *siècle: catalogue illustré* (Rome: Viella, 2011), p. 38. Dataset item 173 is counted here; while Édith Brayer assigned it a late-twelfth- or early thirteenth-century date, it has been dated more recently to the first half of the twelfth century by Careri, Ruby, and Short (no. 14; *Livres et écritures*, p. 30). Missing from the online catalogue due to its current limitations are the following Oxford manuscripts: 6. Bodleian, Digby MS 13; 7. Bodleian, Digby MS 23; 8. Bodleian, Douce MS 320b; and 9. Jesus College, MS 26. Missing from Dean and Boulton's guide and from the resultant dataset used here is: 10. San Marino, Huntington Library, HM 62, vol. 1. See Careri, Ruby, and Short, *Livres et écritures*, p. 202 (no. 89). Manuscripts that have been assigned a mid-twelfth-century date (and are therefore not included here) are Careri, Ruby, and Short, *Livres et écritures*, nos 31, 34, 35, 49, 68, and 94. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, n.a.fr. 4503 (*Saint Alexis* etc.) is excluded due to its late-twelfth-century dating. The so-called Domesday Book is excluded since it does not meet the criteria established by Dean and Boulton. Missing from Dean and Boulton's guide and from the resultant dataset used here is London, BL, Sloane MS 2839, a medical miscellany (no. 45 in Careri, Ruby, and Short, *Livres et écritures*, p. 100). While the miscellany as a whole has been dated to the early twelfth century, the French medical recipes in it (fols 78v and 112v) were copied later in the twelfth century. Some of the manuscripts in the dataset here that have been dated to the middle or second half of the twelfth century might in fact be earlier; either way, the number of manuscripts from this period containing Anglo-Norman literature is remarkably small. This list can be expanded slightly if we include manuscripts containing occasional French glosses, since Dean and Boulton's list does not consistently include these manuscripts (some French glosses, such as Dean nos 315 and 316, are included in their guide). Five manuscripts containing Anglo-Norman glosses have been identified using the list of twelfth-century French manuscripts produced by Careri, Ruby, and Short in *Livres et écritures*, and Brian Woledge and Ian Short in 'Liste provisoire de manuscrits du xiie siècle contenant des textes en langue française', *Romania*, 405 (1981), 1–17.

[22] 'The Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1060–1220 catalogue' (ed. by Orietta Da Rold and others (2010), <https://www.le.ac.uk/english/em1060to1220/catalogue/IndexChronology.htm>) gives 144 individual manuscripts dated to between 1060 and 1150 that contain English. When this list is limited using Dean and Boulton's criteria, twenty-six of these are omitted. This leaves 118 manuscripts in total.

Before answering this question, the dearth of Anglo-Norman material from the period immediately following the Conquest must be contextualized within the broader, transregional tradition of French writing that predates the Conquest. Prior to the Conquest, French written production, on the whole, seems to have been rather sparse relative to English production.[23] The Danes who arrived in Lindisfarne in the ninth century undoubtedly found a much richer tradition of writing in the vernacular than the Norse found when they arrived in Normandy in the early tenth century. Untangling the manifold factors that contributed to this difference is beyond the scope of the current exploration, but one key factor may be the differing origins of the languages. French, close enough to Latin that some intelligibility was possible between the two languages, perhaps did not urgently demand its own unique written tradition in the way English had.

According to Roger Wright's well-known 1982 'monolingual hypothesis', speakers of romance dialects in what is now France did not view their languages as distinct from written Latin until at least the eighth century. A text written in Latin would be intelligible if it were simply pronounced in a 'more vulgar' (or, we would now say, 'more French') way.[24] Wright's hypothesis has been challenged in various quarters and there is little consensus about the stage(s) at which French and Latin began to be viewed as distinct languages (as opposed to written and oral forms of the same language).[25] But regardless of when French began to be viewed as distinct from Latin — and therefore requiring its own written form — it remains the case that the initial overlap between these two languages undoubtedly helps to explain the relative paucity of pre-Conquest writing in French.

The Normans who arrived in Britain, then, probably did not bring with them an extensive tradition of vernacular writing, and there is much to commend Clanchy's suggestion that the Norman interest in vernacular writing that emerged in the wake of the Conquest was largely inspired by insular practices — especially

[23] Comparing the number of pre-Conquest manuscripts containing French to those containing English is illustrative here; Careri, Ruby, and Short estimate that there were around a dozen French manuscripts produced before 1100 (*Livres et écritures*, p. xvii). I have counted 142 manuscripts containing English writing that were produced between 1040 and 1100 alone, based on the chronological list in 'The Production and Use of English Manuscripts', ed. by Da Rold. The so-called precocity of English has been commented on by scholars such as Tyler in 'From Old English to Old French', p. 167.

[24] The idea is put forward in Roger Wright's *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1982).

[25] The 'monolingual hypothesis' is discussed by the contributors to *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Roger Wright (London: Routledge, 1991). Those who call Wright's hypothesis into question include Thomas J. Walsh, who suggests that an awareness of a distinction between Latin and romance began earlier than Wright posits; Thomas J. Walsh, 'Spelling Lapses in Early Medieval Latin Documents and the Reconstruction of Primitive Romance Phonology', in *Latin and the Romance Languages*, ed. by Wright, pp. 205–17. Some have identified evidence of perceived overlap between French and Latin well into the post-Conquest period. Ian Short writes that they were considered 'different registers of the same language' in his *Manual of Anglo-Norman* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2007), p. 13. D. A. Trotter, drawing on the work of Rothwell and others, suggests that even in the thirteenth century the languages were not considered distinct in the same way they are now, and argues that our 'convenient separation of languages may owe more to modern ideologies of linguistic development than to contemporary perceptions of linguistic reality'; D. A. Trotter, 'The Anglo-French Lexis of *Ancrene Wisse*', in *A Companion to 'Ancrene Wisse'*, ed. by Yoko Wada (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 83–101 (p. 85).

the insular approach of using the vernacular for legal and administrative purposes.[26] The earliest surviving legal texts in French were composed in England, which suggests that the tradition of using French for the law started on the British Isles before it was adopted on the continent.[27] And the broader practice of writing texts in French rather than Latin seems to have caught on faster on the British Isles than on the continent. After all, many of our earliest examples of French literature survive in insular manuscripts. And insular manuscripts account for an incredible 66 per cent of all twelfth-century manuscripts containing French, according to the comprehensive survey by Maria Careri, Christine Ruby, and Ian Short.[28] If, as this evidence suggests, Norman interest in writing in the vernacular was inspired by local customs, it should perhaps not come as a surprise that this interest emerged only gradually in the wake of the Conquest.

