Literature and Multilingualism in the Low Countries (1100–1600)

Queeste 22

Middle Dutch Religious Reading Cultures in Late Medieval France⋆

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The language that is now known as French was, during the Middle Ages, originally only one among several variants of a group of languages called *romanch* and later *francois*.[1] Due to a chain of cultural developments and political decisions this variant eventually became the national language of the *République Française*. Nevertheless, within the political boundaries of present-day France several other languages are spoken or understood by the inhabitants. Apart from foreign languages learned in school and the languages spoken by newly naturalized citizens, France has traditionally known a great diversity of languages: Occitan in almost its entire southern half, Breton in French Brittany, Basque and Catalan in the south-west, variants of German along its north-eastern borders and West Flemish in the north-west (ill. 1).[2]

During the *Ancien Régime* and especially after the French Revolution, a strict linguistic homogenization was considered a necessary precondition for the political unification of the patchwork of regions that constitute France. The French language was designated as the sole language of the French Republic, and it is generally considered imperative to stick to this monolingualism in order to assure the Republic's unity and the equal rights of its citizens. In reality, however, France still struggles with its multilingual reality and this subject continues to raise sharp debate, as testified by the heated discussions in the French parliament (*Assemblée Nationale*) about the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in January 2014. Ratification of the Charter is considered controversial, because it would be against the Republican principle of 'unity and indivisibility of the nation' (*l'unité et l'indivisibilité de la nation*) according to several members of parliament.[3]
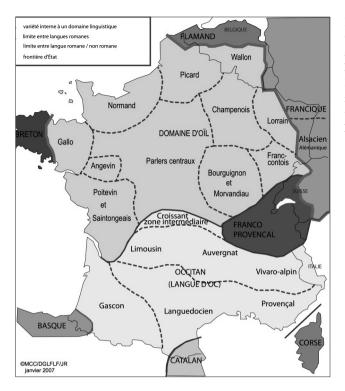
In spite of the broadly supported political ideology of linguistic unity, a specially created governmental service, the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France*, is a recognition of the importance of 'regional or minority languages' for

1 Medieval "French" was in fact a linguistic continuum that included many variants. For the importance of one of these variants, Picard, see Lusignan 2012. For political aspects of writing the history of medieval French as the language of Paris and the creation of the erroneous notion of "Francien" as a medieval national standard language, see Bergounioux 1989. Gaunt 2015, 59 urges to consider medieval French rather as 'a supralocal language, not a national or proto-national one'.

2 For Flemish in France, see Lévy 1950; Ryckeboer 1997; Ryckeboer 2002; Ryckeboer 2004; Le Roy Ladurie 2001, 55-70.

3 Debates of 22 and 23 January 2014, see http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/cri/2013-2014/20140139.asp (accessed 8/8/2014).

Ill. 1   Map showing the spatial distribution of the regional languages of France as published on the website of the French Ministry of Culture in 2014. (http://www.dglf.culture.gouv.fr/ressources/cartes/langues_regionales.pdf accessed 8/8/2014)

the cultural life of the nation.[4] One of these regional languages is *het Vlaemsch van Frankryk* (also referred to as *West-Vlaams* or West Flemish), spoken in a north–western fringe of the country. It is a language of Germanic origin closely related to the Flemish as spoken in Belgium and the Dutch language of the Netherlands. According to a survey from 1999 by the Insee, the use of regional languages is declining dramatically in France and the situation is judged as critical for several languages, including West Flemish, if they are indeed not on the verge of extinction.[5] On top of this, Flemish has negative connotations in France because of the support by some members of the French Flemish movement of Nazism during the Second World War.[6] The growing intolerance of Flemish speakers in Belgium towards French/Walloon is also perceived as highly problematic. In northern France, Standard Dutch is a foreign language (*langue vivante*) option for the *baccalauréat* since 2012, but, surprisingly, not as a

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4   'On entend par langues de France les langues régionales ou minoritaires parlées traditionnellement par des citoyens français sur le territoire de la République, et qui ne sont langue officielle d'aucun État'. See http://www.dglf.culture.gouv.fr/lgfrance/lgfrance_presentation.htm (accessed 8/8/2014). The list of officially recognized regional languages of France is based on the inventory established by Bernard Cerquiglini in his report from April 1999 and includes *flamand occidental* (West Flemish); see http://www.dglf.culture.gouv.fr/lang-reg/rapport_cerquiglini/langues-france.html (accessed 8/8/2014). Hebrew, Sarphatique and Shuadit are never mentioned among the traditional languages of France, although the country has included communities of Jews throughout its history.

