Alex Mullen/George Woudhuysen (eds.): Languages and Communities in the Late-Roman and Post-Imperial Western Provinces. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2023 (Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents). XII, 350 p., 8 ill., 11 maps, 1 table. £ 120.00/$ 155.00. ISBN 978-0-19-888895-6. – DOI Open Access: https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198888956.001.0001.

Linguistic contacts in antiquity have been the subject of growing scientific interest, especially since the publication of James N. Adams's monumental work, "Bilingualism and the Latin Language".[1] As a consequence, ancient sociolinguistics has developed as a discipline, and has even crystalised in the first professorship of Ancient History and Sociolinguistics, held by one of the editors of this volume, Alex Mullen.[2] This step forward might in the future reinforce the scarce presence of classicists and historians of antiquity in the field of historical sociolinguistics.

Two topics have been the most cultivated in this field so far: the contacts between vernacular languages and Latin, and the process of Latinization. Both are part of the intense debate on the concept of Romanization and help to provide interesting insights into Rome's expansion across the Mediterranean, giving more weight to the indigenous part and moving away from the 'Roman vs. indigenous' dichotomy and terms such as 'resistance' towards more balanced perspectives.[3]

The present volume continues to focus on the evolution of the Latin language but is set in Late Antiquity and the post-imperial period.[4] In consequence, it is a work designed to provide, for the first time, a panoramic view of the fragmentation of Latin in Western Europe and the Mediterranean, with a focus on the speaker communities, an ambitious undertaking with a pioneering perspective (pp. 4–5).

1 Adams 2003.

2 The reviewer has been a collaborator of the ERC LatinNow project in 2017–2018. However, she has not participated in any way in the team that conceived the workshop that has given rise to this book, nor in the book itself.

3 See for example Cruz Andreotti/Machuca Prieto 2022.

4 Authors prefer this concept to 'post-Roman', see p. 3, n. 9.

The choice of such a topic for this volume is not accidental. "Languages and Communities in the Late-Roman and Post-Imperial Western Provinces" is the second published volume of a trilogy that will be an essential reference work for those interested in the Latinization of the Western provinces. The first volume, "Social Factors in the Latinization of the Roman West",[5] focuses on the key elements of the Latinization process, in line with the second wave of variationist sociolinguistics.[6] The third, in press and soon to be published, is "Latinization, Local Languages, and Literacies in the Roman West",[7] which focuses on the period of the Roman conquest of the western territories. All these books are open access (license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), thanks to funding from the ERC Starting Grant "Latinisation of the north-western Roman provinces: sociolinguistics, epigraphy and archaeology", led by Mullen.

This is a work that aims to be the first step of a new path, ideally one that historians and philologists would walk hand in hand. This almost utopian collaboration, proposed by the editors, would probably make progress on the controversial question of the fragmentation of Latin and the emergence of the Romance languages, which continues to raise hackles. This desired interdisciplinarity is perhaps the leitmotif of the present work, a more than necessary demand. Whether or not this goal has been achieved, the effort has certainly been worthwhile and, in time, this work will be given its due. Paul Russell reflects on this in his chapter ("A Critical Afterword", pp. 268–276).

Interweaving History and Linguistics is an intellectual and editorial exercise of the utmost difficulty, both for the authors and for the editors. It was not easy for the first serious (and deliberate) attempt to unify the methodologies of linguists and historians to succeed. It is clear, however, that the editing of the book was as intensive as the elaboration of the idea. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that, although there was an initial workshop, this is not the proceedings of a colloquium in the usual sense. As the editors explain in the preface (pp. V–VI), new ideas and even new authors that were not

5 Mullen 2023.

6 Eckert 2012, pp. 91–93; Eckert 2018; Drummond/Schleef 2016; Soukup 2018.

7 Mullen/Willi 2024.

originally foreseen emerged from this workshop (deliberately convened to discuss controversial issues).