But there may be other explanations for the relatively gradual increase of French literature after the Conquest. Even if large swaths of land on the British Isles were redistributed to Normans who arrived with William the Conqueror in 1066, many of these Norman landholders did not stay after the Conquest, so their linguistic presence and literary tastes may not have been heavily felt.[29] Indeed, Short has observed that Norman names are relatively scarce in the early Domesday Book records, increasing significantly only in the twelfth century.[30] Although the Normans occupied many positions of power in Britain following the Conquest — and might therefore be expected to have supplanted high culture within Britain as well — French did not in any way supplant English literary production in the immediate aftermath of the Conquest.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: the most significant for French literary production

French literary production on the British Isles did not start to proliferate in any significant way until the early thirteenth century. The numbers are suggestive (Figure 1).[31]

The chart shows a marked increase in French literary production in the thirteenth century, with the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries standing as the most significant for French literary production.

This increase, of course, must be contextualized within broader patterns of manuscript production and survival. After all, an increase in manuscripts containing

[26] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 27–28.

[27] On the earliest legal writing in French, see Ian Short, 'Patrons and Polyglots: French Literature in Twelfth-Century England', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 14 (1992), 229–49.

[28] Careri, Ruby, and Short, *Livres et écritures*, p. xxxiii.

[29] Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely*, p. 9. See also Elisabeth van Houts, 'Invasion and Migration', in *A Social History of England, 900–1200*, ed. by Julia Crick and Elisabeth van Houts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 208–34 (pp. 222–30).

[30] Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, pp. 17–19.

[31] For the relevant figures, see Appendix Table 1. A preliminary version of this chart and the two below it appear without detailed discussion in Murchison [Milne] and Companjen, 'Manuscripts, Metadata, and Medieval Multilingualism'. Composite manuscripts and those copied in stages, when identified as such in catalogue records, were treated as a group of individual codicological units, each with its own dating information.

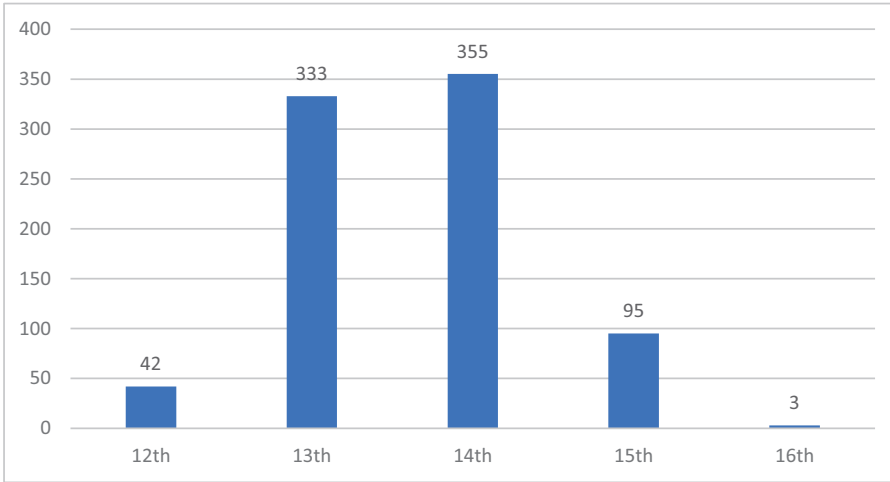

Figure 1 Absolute numbers of manuscripts containing French literature in the dataset by century copied.

French in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is not particularly interesting if it merely reflects an increase in manuscript production — or survival — as a whole. Contextualizing this increase, however, is not easy since there is at present no reliable large-scale dataset about the chronological distribution of manuscripts produced on the British Isles.

Nevertheless, some insight into the question can be gained using existing catalogues. Neil Ker's 'Medieval Libraries of Great Britain' (MLGB) is useful here. This corpus, recently digitized and updated, contains a list of manuscripts copied between the tenth and sixteenth centuries that are localizable to medieval book collections in Great Britain. Its selection criteria match the criteria used here in several key respects. First, both datasets are focused on roughly the same geographical area. It is, however, worth noting that while the dataset for this project is focused on manuscripts copied in Great Britain and Ireland, Ker's list is focused exclusively on those that appeared in the book collections of Great Britain. Since Ker's list is based on the medieval ownership of manuscripts and not where they were copied, it contains manuscripts copied in Great Britain, but also some manuscripts that were copied in Ireland and on the continent. While the first two categories of manuscripts are included in the Anglo-Norman dataset, this latter category of manuscripts is not. This means that, relative to the Anglo-Norman dataset, Ker's dataset is likely more influenced by trends in the cross-Channel book trade and in continental production, but this would not skew the overall picture that significantly.

The scope of both datasets is roughly similar. Ker's includes both manuscripts and printed books; this is important, since otherwise this dataset would be expected to look relatively sparse with the arrival of print in the late fifteenth

century.[32] The Anglo-Norman manuscripts dataset does not include printed works in Anglo-Norman, but this is, perhaps surprisingly, not a limitation in the dataset but a reflection of the paucity of Anglo-Norman literary incunabula.

Ker's list must of course be used with some caution, since its focus on medieval libraries means that it is skewed towards clerical collections. It may therefore reflect monastic book production and commissions rather than broader patterns within medieval society, and the distribution of manuscripts by date could be skewed somewhat towards periods of relatively high monastic book copying and commissioning.[33] But if this investigation were to start discounting datasets skewed towards monastic book production it would not get very far, so Ker's list is considered here — with the necessary caveat that it may not be representative of medieval book culture as a whole.