5   In 1999 only 3% of the interviewed parents of children born between 1980 and 1990 declared having spoken a regional language with their children. See Clanché 2002; Héran, Filhon & Deprez 2002, 3.

6   Le Roy Ladurie 2001, 65-68.

regional language (*langue régionale*).[7]

In spite of expectations of the imminent extinction of West Flemish and the wide-spread conceptualization in France of this language as only a marginal phenomenon, it is part of a much larger linguistic entity, known as *Algemeen Nederlands* (Standard Dutch): a language with 23 million native speakers worldwide. An official language in eight countries, it is also numerically the eighth language of the European Union.[8] In Belgium this language is usually referred to as *Vlaams* (Flemish) and in the Neth-erlands as *Nederlands* (Dutch). During the long fifteenth century (ca. 1400-ca. 1550), its historical ancestor, in modern scholarship commonly referred to as Middle Dutch, was spoken and written from present-day northern France to the regions situated at the west of the rivers Rhine and IJssel, including the provinces of Utrecht and Hol-land.[9] Together with Middle Low German, Middle Dutch formed a linguistic contin-uum of closely related languages that are not always easy to distinguish clearly from each other.[10] This allowed people to communicate with one another in a broad strip from northern France to north-eastern Germany (with the exception of the Frisian regions in the north) and to read each other's texts.

Traditionally, historical linguistics has traced a much harder border between the Flemish/Dutch (Germanic) and French (Romance) languages, which is supposed to reflect the incursions of Germanic tribes into the late Roman Empire as far south as the *limes Nervicanus* on the line Boulogne-Bavay-Tongeren during the second and third centuries C.E., followed later by the immigration of Frankish groups in the fifth century.[11] According to this view, to the north of the *limes* the Roman language and culture would have disappeared completely, while it would have continued to pros-per on its southern side. During the subsequent centuries the linguistic border would have moved slightly towards the north. As a consequence, in the late Middle Ages the dividing line between Germanic and Romance languages would have ran from Cap Gris Nez towards the east, passing south of Saint-Omer, then following the river Lys and continuing as the Flemish-Walloon language border in present-day Belgium. The exact location of the linguistic border, however, both in the past and in the present, is subject to debate, and the arguments are often biased by nationalistic sentiments or tainted by the projection of the modern linguistic situation in France and Belgium onto the past.[12]

Scholars have often assumed that the language and culture on the southern side of the linguistic border would have remained strongly Romanized. However, Paul Lévy has proposed earlier a historical model that is, in my opinion, more plausible, most notably his suggestion of the existence of a *zone médiane* of Frankish presence

7 *Arrêté relatif aux épreuves du baccalauréat général*, articles 6 and 6-2; see http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cid Texte=JORFTEXT000000179949&fastPos=3&fastReqId=vig&categorieLien=cid&oldAction=rech Texte (accessed 8/8/2014).

8 http://taalunieversum.org/inhoud/feiten-en-cijfers#feitencijfers (accessed 8/8/2014). For the influence of Standard Dutch on other languages, see Van der Sijs 2010.

9 Van den Toorn et al. 1997, 69-74, 148-149; Van der Wal 1992, 102-127.

10 Van den Toorn et al. 1997, 152-158; Van der Wal 1992, 108-110.

11 Lamarcq & Rogge 1996, 59-163.

12 Ryckeboer 2002; Ryckeboer 1997, 172-177; Lamarcq & Rogge 1996, 9-19, 206-234.

in late-Roman Gaul, stretching from the line Boulogne-Saint-Omer up to approximately the Loire river, followed by centuries of bilingualism of Gallo-Roman and Frankish languages in the entire northern half of former Gaul, until the seventh and eighth centuries when the use of *theodiscam* (a Germanic language) regressed gradually in favor of the *romana lingua*. Nevertheless, in northern France the latter language preserved a high percentage of lexical and grammatical borrowings from Germanic languages. Lévy also stressed the continuing presence of Germanic languages in later medieval France because of the influx of princes and princesses, ambassadors, soldiers, merchants, students and pilgrims.[13] The linguistic situation as suggested by Lévy is one with much more dynamism, interpenetration, exchange and hybridity than is generally assumed.

