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**Language, law and loanwords in early medieval Gaul:
language contact and studies in Gallo-Romance phonology**
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10 Conclusion

This dissertation comprises a study of the sociocultural and sociolinguistic factors that defined the linguistic encounter between Germanic and Romance in Late Roman and Merovingian Gaul. This final chapter summarizes and evaluates the main results.

As concerns the prehistory of French and the establishment of the Gallo-Romance dialect area, this dissertation has argued that the following factors played an important role:

- The disintegration of the Roman Empire from the third to the fifth century CE can be considered a ‘catastrophic event’ in the sociolinguistic sense of the word; it brought along demographic shifts and changes in social patterns that may have accelerated linguistic change in Roman Gaul.
- The political dismemberment of the Western Roman Empire in the late fifth century CE disrupted the geographical mobility that had until then tied Gallo-Romance to the wider Romance-speaking world.
- Because Merovingian scribes employed an evolved Gallo-Romance reading tradition when practicing Latin literacy, Merovingian Latin displays traits of the spoken Gallo-Romance vernacular.
- Merovingian Latin orthography should therefore be studied in consideration of a Gallo-Romance pronunciation.

As concerns Merovingian Frankish society, the investigations in this dissertation have made the following observations on how the vernacular languages reflect elements of, and shifts in Merovingian sociocultural identities:

- The first generation of Merovingian Franks belonged culturally and linguistically to the hybrid Germano-Gallo-Roman frontier zone of Late Roman Belgium.
- Later generations of Merovingian Franks considered their Frankish language to be an important part of their non-Roman identity.
 - This is clear from the inclusion of Germanic lexis in the Salic Law.
 - This is clear from their cultivation of runic literacy.
 - This is clear from the different semantic domains of borrowed Germanic lexis, which are present in the French dialects.
- The different Germanic lexical strata in the French dialects show that the interaction between Germanic-speakers and Gallo-Romance speakers lasted several generations, and that the Franks brought along non-elite lexis as part of their home culture; language functions here as a cultural artefact that fits Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of the ‘culture of the private’.

- In Austrasia, the bilingual society of northeastern Gaul, native speakers of Frankish imposed a ‘Germanic accent’ on their pronunciation of Gallo-Romance.
 - When these features were conventionalized throughout the Austrasian speech community, the result was an Austrasian dialect of Gallo-Romance, which was marked by the imposition of Germanic L1 features.
- In the late seventh and early eighth century, the Austrasian ‘Germanic-like’ dialect of Gallo-Romance spread to the southwest of northern Gaul in the wake of the Pippinid take-over of the Merovingian realm. This elite replacement facilitated the stabilization of a new Gallo-Romance prestige dialect.

As concerns the Salic Law, the investigations in this dissertation have pursued a new approach to the etymology of the Malberg glosses, which highlights the idiosyncrasies of the Merovingian scribal tradition and its relation to the Gallo-Romance vernacular. In this dissertation, the following observations were made:

- The Germanic lexis of the Salic Law has to be read in consideration of a Latinate spelling that was pronounced with Gallo-Romance phonology.
- The Malberg glosses contain Gaulish lexical items, presumably Gaulish loanwords in Germanic.
- The early Merovingian A-redaction of the Salic Law contains glosses that, by the time of the late sixth-century C-redaction, were no longer understood by Romance speaking scribes.
- The A-redaction of the Salic Law was, in all likelihood, connected to the fifth-century Germanic-speaking communities of Late Roman Belgium.
 - This is supported by the presence of Rhine Frankish elements in the Malberg glosses.
 - This is supported by the presence of Gaulish lexis in the Malberg glosses.
 - This is in consonance with the presence of North Sea Germanic elements in the Malberg glosses.

On a more general level, this dissertation has established the importance of the following factors, some of which were already mentioned in previous scholarship, but which, in my opinion, have received too little attention:

- The etymological possibilities of considering reconstructed Romance as a contact language.
- The late survival of Gaulish in isolated areas of Late Roman Gaul.
- The importance of the Gallo-Romance reading tradition for Merovingian Latin.
- The role that the northeastern border dialects of Gallo-Romance may have played in the prehistory of French.

It is my contention that, when we take the above mentioned factors into consideration, we come to a better understanding of the relationship between the written language and the Merovingian spoken vernaculars. In my opinion, such an approach has the potential of reinvigorating the lexical study of Merovingian Latinity. I therefore expect, that in the years to come, more information about the vernacular languages of Merovingian Gaul will come to light.

Finally, the investigations in this monograph were written from an interdisciplinary point of view, in anticipation of a new dialogue between archaeologists, historians and historical linguists. Although it might be hard to find agreement on some major points of contention, in my opinion, it seems at least feasible to agree on one thing; all pieces of evidence that have come down to us from Late Roman Gaul and Merovingian Gaul should be taken into consideration, also linguistic evidence. I therefore hope that the investigations in this monograph can convince at least some scholars outside of historical linguistics that data from the historical linguistic record should be part of our interpretative models of the Late Antique and Early Medieval past.