At present, the MLGB online catalogue contains 8350 records, each representing a manuscript or printed book.[34] Of these, 7814 have been dated to the period under investigation. To compare the number of French manuscripts by century to the number of manuscripts from medieval libraries by century, it is most helpful to compare the percentages of manuscripts copied in each century (relative figures), rather than absolute figures (Figure 2). This data has been compiled by first counting the number of records from each century, and then dividing this number by the total number of records (to arrive at a percentage).[35]

The comparison is remarkable. While a relatively high percentage of the manuscripts on Ker's list were produced in the twelfth century, the percentage of surviving manuscripts containing French literature produced in this century is comparatively very limited. Based on Ker's data, the production of manuscripts in Great Britain seems to have gained momentum in the twelfth century, but the production of French literature does not seem to have done the same. Indeed, the first true wave of surviving manuscripts containing French literature emerged in the thirteenth century — over a century after the Norman Conquest. As is clear from Figure 2, the remarkable increase in French manuscripts was part of a broader increase in written production, with the century that followed the Norman Conquest standing, according to Ker, as the most significant for medieval

[32] For ease of reference, and because the bulk of the dataset comprises manuscripts rather than printed books, the term 'manuscript' is used here to refer to an item in the dataset.

[33] Neil Ker and others, 'Medieval Libraries of Great Britain 3' (2015), <http://mlgb3.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>. Using Ker's MLGB as a corpus for tracing manuscript growth is in keeping with the methodology of the work of Eltjo Buringh and Jan Luiten Van Zanden about manuscript production in Europe more generally; see Eltjo Buringh and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, 'Charting the "Rise of the West": Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, A Long-Term Perspective from the Sixth through Eighteenth Centuries', *The Journal of Economic History*, 69 (2009), 409–45.

[34] The absolute figures appear in Appendix Table 2. Since the MLGB site continues to be updated, the figures here differ from previously published data. For this reason, the dataset at the time of analysis has been archived.

[35] For both datasets, manuscripts dated between centuries (for example, between the twelfth and thirteenth) have been counted as 0.5 in each century. This decision led to decimal results. All sixteenth-century books and manuscripts have been omitted from both datasets, and this means that the Anglo-Norman manuscript dataset contains 825 manuscripts, rather than the 828 dated manuscripts listed above.

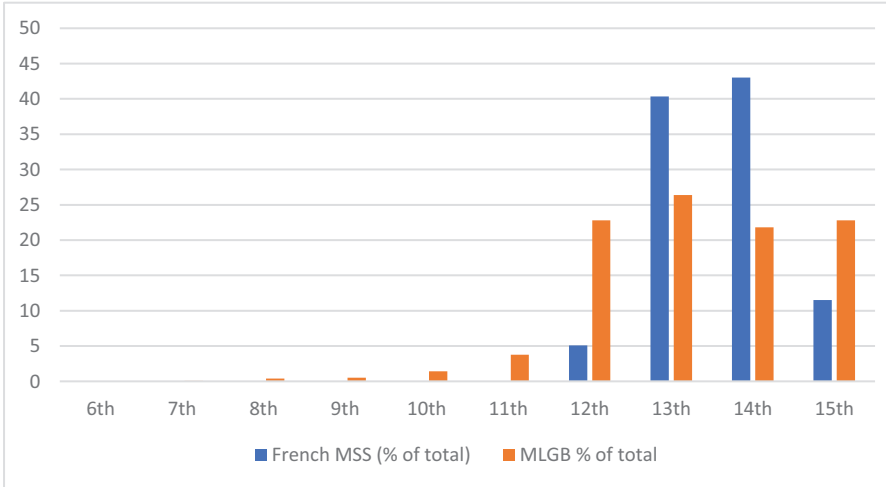

Figure 2 Numbers of manuscripts in the Anglo-Norman Dataset and manuscripts in MLGB by century (as relative figures).

book production in England.[36] The reasons for this broader increase have been documented and explored in depth by others, and there is no need to repeat their findings here.[37]

Yet the marked increase in manuscripts containing French literature in the thirteenth century is still curious and merits closer investigation. Certainly there were some who maintained French as a mother tongue in this period. This is implied by Robert Grosseteste who, writing in his *Chasteau d'amour* around 1235, claims to be using French for those who have 'ne lettrure ne clergie' — which suggests that, at least for him, French was not necessarily a taught language in the same way that Latin was.[38] Indeed, writing as late as *c.* 1325, Robert of Gloucester famously states that high-born descendants of the original wave of Conquerors 'Holdeþ alle þulke speche þat hii of hom nome' [maintain the same language as they took from [their

[36] N. R. Ker describes the century after the Conquest as 'the greatest in the history of English book production' in *English Manuscripts in the Century after the Norman Conquest: The Lyell Lectures 1952–3* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 1.

[37] For the impact of the increase of monasteries on thirteenth-century medieval book production, see, for example, Buringh and Van Zanden, 'Charting the "Rise of the West"', p. 438. For the rise of universities and their effect on book production, see for example Richard and Mary Rouse, 'The Book Trade at the University of Paris, *ca.* 1250–*ca.* 1350', in *La Production du livre universitaire au Moyen Âge: exemplar et pecia*, ed. by Louis J. Bataillon, Bertrand G. Guyot, and Richard H. Rouse (Paris: CNRS, 1988), pp. 41–114.

[38] Robert Grosseteste, 'Le Chasteau d'amour', ed. by Andrea Lankin, in *Vernacular Literary Theory from the French of Medieval England: Texts and Translations, c. 1120–c. 1450*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Thelma Fenster, and Delbert W. Russell (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), pp. 40–45 (p. 44). For scholars who explore the presence of native speakers of French in late medieval England, see the sociolinguistic studies listed above.

ancestors]].[39] These accounts must of course be approached with caution, but they suggest that as late as the fourteenth century, French continued to operate as a native language on the British Isles.