As far as the structure of the book is concerned, it is divided into three parts: "North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula" (pp. 35–125); "Gaul and the Germanies" (pp. 127–199); and "Ireland and Britain" (pp. 201–276). These are preceded by a useful introduction by the editors Alex Mullen and George Woudhuysen ("Language and History in the Late-Roman and Post-Imperial West", pp. 1–34). The volume concludes with a critical afterword by Cambridge Emeritus Professor of Celtic Languages Paul Russell, which, as noted in the previous paragraph, is surprisingly harsh on the results of the work, but also helps to put them into perspective and context. The book contains a useful general index (pp. 333–342), an index of literary sources (pp. 343–347) and an index of epigraphic and papyrological sources (pp. 348–350).

The introduction is, in fact, a chapter in itself. It gives the reader an idea of the complexity involved in producing the work, explaining in detail the conception of the idea of the book and the methodological difficulties encountered. In particular, they highlight three challenges: overcoming established paradigms, the difficulty of reconciling different perspectives on the same issue, and the scarcity of general primary source publications. By 'overcoming paradigms', the editors mean that little effort has been devoted to the linguistic situation in Late Antiquity and the post-imperial period in a comprehensive way,[8] and they explore several reasons for this. The second challenge, the lack of interdisciplinary dialogue, has already been explained in the previous paragraphs. The example of Gildas suggested on pp. 9–10 is very illustrative. Mullen and Woudhuysen explain that the differences between the two disciplines were particularly evident in the controversial question of the relationship between Latin and Romance languages, which virtually monopolised sociolinguistic research in this period. The editors cautiously and sensibly argue, in line with Roger Wright and Michel Banniard, that both languages were part of the same linguistic continuum in the early Middle Ages until Charlemagne's reform. The editors of the book also argue that it is difficult to reconcile the perception of late antique authors proposed by historians of antiquity and medievalists (p. 12). All of these difficulties (or challenges) stem from the fact that the late antique and post-imperial period

8 Authors just refer to publications in English, for example Minets 2021.

is the temporal boundary between the classical period and the Middle Ages, and that the barriers between the disciplines have, until recently, been impassable. The third challenge, the precariousness of the documentary record, is probably the most remarkable. It is the most likely reason why no comprehensive work has been devoted to the question of the Latin language in the late antique and post-imperial period. The literary sources are undoubtedly fundamental, and they are in Latin, so that, with exceptions such as the *Passion of Symphorianus* of Autun (p. 16), they do not provide consistent data on the linguistic situation of the majority of the population (although, as the authors point out, it is to be expected that the cultivated and 'vulgar' variants of Latin of the time were completely inter-intelligible). The problems lie specifically in the epigraphic sources.

Although some sets are accessible in excellent publications for some years (e.g. the Visigothic slates[9]), some even for many years (e.g. the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*), and are the subject of recent revisions,[10] there is no complete corpus of non-literary documents. One of the (enormous) problems that such a publication would entail would be the revision of the editorial conventions of the late antique inscriptions, especially with regard to the correction of alleged grammatical 'errors', which are precisely the nuances that it would be interesting to take into account.

The chapter on North Africa is by Jonathan P. Conant ("Languages and Communities in Late Antique and Early Medieval North Africa", pp. 37–57). It is a masterly presentation of the linguistic situation of this territory (although it begins with a controversial sentence: "In the contested space of late antique western North Africa, language was political", p. 37). This largely Amazigh-speaking territory was ruled by different empires with their own languages (Latin, Germanic/Vandal, Greek, Arabic) in the space of three centuries. Conant proposes a very broad chronological range (400–1230) to analyse the evolution of the longue durée. The author gives great importance to two factors in the linguistic choices of the North African peoples: pragmatic issues and the relationship between language and power.[11] This chapter describes how Latin was the dominant language in Africa in 300, and

9 Velázquez Soriano 2000.

10 Lemay 2017; Handley 2020.

11 But see p. 47: "Power was not the lens through which late Roman authors themselves understood the relationships between languages."