Moreover, recent developments in linguistics have questioned the adequacy of the view of 'speech communities as relatively homogeneous and populated by stable linguistic subjects', and have argued that linguistic communities are inherently characterized by 'in-betweenness' and 'hybridity'.[14] With this in mind, and against the background of uncertainty over the exact location of the linguistic border and the lack of reliable historical documentation, it would be better to consider a much larger area as a linguistic contact zone, characterized by intensive language contacts resulting in such phenomena as bilingualism, code switching and code mixing.[15] In addition, the conclusions of historical linguistic research are mainly based on the dialects spoken by modern inhabitants, on the etymology of place names, and above all on legal and institutional documents from the Middle Ages. In reality this historical source material is fragmentary and not always representative of the languages that were actually in use by the people living in the regions north of Paris.

A supplementary approach that allows going beyond existing ideas is the study of reading cultures, especially of lay people, in the linguistic contact zone of Middle Dutch and French.[16] Very informative historical source material has survived from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: archival documents, such as wills and post-mortem inventories mentioning books, and the surviving original books. These types of sources give a much better insight into the languages that people actually used in their daily life than the study of institutional documents alone. As I will argue here, these sources show that texts in Middle Dutch circulated in regions that have always been considered as exclusively French speaking. Consequently, I will argue that a large part of the area north of Paris should actually be considered as bilingual or even multilingual during the late Middle Ages. In addition, and this will be the second point of this paper, historical data concerning lay owners and lay readers of religious texts in this particular area reveal the cultural continuity through translations of texts

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13 Lévy 1950, 3-107. For Romance-Germanic bilingualism during the fifth to ninth or even tenth centuries, see also Sala 2013, 204-201; Haubrichs 2011, 22-28; Rey, Duval & Siouffi 2011, 40-47; Lodge 1993, 54-84. In the view of this latter author the area with the strongest Germanic (Frankish) influence should be situated north of the line between Abbeville, Versailles and Nancy.
14 De Fina & Perrino 2013.
15 Haubrichs & Pfister 1998; Röhrig 1987, 23-29. For the influence of (Middle) Dutch on French, see Valkhoff 1931; Höfler 1965.
16 For theoretical aspects of the study of historical reading cultures, see Hoogvliet 2013.

that were originally composed in Middle Dutch- and Middle Low German-speaking regions during the long fifteenth century. The reception of texts from the North in French-speaking areas resulted in a shared religious culture, regardless of linguistic differences. In order to challenge modern French ideas about the insignificant relevance of Standard Dutch for the cultural identity of France, both modern and historical, I will concentrate here on the area that is now northern France, from Paris northwards to the supposed linguistic border.[17]

In order to demonstrate the existence of Middle Dutch reading cultures in areas that have always been perceived as forming part of the French-speaking world, and consequently of a different culture, I will first present archival sources and books that testify to the presence of religious texts in Middle Dutch in areas that are usually considered as exclusively French speaking. Secondly, I will discuss translations into French of religious texts originating from the Low Countries and the Rhineland that testify to the receptiveness among lay people in French-speaking areas for reading cultures from the northern regions. My inquiry will be primarily based on religious texts, because numerically these were read in far larger numbers than literary and pragmatic texts. Based on these historical sources, I will argue that the perspective of religious reading cultures allows us to go beyond traditional narratives based on the ideology of stable and monolingual national identities and that it results in revealing European patterns of shared religious textualities.