But the presence of native speakers alone does not explain why French was increasingly used as a language for literary production in the thirteenth century; after all, French literary production in the wake of the Conquest was relatively limited. Moreover, the marked growth of French literary production in this period is surprising in light of the powerful relationship between book production and economic power. If, as Eltjo Buringh and Jan Luiten Van Zanden suggest, 'the number of manuscripts and printed books produced in a given society are complex measures of economic performance', it is perhaps surprising to find that French literary production was actually increasing at the time that, in the traditional narrative, French was presumably losing its economic foothold on the British Isles.[40]

The marked growth of French literary production in this period may be, in part, due to an increase in the use of French in international affairs. Clanchy has found that 'the advance of French as an international literary and cultural language, particularly in the thirteenth century' led to its increased use in mercantile and business documents.[41] Perhaps as a result of this development, French also gained a foothold within legal and administrative domains; in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, the language of statutes officially changed from Latin to French.[42] Moreover, Lusignan has shown that French became increasingly associated with royal power in the thirteenth century; towards the end of Edward I's reign (1272–1307), acts written under the privy seal started to be written in French, and by the time of Edward II (r. 1307–27) an equal number of acts were written in French as in English.[43]

The typical interpretation of the evidence is that French was gaining traction in these legal, mercantile, and administrative domains at the precise moment that it was losing traction within other domains.[44] But the evidence presented here suggests that French was also gaining traction within literary domains in this period. Indeed, the growth of French literary production may have been the result of a growth in administrative and legal production. We should not be surprised to find that an increase in legal and administrative writing in French would come accompanied by a new interest in literary writing, as writers and scribes familiar

[39] Robert of Gloucester, *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. by William Aldis Wright (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), pp. 543–44; my translation.

[40] Buringh and Van Zanden, 'Charting the "Rise of the West"', p. 410.

[41] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 214.

[42] Spence writes that 'Anglo-Norman was moreover used more frequently in legal and administrative documentation from the second half of the thirteenth century', and observes that 'Statutes were made in Anglo-Norman instead of Latin from 1275' (*Reimagining History in Anglo-Norman Prose Chronicles*, pp. 3, 4).

[43] Lusignan, *La Langue des rois au Moyen Âge*, pp. 161–66.

[44] See, for example, Lusignan, *La Langue des rois au Moyen Âge*, p. 162. Christopher Baswell suggests that French was increasingly less common in casual and domestic domains in the thirteenth century, at the same time as it gained status as what Baswell terms a 'language of authenticity'; see Christopher Baswell, 'Multilingualism on the Page', in *Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 38–50, especially pp. 40, 45–49.

with French turned their skills to other ventures. Certainly this explanation would account for the relatively high proportion of chronicles, statutes, and other documents that were produced in the thirteenth century.

Yet this explanation appears somewhat incomplete when we examine more closely the French literature produced in the thirteenth century. Writing of a devotional or religious nature appears frequently among the thirteenth-century manuscripts in the dataset; this includes, for example, the French captions on the collection of Bible illustrations of William de Brailes (item 8 in the dataset), Psalters, such as the bilingual Oxford Psalter preserved in London, British Library, Add. MS 35283 (item 369), and other works of pastoralia, such as the copy of the *Manuel des péchés* commissioned by Jane Tateshal in Princeton University Library, Taylor Medieval MS 1 (item 755).[45] The emphasis on religious and pastoral topics in the French manuscripts of the period is in keeping with the findings of Madeleine Blaess, who identifies a similar emphasis among French manuscripts owned by religious houses in the thirteenth century.[46] Judging from this emphasis, the increased interest in French literature in the thirteenth century may owe much to the status of French among the laity; as works of religious instruction increasingly moved into the hands of the laity, French — more accessible than Latin but with some of Latin's authority — became increasingly important.

But it is worth noting that several of the manuscripts containing French pastoral texts seem to have been designed for use by the clergy. This seems to be the case with a Latin Psalter that is preceded by French commentary (item 278), which was produced in Durham Cathedral and remains in its collection to this day. The layout of this Psalter suggests that the French is there to guide the reader through the Latin. A manuscript designed in this way may have been intended for a member of the clergy who had little command of Latin.[47] But examples like this are, on the whole, relatively rare and most of the multilingual manuscripts from the thirteenth century seem to have been designed for an audience with multilingual competence, as we shall explore shortly.

Even more remarkable than the growth of French writing in the thirteenth century, at least in terms of the figures presented here, is the significant growth in the fourteenth century; a remarkable 43 per cent of the manuscripts in the French literature dataset date to this period. It was, in short, the most significant period for insular French literary production. This is notable given that the century was less important for manuscripts on Ker's list, and given that the second half of the fourteenth century was, according to Buringh and Van Zanden, a period of

[45] On the proportion of devotional works in French, see Wogan-Browne and Watson, 'French of England', p. 41.

[46] Madeleine Blaess, 'Les Manuscrits français dans les monastères anglais au Moyen Âge', *Romania*, 375 (1973), 321–58 (p. 324).

[47] On the question of the Latinity of the clergy in this period, see Joseph Goering, *William de Montibus (c. 1140–1213): The Schools and Literature of Pastoral Care* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992), pp. 62–63.

rapid decline in manuscript production throughout Europe.[48] But although the relative increase of French literary production is somewhat surprising, the findings presented here are nevertheless consistent with ongoing work in linguistic corpora analysis, which suggests that the fourteenth century was the most significant period for borrowings from French into English.[49] Such borrowings suggest a high degree of contact between the two languages and point to a strong French presence in England.