even remained so in urban contexts until almost the eighth century, if we look at the epigraphic record, for example, of Carthage. Conant shows that neither Vandal nor (early) Byzantine rule displaced Latin: the Vandal ruling classes saw themselves as the heirs of the Roman administration, so Latin remained the language of power, while the Vandal language, like other Germanic languages, is invisible in the epigraphic record. Latin was also the language of religion. The author also considers the question of the survival of Punic and the controversial passages of Augustine, as well as the situation of the Greek language under Byzantine rule. The last section deals with a subject that is not often addressed: the use of Latin in an Islamic environment from the fall of Carthage to the Arabs in 698 to the very Middle Ages.

Isabel Velázquez's chapter is the result of decades of research and expertise on the extremely interesting collection of Visigoth slates from the Iberian Peninsula ("Reflections on the Latin Language Spoken and Written in Visigothic Hispania", pp. 58–84). The author offers a clear historical contextualization of these materials, which logically leads to the linguistic result of the 'hybridization' of 'Hispano-Romans' and Visigoths from 507 onwards, almost imperceptibly. All documentation from the sixth and seventh centuries is still in Latin (with diastratic variations but the same code). The Visigoth kings used it as a language of power,[12] and it became the *lingua franca* of the territory. Velázquez is clearly in favor of not identifying a Romance language in this period, not even for the oral register (p. 60). This hypothesis is supported by the fact that Isidore of Seville was aware that he had to lower the register of his writings (in Latin) in order to be understood by the monks, but above all by all the texts written on slate. Velázquez gives a detailed account of the phonological, morphological and syntactic details of these tablets, to give the reader an idea of the stage of development of the Latin language in the Visigoth period, when a complete transformation towards the Romance languages had not yet taken place. This presentation is complemented by a monographic section devoted to the cultivated language, and more specifically to Isidore of Seville. The chapter concludes with an introduction to the question of the borrowings of the Germanic lexicon and onomastics into Latin or the Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, which penetrated before and after the establishment of the Goths.

12 Ennod. vita Epiph. 90 (Monumenta Germaniae historica. Auctores antiquissimi. Vol. 7: Magnus Felix Ennodius: Opera, rec. F. Vogel. Berlin 1885, p. 95).

Two chapters are devoted to the Iberian Peninsula, the second by Graham Barrett ("Conservatism in Language. Framing Latin in Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia", pp. 85–125). After the previous chapter, which demonstrates the continuity of Latin in the Iberian Peninsula ("the Land of Babel", p. 85) during the sixth and seventh centuries, Barret, who displays an astonishing capacity for synthesis, highlights the multilingualism of this territory from the Phoenicians to the multilingual Bible of Alcalá de Henares at the beginning of the sixteenth century. His multifaceted approach differs from that of Velázquez: Barret paints a more complex linguistic picture. For example, he includes the Greek language on the game board and further qualifies the different registers of Latin: a more learned register, a middle register (mainly the didactic material of Isidore of Seville) and the lower register, which corresponds to the slates, which are mainly economic documents, and some parchments. On this point, Barrett agrees with Velázquez in identifying a linguistic continuum in Latin. The longue durée approach of this volume allows the authors to take a panoramic view of the whole process and, in the case of Barrett's chapter, we reach the Post-Visigothic period, when a new language, Arabic, is introduced in the peninsula. Despite all the social and sociolinguistic changes brought about by the year 711, the author maintains that Latin continued to be used in the eighth century in the cultivated register of the south of the peninsula. In addition to this diachronic overview of the Hispanic linguistic situation (including some interesting remarks on the reign of Alfonso VI), Barrett introduces interesting sections with a sociolinguistic focus dealing with what he calls "Contesting Bilingualism" (pp. 109–113), "Complex Monolingualism" (pp. 113–115, the application of a model proposed by Roger Wright applied to northern Spain, where the conservatism of the written language did not begin to break until the Carolingian reform), "Accommodating Multilingualism" (pp. 115–119, a section in which all the minority languages of the peninsula, including Basque, are examined), and "Continuing Formulism" (pp. 119–122), in which Barret reflects on the importance of formal expressions, copying and quotation in the transmission of a language.