Reading Middle Dutch in late Medieval France

Possibly because of the strong emphasis on French as the only official language of the République Française, French historians expect their vernacular sources from the Middle Ages to be mainly in French, too. However, historical sources show that during the late Middle Ages people were aware of the multilingual nature of the French kingdom. For instance, around the year 1400 Étienne de Conty wrote in his continuation of the *Chronica Martiana* that one of the riches of France was the fact that it counted three languages: Flemish, Breton and French.[18] Unfortunately, this historical linguistic diversity of France is not always reflected in the outcomes of modern research.[19]

The town of Saint-Omer is situated on what many modern scholars consider to have been the linguistic border between Middle Dutch and French during the Middle Ages (in reality Picard, another variant of *romanch*, was spoken in this area, as it is to this day). Although historians from Belgian Flanders often characterize the town

17 In the Low Countries (roughly present-day Flanders and the southern half of the Netherlands) both Middle Dutch and French (Picard) languages were spoken, written, read and understood by the inhabitants during the late Middle Ages and the following centuries, see Lusignan 2012, 211-212. However, as I will demonstrate below, Lusignan is overgeneralizing by claiming that French (Picard) held a superior position with regard to Middle Dutch.
18 Contamine 1980, 382.
19 An exception is Lusignan 2012, 202-204 who does refer to the use of Middle Dutch in Calais, based on the municipal accounts between 1268-1301.

as bilingual, the French historian André Derville wrote that the Romanization of its population started around 1150 and that it was completed in the early fourteenth century: the inhabitants would have completely forgotten the Middle Dutch language by that time.[20] Yet in the same book, Derville quoted countless expressions in that language that were apparently commonly used in late medieval Saint-Omer, such as *keure* (founding charter with regulations), *zoeninghe* (money paid in order to make up for a crime), *espoulemans* (person handling the shuttle of a loom) and *kerkmaistres* (layperson responsible for the financial management of a parish), to only name a few.[21]

There are many historical sources showing that people in Saint-Omer were still using Middle Dutch during the late Middle Ages. In September 1324, for instance, the dean and canons of the collegial church of Saint-Omer unearthed the saint's body from its sepulchre and displayed it in their church. The original documents found in the shrine were read to the people of Saint-Omer, and the texts were published in *gallico* and in *flamingo* on the rood screen and behind the choir of the church.[22] During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Middle Dutch was also used in Saint-Omer for legal documents, such as wills: at least twelve original documents have survived.[23] In article 7 of the revision of local customary law from 1509, the mayor and aldermen of Saint-Omer stated that they would write their judgments of criminal cases in *langaige flameng*.[24]

It is not surprising that books in Middle Dutch were also present in this bilingual context: in her will from 1420, written in French, Jacquemine Rams from Saint-Omer bequeathed a book with the Gospels, an Epistolary and 'a Golden Legend in Flemish' to the grand convent of the Beguines.[25] Jacquemine's book would certainly have found an audience among the Beguines, because the regulations for the religious women of their house in Saint-Omer, dating from the early fourteenth century, were noted in French/Picard and in Middle Dutch.[26] Another example is a Book of Hours in Latin and in Middle Dutch, which dates from the early fifteenth century and was very likely used in Saint-Omer (the Middle Dutch name of St Omer has been written in red in the calendar).[27]

The historical evidence from Saint-Omer discussed here shows that Middle Dutch and French/Picard were perceived as two different linguistic entities. The practice of translating documents indicates that it was not generally expected that every single member of the audience would understand both languages. On the other hand, examples such as that of Jacquemine Rams show that at least a part of the population was bilingual and well versed in both languages. The presence of people with linguis-

20   Derville 1995, 246.
21   Derville 1995, 145, 103, 202, 249.
22   De Givenchy, 1837-38, xxxi: 'Quas eciam dicto populo legi et publicari fecimus et easdem exponi in idiomatibus gallico et flamingo, tam infra chorum dicte ecclesie quam super dossale'.
23   Deschamps de Pas 1901/1902. Unfortunately the wills in Middle Dutch still remain unedited.
24   Courtois 1856, 9.
25   Saint-Omer, Archives Communales, B 268/10: 'au grant couuent dez beghines […] ung evvangeliaire et vng epistolaire et vne legende doree en flamenc'.
26   Delmaire 1985, 149, n. 104; Simons 2001, 195, n. 160.
27   Arras, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 822. Discussed in Gil & Nys 2004, 97.

tic skills in both French/Picard and Middle Dutch acting as cultural mediators will have facilitated translations and the sharing of texts across linguistic differences.