It is worth asking why the production of manuscripts containing French literature increased at a moment when the production of manuscripts as a whole seems to have been slowing down. On one hand, all the factors that led to an increase in French literary production in the thirteenth century must have continued to bolster it well into the fourteenth century. But there may be other factors involved — especially growing conflict with France. Although the Hundred Years' War, and ensuing anti-French sentiment, is often thought to have led to a decline in French training and use in England, there is evidence to suggest that, at least in the early years of the war, knowledge of French was encouraged, in the hopes that English soldiers could use the language in France. This is, at least, the impression left by Jean Froissart, who states in his *Chroniques* that in 1337: 'Tout seigneur, baron, chevalier, et honnestes hommes de bonnes villes mesissent cure et diligence de estruire et aprendre leurs enfans le langhe françoise par quoy il en fuissent plus able et plus coustummier ens leurs gherres' [All lords, barons, knights, and respectable men from good towns should take care and be diligent to instruct and teach their children the French language so that they might become more able and more familiar with it as they go to the wars].[50] Manuscripts containing language-learning manuals, such as Walter Bibbesworth's *Tretiz* and the various versions of the *Manière de langage*, were copied relatively frequently in this period and attest to a marked interest in French as second language.[51]

But if the start of the war was accompanied by an increased interest in French, this interest does not seem to have persisted, and the production of French literature slowed in late medieval England. This development is usually thought to have accompanied changes in the status of French in the late fourteenth century, including those tied to nationalistic sentiment spurned by the ongoing war with France. The change has also been linked to a movement towards the democratization of the law courts that culminated in the 1362 act known as the 'Statute of Pleading', which specified that court proceedings were to be in English rather

[48] Burignh and van Zanden, 'Charting the "Rise of the West"', p. 418.

[49] See Philip Durkin, *Borrowed Words: A History of Loanwords in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 33.

[50] The passage and its translation are from Ad Putter and Keith Busby's 'Introduction: Medieval Francophonia', in *Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and Its Neighbours*, ed. by Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 1–13 (p. 5).

[51] It is worth noting that almost all copies of Bibbesworth's *Tretiz* date to the fourteenth century.

than French.[52] The importance of this latter act has, however, been overstated in the past, since French persisted as the primary language of the courts into the early modern period.[53]

Evidence for the changing status of French in the fourteenth century surfaces in the literature. So, the *Speculum vitae*, written around the middle of the century, famously suggests that French is not widely known but is still being used in courts, while

> lered and lawed, alde and yhunge,
> Alle vnderstandes Inglische tunge.
> [learned/educated and uneducated, old and young,
> everyone understands the English tongue.][54]

But French education was on the decline in the second half of the fourteenth century according to John Trevisa, who laments in his translation of the *Polychronicon* (1385) that, while French used to be taught in school, now: 'in alle þe gramere scoles of Engelond, children leueþ Frensche and construeþ and learneþ an Englische' [in all the grammar schools of England, children abandon French and work and learn in English].[55]

The decline in the production of French literature seen in the fourteenth century appears to have intensified in the fifteenth. This decline likely reflects a growing unease about the use of French in legal and administrative contexts — an unease that had already started in the late fourteenth century. But there may be other factors involved as well. One possible, though perhaps unlikely, explanation is that the production of French manuscripts slowed in the fifteenth century due to what Sargent describes as 'market saturation'.[56] Through quantitative analysis, Sargent has argued that the copying of medieval English bestsellers such as *Piers Plowman* reflects 'a pattern of rising, then falling demand'.[57] In short, the production of one of these bestsellers seems to have ramped up rapidly in the first twenty-five to fifty years after it was written, then started to level off — just at the moment at which, Sargent suggests, the market had become 'saturated' with copies.

Given the medieval appreciation of tradition and established authority, it is possible that this type of 'market saturation' played out on a broader level,

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[52] According to Baswell, French began to lose its role as an authenticating language in this period, and was increasingly being replaced by Latin; Baswell, 'Multilingualism on the Page', p. 40. On the Statute of Pleading, see p. 39.

[53] See Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*, p. 323. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of this essay for pointing me towards this information.

[54] *Speculum vitae*, ed. by Ralph Hanna, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), I, 7, ll. 79–80; my translation. For similar statements in the prologues of contemporary and near-contemporary Middle English works, see Elizabeth Dearnley, *Translators and Their Prologues in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), pp. 73–77.

[55] *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, Monachi Cestrensis: Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Churchill Babington, 9 vols (London: Longman's Green, 1865–86), II (1869), pp. 159–63.

[56] Sargent, 'What Do the Numbers Mean?', p. 219.

[57] Sargent, 'What Do the Numbers Mean?', pp. 222, 243.

influencing the production not just of bestsellers but of other types of writing. This would help to explain the very slight decline in the production of new manuscripts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that is attested by the medieval library dataset. It would also help to explain why a decline in the production of French manuscripts did not happen until the fifteenth century; the protracted development of French literary production might have meant that French written production achieved market saturation later than written production as a whole.

The findings presented here therefore provide powerful support for several ongoing re-evaluations of the role of French in the centuries following the Norman Conquest. The relatively slow increase in French literary production in the immediate post-Conquest period illustrates clearly that the Normans did not in any way supplant English literary production. It provides strong support for the claim put forth by Richard Ingham and others that the growth of French literature had far less to do with the Norman Conquest and much more to do with the use of French in international affairs and exchange in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

But the data presented here allows us to go even further. It illustrates a trend that I have seldom seen commented on: that Anglo-Norman literary production was in fact at its apex in the fourteenth century. French literary production was not just subsisting in the fourteenth century — it was thriving. While French literary production started to taper off in the fifteenth century, this decline should not be overstated; French texts that continued to be copied into the early modern period, such as John Mandeville's *Travels*, illustrate the persistent appeal of French literature.

The manuscript contexts of French literature and their sociolinguistic implications

The dataset also provides remarkable insight into the contexts in which French literature circulated. Among the most notable findings is the relatively limited proportion of monolingual French manuscripts: only 42 per cent of the total.[58] And the original proportion was likely even lower, since fragments represent a significant portion of the manuscripts (about a third, depending on how a fragment is defined), and many of these fragments may have once been part of multilingual manuscripts. In other words, French literature circulated most commonly alongside works in other languages.