The second part of the book is devoted to more northerly Europe, and more precisely to two regions that are particularly interesting from a methodological point of view: Gaul and Belgium and Germany. The study of the former is divided into two parts, a perfectly understandable choice since the survival of the Gallic language is a subject that requires in-depth reflection. This task

is left to Alderik H. Blom ["Gaulish in the Late Empire (*c.* 200–600 CE)", pp. 129–154] and Ian Wood ("Registers of Latin in Gaul from the Fifth to the Seventh Century", pp. 155–167), who have divided the work diachronically and thematically: the former concentrates on Gaulish and the latter on Latin.

Blom is faced with the task of establishing the situation of the Gallic language in its final stages, a delicate matter because the dating of epigraphic sources is too vague, so that one must necessarily rely on literary sources. Both types have been taken into account. As for the epigraphic sources, Blom selects those of the "Late Gaulish" (p. 132) period, according to David Stifter's periodization, a proposal that will probably have to be revised in the future, since, as has been pointed out, the dating of most of the inscriptions is uncertain. The author states that Gaulish language was virtually forgotten in most of society; although of the ten or so 'Late Gaulish' inscriptions, three contain long texts: the tegula of Châteaubleau, the lead tablet of Rome and the golden tablet of Baudecet, a fact that might point to a more nuanced statement about the linguistic vitality of Gaulish at that moment. He concludes with a thoughtful consideration of the factors that contributed to the spread of Latin in the final phase of Gaulish.

Wood's work takes up the linguistic situation in Gaul with a key idea: "Merovingian Latin is no longer dismissed as simply bad" (p. 155), a statement that reminds some of the conceptual difficulties mentioned at the beginning of this review. The author affirms that it is true that the Latin of Gaul deviated from the classical norm between the fifth and eighth centuries, but did not disappear and remained a living, spoken, cultivated and studied language. The key figure is Gregory of Tours, who, in his monumental work, naturally finds room for a self-description of his style, always in somewhat pejorative terms (*rusticus*, *incultus*). However, his style was deliberate, in order to reach a higher level of understanding among his readers, in the same way as Isidore of Seville. Gregory, as has recently been shown, had ample rhetorical resources and was well versed in the use of registers. This tendency continued among seventh-century authors, especially bishops.

Wolfgang Haubrichs's extensive chapter on the situation of Latin west of the Rhine and north-east Gaul deals with the emergence of the Franconian varieties, a process that took place gradually from the contact zones ["Death and Survival of Latin in the Empire West of the Rhine (Belgicae, Germaniae) and the Rise of the Frankish-Theodisc Languages", pp. 168–

199]. The study of this linguistic genesis is based on borrowings from Latin (such as the *lex Salica*), Franco-Germanic and later Romance texts, and on onomastics (toponymy and anthroponymy). Detailed lists of these borrowings are given in the chapter. Haubrichs's method is essentially linguistic (in contrast to the other chapters in this volume, there is hardly any mention of literary evidence). His conclusion is that there are different levels of continuity of Latin in the chosen region: while the process of Franco-Germanization seems to have been completed in the eighth century north of the Rhine, in contrast, there is continuity of some Roman habits (epigraphic, even oenological) and also of the use of Latin in the Moselle region.

The chapters on the British Isles, like those on Gaul, are divided into two periods: the first is authored by David Stifter, Nora White and Katherine Forsyth, the second by David N. Parsons. The first one focuses on "Early Literacy and Multilingualism in Ireland and Britain" (pp. 203–235), more than any other chapter in the book, while the second takes as its subject "The Romance of Early Britain: Latin, British, and English, *c.* 400–600" (pp. 236–267).