Study of legal documents and of original books reveals the presence of Middle Dutch even in towns that are generally believed to have been on the French/Picard/Walloon-speaking side of the linguistic border. In Tournai, part of the French kingdom until 1521, at least two books in Middle Dutch were bequeathed by will before 1500: Claire le Werke bequeathed *a booklet with a part of the Psalter in Middle Dutch* to her goddaughter in her 1417 will[28] and Jeanne Rollande dite Hardoye, also from Tournai, bequeathed her *large book in Flemish* in 1448 to the town's messenger Laurent Rasoir.[29]

Douai is also generally considered as a French/Picard speaking town, but here too, Middle Dutch was present, as is testified by manuscript 193 of the *Bibliothèque municipale* of Douai.[30] It is a colourfully decorated Latin Psalter that can be dated to the fourteenth century. The book is heavily used and it contains an ex-libris note on one of its flyleaves showing that it belonged to the Blassel family of Douai: *Cest livre appartien à Blassel, demeurant au pons du marché poison* (This book belongs to Blassel, living on the bridge of the fish market). On folio 285r a fourteenth-century or early fifteenth-century hand has written a note in Middle Dutch: *Hier toe staet vele perdoen na alle ghetide danc hebbe God* (Hereafter the [text of the] Hours there are many indulgence prayers. Thank the Lord). At the end of the prayers and fragments from Luke in Latin that follow (f. 289v) copied by the same hand: *Lof God van al* (Praise to the Lord of all).

Manuscript 563 of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal is a fifteenth-century Book of Hours after the use of the diocese of Laon, followed by prayers with rubrics in French and in Middle Dutch (from f. 160r onwards).[31] The decoration has been added by Henri d'Orquevaulz, a manuscript painter active in Metz,[32] which suggests that this prayer book originates from this area and that it was possibly in use there as well. This is not as unusual as it might seem: Metz was situated in the German Empire until 1552 and although the inhabitants were predominantly French speaking, they also owned books in German.[33]

Surprisingly, books in Middle Dutch were printed as far south as Paris and Rouen: at least fourteen editions can be retraced until 1533.[34] These were often Books of

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28 Vanwijnsberghe 2001, 179: 'ung livret d'une partie du sautier en flamench'.

29 Vanwijnsberghe 2001, 193: 'men grant livre en flameng'.

30 Accessible online: http://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/resultRecherche/resultRecherche.php?COMPOSITION_ID=5623.

31 I have not yet been able to consult the original manuscript. The inclusion of prayers in Middle Dutch is mentioned in the catalogue of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

32 Avril 1989, 69-80.

33 Haubrichs 2000.

34 A search on www.ustc.ac.uk (accessed 12/8/2014) results in the following titles: 1. *Ghetiden van onser lieuer vrouwen*. Paris: [Jean Higman] for Willem Houtmert, 1497; 2. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen met vele schoon loven ende oracien*. Paris: Thielman Kerver, 1500; 3. Sebastian Brant, *Dit is der zotten ende der narrenscip*. Paris: Guy Marchant, 1500; 4. *Der kerstenen regiment*. Paris: Thielman Kerver, 1500; 5. *Onser vrouwen ghetiiden*. Paris: Wolfgang Hopyl, 1500; 6. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen met vele schoon loven ende oracien*. Paris: Thielman Kerver for Gillijs Remacle, 1501; 7. Jacobus a Varagine, *Hier beghint twinter/tsomer stuck des passionale. Dhat is gehieten Aurea legenda*. Paris: Wolfgang Hopyl for Willem Houtmart (Brussels), 1505-1507; 8. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen*