Given the surprisingly low proportion of French-only manuscripts, it is worth examining these more carefully, by exploring which texts were most commonly found in monolingual contexts. These are usually longer works — unsurprising

[58] The dataset published online contains 839 entries, which represent whole manuscripts in most cases or, where relevant, booklets or stages of compilation. Of these, language profile data has been gathered for 807 manuscripts. Of these 807 manuscripts with language profile data, 341 are monolingual French (marked as 100 per cent French); this means 42 per cent are monolingual. See Murchison [Milne], 'Intercultural Dialogue and Multilingualism in Post-Conquest England', <https://leidenuniversitylibrary.github.io/manuscript-stats>.

given the typical size of manuscripts — such as St Edmund's *Mirour de seinte eglise* (Dean no. 629; e.g. item 286b), Robert of Gretham's *Mirur* (Dean no. 589; e.g. item 692), and Pierre d'Abernon's *Lumere as lais* (Dean no. 630; e.g. item 523). A number of monolingual manuscripts contain chronicles or other historical texts (e.g. items 516, 607, and 701, and genealogical rolls such as items 608–13). These manuscripts seem to reflect the powerful relationship between French and historical writing in this period.[59]

The quantitative data here reveals another trend that has, to my knowledge, gone largely unnoticed: French literature circulated almost as often with Latin as it did on its own (see Figure 3). Trilingual manuscripts (those containing English, French, and Latin) are relatively rare, but — perhaps surprisingly — manuscripts containing only English and French are even more rare. The other languages represented in the dataset include Greek and Hebrew; as Clanchy notes, both men and women in the Jewish communities of medieval England were taught to read Hebrew.[60]

The frequent pairing of Latin and French is striking. And it may provide some insight into the linguistic abilities and preferences of readers on the British Isles. But before exploring this possibility, a word of caution is necessary. First, it is worth stressing that manuscripts do not represent readers in any straightforward way. It is notoriously difficult to identify the audience that a manuscript actually reached. And as Brian Stock, Joyce Coleman, and others have convincingly shown, literate culture in the medieval period was characterized by a strong tradition of oral reading.[61] This means that a single manuscript could have been used and experienced by various audiences of listeners — the scope and nature of which are

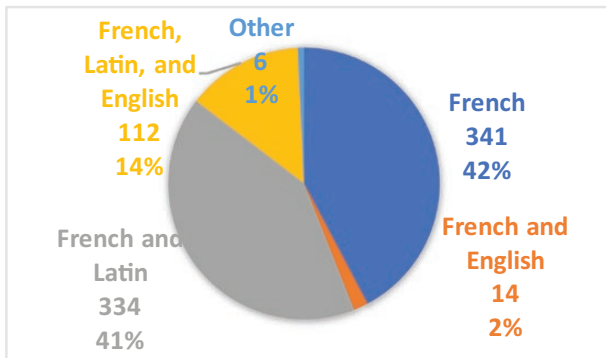

Figure 3 Linguistic profile data of manuscripts in the dataset.

[59] On this subject, see Spence, *Reimagining History in Anglo-Norman Prose Chronicles*.

[60] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 202.

[61] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation on the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

in most cases impossible to assess. A larger number of Latin/French manuscripts, then, does not necessarily imply a larger community of Latin/French readers.

The oral reading culture of the period has another implication which is perhaps even more significant here: the language of a written text was not necessarily the language in which it was experienced. So, a text in Latin could be read aloud exclusively in French by a translator. We cannot, therefore, assume that the languages used in a manuscript are representative of the linguistic abilities or interests of its audience. It is also worth noting that the production or acquisition of a manuscript does not necessarily imply its use. A manuscript could be created or acquired for any number of political, ideological, and social motives, some of which had very little to do with reading. The presence of a language in a manuscript, then, does not necessarily indicate that the owner or patron of that manuscript wanted to — or could — read it. Thus the frequent pairing of Latin and French in manuscripts, while interesting, can only tell us so much about linguistic abilities and interests, and must be approached with some caution.

It is certainly true that the presence of French in manuscripts has sometimes been interpreted as evidence of a lack of Latinity. So, David N. Bell suggests that the significant presence of French in late medieval convent libraries is due to low levels of Latinity among nuns.[62] Some of the French/Latin manuscripts in the dataset support this interpretation. One illustrative case is that of the fourteenth-century London, BL, Royal MS 2 D XIII (item 543), which contains the Apocalypse of John in Latin with a verse translation in French written below it. Judging from its position, the French text may be designed to help guide a reader through the Latin. This manuscript seems to reflect a model of language use in which French occupies a kind of middle ground between Latin — considered erudite but relatively inaccessible — and English — considered modest and widely accessible. This model, which has been identified in other multilingual manuscripts from medieval England, is described in Abbot Samson's *c*. 1200 model of England's linguistic situation, in which Latin is at the top, French in the middle, and English at the bottom.[63]

But the data analysed here indicates that this model cannot be generalized in any straightforward way; many of the French/Latin manuscripts contain

[62] David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), p. 68.

[63] On Abbot Samson's model, see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 205. The model is discussed by Geoff Rector in 'An Illustrious Vernacular: The Psalter *en romanz* in Twelfth-Century England', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, ed. by Wogan-Browne, pp. 198–206. See also Waters, *Translating 'Clergie'*, p. xii, and Spence, *Reimagining History in Anglo-Norman Prose Chronicles*, p. 7. The model is also implicit in Rebecca June's suggestion that the nuns of Crabhouse Priory used French in their manuscript because it 'could offer the nuns a measure of public formality for their documents' while not being Latin; Rebecca June, 'The Languages of Memory: The Crabhouse Nunnery Manuscript', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, ed. by Wogan-Browne, pp. 347–58 (p. 353). The same model, and Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence's creative challenge to it, are discussed in Thomas O'Donnell, 'Anglo-Norman Multiculturalism and Continental Standards in Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence's *Vie de Saint Thomas*', in *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in England, c. 800–c. 1250*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Tyler (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 337–56.

stand-alone texts in both languages. To choose one of any number of examples, London, BL, Royal MS 12 F XIII (item 554) contains a bestiary in Latin (fols 3r–141r), which is followed without interruption by a lapidary in French (fols 141v–49r; Dean no. 350). It is of course possible that the different languages in a manuscript such as this one target different communities — Latin for the priest, French for the layfolk he counsels, for example. But it is highly unlikely that this explanation lies behind all the Latin/French collections in the dataset.