Stifter, White and Forsyth explain how the process of Irish and British literacy emerged and developed from the Latin culture of the island of Britain. In the case of Britannia, Brittonic Celtic remained the majority language even under Roman rule, although, with very few exceptions, it was rarely written. The Anglo-Saxon invasions, on the other hand, broke the sociolinguistic continuum. After an obligatory historical contextualization, the authors return to a question that recurs throughout the volume: the 'errors' contained in Latin texts written by speakers of vernacular languages (in this case, interesting ogamic inscriptions with a Latin version). This long reflection serves as a bridge to the part of the chapter devoted to the genesis of the ogamic script, a peculiar and highly abstract writing system that records the earliest documents in the Irish language (late fourth century). The main point of this chapter is that this writing system was carefully constructed as a result of the "linguistic reflection that Irish scholars engaged in as a consequence of learning Latin as a foreign language" (p. 215). In his very comprehensive chapter, there is also space to discuss the question of its origin, its periodisation (which reaches the present day with the "'revivalist ogam'" [p. 221] phase) and to reflect on some sociolinguistic aspects, a section which contains fascinating bilingual examples illustrating the differences between the Irish and British regions.

Parsons's chapter tackles the difficult question of the complex situation of Latin in late antique Britain. The chapter has the virtue of explaining the debate clearly, especially in its conclusions. Parsons's approach is eminently linguistic (indeed, literary sources, of which Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae* is the most important, are scarce; epigraphic sources are essentially epitaphs): he suggests a number of Latin borrowings in the British languages, but also discusses how some British morphosyntactic innovations reflect Latin models, and also similar phonological developments between British and Latin or Romance. Parsons distinguishes between the Highlands and the Lowlands since the latter were much more exposed to the Roman and Anglo-Saxon conquests, and consequently there was a clear break with the Latin continuum after the latter. The author poses a difficult and pertinent question: why are there so many Latin borrowings from Anglo-Saxon and so few from Brittonic? After analyzing several hypotheses, Parsons very cautiously suggests that the Latin spoken in Britannia at the beginning of the fifth century was little different from the Latin spoken in other neighboring regions, such as Gaul.

The book closes with Russell's critical afterword, alluded to at the beginning of this review, which is an act of honesty on the part of the editors. This work shows that the book has not succeeded in satisfactorily interweaving the different perspectives (especially historical and linguistic, but not only) on the situation of Latin in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. This final chapter by Russell will undoubtedly make an impact on the reader: it is unusual to find such sharp criticism of a book from the book itself. However, even if it could feel too severe, it will probably confirm some of the feelings he may have had while reading the chapters, especially after the initial good intentions put forward by the editors.

To sum up, even if the book has not accomplished one of its key goals (probably it was too ambitious), it is undeniable that it constitutes an essential starting point for those interested in the final stages of the Latin language in western Europe and its relationship with Romance languages. Apart from this big topic, two elements have to be highlighted, in my view: first, it is worth noting that the editors deliberately avoid the term "ethnicity" (p. 7, n. 23), which seems to be an obligatory mention in any scholarly production dealing with language and identity, and that has proven to be often misleading in sociolinguistic research. Instead, they give more importance to the linguistic agency and personal linguistic choices. On the other hand, all the

contributions confirm the importance of Latin continuity, and none of them rush to identify the Romance languages in this period, which is already a step forward.

Formally, this is a very careful edition, with practically no typographical errors ('Aiestaran' for "Aiesterán", p. 116, n. 166; the map in Fig. 4.1 would need some corrections, as several cities are misplaced; the map in Fig. 7.8 is difficult to make sense of). But the main value of this book, as has already been said, is that it provides a first point of departure for understanding the linguistic situation of the Roman West in Late Antiquity and the post-imperial period, particularly with regard to the fate of Latin. We can therefore only rejoice at the publication of such an ambitious and at the same time illuminating volume, which will certainly serve as an impetus for further research.

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