Common among these Latin/French manuscripts are chronicle collections, legal compendia, and devotional guides such as Psalters and Books of Hours (typically a Latin Psalter is paired with French material). A typical example of a manuscript containing a devotional Latin/French pairing is Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.6.16 (item 197). This fourteenth-century manuscript opens with the offices for Advent in Latin (fols 1r–8v). These are followed by a short prayer to St Anne in Latin and French (Dean no. 920) (fol. 10r–v) and a Latin Calendar (fols 10r–16v). The next folio (17r–v) contains a prayer to St Francis in French. All this material serves as a prelude to the main text in the manuscript: a Latin Book of Hours (fols 18r–201r). Other devotional texts in Latin and French follow (fols 201v–06). There seems to be a correspondence between the type of text and the language used; the well-established Book of Hours is supplied in Latin and more modern prayers to saints are supplied in French.[64] The texts here suggest a community or patron who used Latin for authoritative biblical devotions and French for more intercessional ones.[65]

Similar combinations of religious material are common in the dataset. Religious writing in French was itself very common; Wogan-Browne and Watson have observed that 'nearly half the items in Dean's list of 986 Anglo-Norman texts are non-hagiographic texts of religion', and that a large number of these are aimed at pastoral teaching.[66] In many manuscripts, French pastoral works are found alongside more traditional, or established, Latin works — that is, works derived more directly from the Bible, or from patristic writings. To give one of many examples, the thirteenth-century London, BL, Harley MS 1801 (item 511), contains over a hundred folia of Latin theological tracts, which are attributed in the manuscript to various established authorities, including St Augustine, St Bonaventure, and St Bernard of Clairvaux. Nestled among these more established Latin works is the far less established allegory in French, the *Four Daughters of God* (Dean no. 685). This work recounts a widely popular parable, loosely inspired by Psalm 85.10, in which the virtues, cast as the daughters of God, hold a debate. Here, Latin is used for the

[64] See the record in Murchison [Milne], 'Details for Manuscript 197', *Intercultural Dialogue and Multilingualism in Post-Conquest England: A Database of French Literary Manuscripts Produced between 1100–1550* (2018), <https://leidenuniversitylibrary.github.io/manuscript-stats/details/ms_197.html>.

[65] For those who have suggested that the use of French was intimately tied to the genre of a given text, see for example Clanchy, who writes that different languages were associated with different themes and audiences (*From Memory to Written Record*, p. 220).

[66] Wogan-Browne and Watson, 'The French of England', p. 41.

established theology, and French for the less-established theology. Linguistic pairings of this nature, which are common in the dataset, suggest readers who chose Latin or French based on the nature or genre of a work, rather than their own linguistic skills.[67] They suggest a powerful correspondence between genre and language.

The choice of French could be informed by other factors as well. This point is illustrated by Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 469. This late-thirteenth-century manuscript contains mostly Latin tracts of a didactic nature, including selections of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (fols 17r–28v).[68] The only French text it contains is a short prose Brut chronicle known as *Le livere de reis de Brittanie* (Dean no. 13) (fols 178r–81r). This French text is preceded by a similar short Brut chronicle — this one in Latin (fols 167r–77v). Although they are significantly different, the two chronicles cover much of the same material and neither is explicitly linked to any established source. There is no sense here that the Latin is more authoritative than the French. The specifics of the chronicles differ enough that the French could not easily function as a translation of the Latin. Rather, the pairing suggests a use context in which French and Latin are equally authoritative and equally accessible. Many of the chronicle manuscripts in this dataset suggest a similar model.

In many cases, then, French literature seems to have been read by people who could understand both French and Latin. The use of French in a literary work does not seem to have been driven by necessity or by a patron's lack of Latinity, but by factors such as the genre of a text and its relationship to established biblical tradition. While manuscripts containing both English and French, such as the famous London, BL, Cotton Caligula MS A IX (which contains the *Owl and the Nightingale* and Layamon's *Brut*) or the Simeon or Auchinleck manuscripts, tend to feature prominently in studies of medieval British literature, the evidence suggests that the pairing of French and English literature in such contexts was relatively rare. This finding is notable, and, in light of the other evidence presented here, suggests that French literature was more commonly read alongside Latin than English. Although we must use considerable caution in extrapolating linguistic competence from manuscript data, the evidence may suggest that the audiences of French literature were more likely to possess Latin/French bilingualism than French/English bilingualism.

Conclusions

Some of the results of this quantitative analysis tell us nothing new. The data has revealed that the most significant centuries for insular French literary production were the thirteenth and fourteenth, and this finding is very much in keeping with the ongoing work of linguists, literary scholars, and social historians, who are increasingly finding evidence to suggest that French, far from being a dying

[67] Other examples include items 213, 249, 371, and 622.

[68] For a fuller description of its contents, see Murchison [Milne], 'Details for Manuscript 65', *Intercultural Dialogue and Multilingualism in Post-Conquest England: A Database of French Literary Manuscripts Produced Between 1100–1550* (2018), <https://leidenuniversitylibrary.github.io/manuscript-stats/details/ms_65.html>.

language in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, continued to be used in various domains.[69] In this way, the evidence here supports a growing body of scholarship that points to flaws in the traditional model of the rise of English.

Yet the quantitative approach has also revealed some trends that have gone largely unnoticed. Perhaps most notably, it has revealed that the growth patterns of French literary production did not mirror the growth patterns of book production in Great Britain as a whole — that French literary production seems to have taken about a century longer to hit its peak, and that it experienced a much sharper subsequent decline. It has also revealed that French literature circulated most commonly with works in other languages, a finding that highlights the protracted multilingualism of post-Conquest society. The quantitative approach taken here also holds promise for further research questions. It could, for example, shed new light on which genres flourished during which periods, or which areas on the British Isles were the most important for the production or ownership of French literature, two topics which I plan to explore in a future study.

But perhaps the more promising aspect of the quantitative approach taken here is that it offers a new means of looking beyond the limited number of texts and examples that, despite having been selected years ago on the basis of Victorian and other outmoded values, continue to characterize many popular and scholarly perceptions of language and literature from medieval Britain due to disciplinary boundaries, editorial barriers, and other factors. Perhaps the most famous example is the collection of Harley Lyrics (London, BL, Harley MS 2253). The collection's importance among studies of medieval language and literature has been shaped, at least in part, by the legacy of nineteenth-century scholars such as Karl Böddeker, who turned to it looking for 'Old English' poetry. English works in this manuscript have generally received more attention than French ones, because, in the words of Barbara Nolan, 'canons of British literature tend to privilege texts composed in the Middle English of emerging insular nationhood'.[70] Scholars are becoming increasingly interested in the collection's French works, and the manuscript has become an often-cited example of medieval multilingualism. But as the investigation here plainly illustrates, the kind of multilingualism it reflects (English/French/Latin) is not representative of the multilingual manuscript production of its day.[71] The manuscript's centrality to discussions of medieval multilingualism

[69] For those who stress the persistence of French into the late medieval period, see the discussion in the introduction to this study.

[70] Barbara Nolan, 'Anthologizing Ribaldry: Five Anglo-Norman Fabliaux', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 289–327 (pp. 289–90).

[71] For those who explore the French works in this manuscript, see for example Nolan, 'Anthologizing Ribaldry'; John J. Thompson, '"Frankis rimes here I redd, | Communlik in ilka sted…": The French Bible Stories in Harley 2253' (pp. 271–87); and Mary Dove, 'Evading Textual Intimacy: The French Secular Verse' (pp. 329–49), all in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, ed. by Fein. For those who consider the manuscript as representative of a variety of fourteenth-century multilingualism, see, for example, Marilyn Corrie, 'Harley 2253, Digby 86, and the Circulation of Literature in Pre-Chaucerian England', also in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, ed. by Fein, pp. 425–43; and John Scahill, 'Trilingualism in Early Middle English Miscellanies: Languages and Literature', in *Medieval and Early Modern Miscellanies and Anthologies*, ed. by Nicola Bradbury (= special issue, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003)), pp. 18–32.

reflects the interests of the nineteenth-century scholars who established its place in the modern canon — not the literary culture it is said to represent.

The quantitative approach taken here, by decentring the limited number of works favoured by the early architects of the English literary landscape, offers a means of circumventing some of the inherited values and ideals that continue to shape approaches to medieval multilingualism. Of course, any quantitative analysis will itself be shaped by values and ideals, and it is undoubtedly no coincidence that the major question that motivated this project arose at a moment when the United Kingdom was questioning its relationship to the continent and, with it, its history of intercultural communication and interchange. The goal of this investigation, therefore, is not to offer any attempt at an 'objective' account of a medieval linguistic environment, but to contribute to an increasingly complex — and increasingly urgent — dialogue about the British Isles' rich history of linguistic diversity.

Appendix

Table 1 Manuscripts containing French literature in the dataset by century copied

Century	MSS in dataset
11th	0
12th	42
13th	333
14th	355
15th	95
16th	3
Unknown	11
Total MSS in dataset	839
Total MSS dated in dataset	828

Table 2 Manuscripts in the dataset and manuscripts in MLGB by century produced (absolute and relative figures)

Century	French MSS	French MSS (% of total)	MLGB	MLGB % of total
6th	0	0	1	0.01
7th	0	0	6.5	0.08
8th	0	0	32	0.41
9th	0	0	40.5	0.52
10th	0	0	111	1.42
11th	0	0	294	3.76
12th	42	5.09	1781.5	22.80
13th	333	40.36	2063	26.40
14th	355	43.03	1704.5	21.81
15th	95	11.52	1780	22.78
Total	825		7814	

Abstract

According to the traditional model, the use of French in Great Britain was fundamentally tied to the Norman Conquest of 1066. The language of the conquerors rapidly replaced English within administrative and cultural domains, and it maintained its foothold in these domains until the thirteenth century, when English began to regain prestige. Yet research of the past few decades has shown that this model is significantly flawed. This article is aimed at supporting an ongoing revision of this model through a quantitative approach centred around a catalogue of manuscripts containing French literature and copied in the British Isles. The results presented here indicate clearly that, in the century following the Conquest, English literature was being produced in much greater quantities than French literature. Indeed, the peak of French literary production did not occur during the century following the Conquest, but rather during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Perhaps even more surprisingly, the analysis presented here reveals that in the centuries following the Conquest, works in French circulated most commonly with works in other languages — especially Latin. The approach adopted here thus sheds light on the history of French while decentring the canonical works that typically lie at its heart.

Résumé

Selon le modèle traditionnel, l'usage du français en Grande-Bretagne était fondamentalement lié à la conquête normande de 1066. La langue des conquérants aurait rapidement supplanté la langue anglaise dans les domaines administratifs et culturels et préservé son hégémonie dans ces domaines jusqu'au treizième siècle, où la langue anglaise aurait commencé à retrouver son prestige. Mais les recherches effectuées au cours des dernières décennies ont montré que ce modèle est considérablement défectueux. Cet article vise à soutenir une révision de ce modèle traditionnel en adoptant une démarche quantitative, axée sur un catalogue de manuscrits contenant des œuvres françaises provenant des îles britanniques. Les résultats présentés ici indiquent clairement que, pendant le siècle suivant la conquête, la littérature anglaise était produite en volume supérieur à littérature française. À cet égard, ils contrastent nettement avec le modèle traditionnel. De plus, la production de la littérature française a atteint son sommet aux treizième et quatorzième siècles et non pas pendant le siècle suivant la conquête. Fait encore plus surprenant peut-être, l'analyse présentée ici indique que pendant les siècles suivant la conquête, la littérature française circulait le plus fréquemment avec des œuvres dans d'autres langues — et surtout avec des œuvres en latin. La démarche adoptée ici apporte ainsi un éclairage sur l'histoire de la langue française tout en décentrant les œuvres canoniques qui se trouvent typiquement à son cœur.