Hours that were intended for exportation to the Low Countries, such as, for instance, the first Book of Hours in Middle Dutch that was printed in Paris in 1497, probably by the printer Johannes Higman. It was ordered by Willem Houtmaert, a bookseller, active in Antwerp, as is testified by the colophon.[35] However, the Book of Hours in Middle Dutch printed by Thielman Kerver in 1500 was, according to the colophon, intended for readers *here in this same town of Paris*.[36] Thielman Kerver reprinted this Book of Hours in 1501 and again in 1505 for his brother-in-law Gillijs Remacle and these were sold in Paris on the Pont Saint-Michel in a shop with the sign of the unicorn.[37] After reprints in 1509, 1512, 1517, 1518 and 1522, Kerver's widow, Jolande Bonhomme, reprinted the Book of Hours in Middle Dutch one more time in 1533, and this edition could be purchased in Paris in the Rue Saint-Jacob at the sign of the unicorn.[38]

The frequent reprints of Books of Hours in Middle Dutch in Paris indicate that books in Middle Dutch printed in Paris and Rouen were not always exported to the Low Countries but that they probably also found readers in predominantly francophone areas. Judging by the number of reprints, there must even have been a considerable audience for them during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The Parisian readers of this book in Middle Dutch consisted most likely of nobility, students, merchants, lawyers, translators working for the *Parlement de Paris*, and their families, originating from Middle Dutch–speaking northern France and the Low Countries.[39] Middle Dutch was, for instance, present in Paris as a juridical language because the *Parlement de Paris* was the court of appeal for Flanders. This implied that speakers of Middle Dutch had the right to defend their cause in their own language and that the lawyers in Paris had to take into account juridical files that had been noted earli-

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met vele schoon loven ende oracien. Paris: Thielman Kerver for Gillijs Remacle, 1505; 9. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen*. Paris: Thielman Kerver, 1509; 10. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen met vele schoone loven ende oracien*. Paris: Thielman Kerver, 1512; 11. *Dat leven ende die passie van der heyliger maget sinte Kundra*. Rouen: s.n., 1515; 12. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen met vele schoone loven ende oracien*. Paris: Thielman Kerver, 1516 (=1517 n.s.); 12. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen met vele schoone loven ende oracien*. Paris: François Regnault, [1518]; 13. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen*. Paris: Thielman Kerver, 1522; 14. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen ende vanden heylighen cruce*. Paris: Yolande Bonhomme, 1533. Later prints in Dutch made in Lyon were all part of Protestant evangelization campaigns.

35 'Fijn geprent te Pariis. Int iaer ons heeren M.cccc.xcvij. Voir Willem Houtmert wonende Tantwerpen int Voghelhuys buyten die Lamer poerte: ende daer salmense vinde te coepe'. The calendar in the Book of Hours in Middle Dutch printed in 1500 by Wolfgang Hopyl suggests that it was also intended for the southern Low Countries; see Van Delft 2010.

36 Book of Hours in Middle Dutch. Paris: Thielman Kerver, 12 Feb. 1500. Colophon: 'Dese onser lieuer vrouwen ghetijden met zeere vele schooner louen ende oracien oft bedinghen ende metten leuene ons heeren vuter biblen ghenomen ende in figuren ghesneden zijn gheprent te Parijs bij Thielman Keruer duytsche ende drucker *heere wonende in deselue stad van Parijs* ende heeft se ghedruct met sijnen coste ten orbore van allen goeden kerstenen menschen die gheen latijn en verstaen ende voldean den .xij. dach in Sporkelle int iaer ons heeren M CCCCC. Gode zijts danck ende lof'. (My emphasis).

37 '[...] ende heeft se gedruct voir sijne zwer Gillijs remacle te or bare van alle goeden kerstenen menschen die gheen latijn en verstae. de welcke men vindt te cope te Paris op Sint Michiels brugge inden hooren'. Lambeth Palace Library 1843, 410-411.

38 'Ende sijn volmaect te Parijs by die weuwe van den voerleden druckerheere Thielman Keruer in Sint Iacobs Strate in den eenhoren ende daer vindt men se te cope'. *Die ghetijden van onser liever vrouwen ende vanden helylighen cruce*. Paris: Yolande Bonhomme, 1533.

39 Lévy 1950, 51-60, 74-87. For groups of foreign students in twelfth-century Paris, see Weeda 2010.

er in Middle Dutch. Consequently, a considerable juridical apparatus of lawyers and translators with a mastery of Middle Dutch was present in Paris.[40]

Even though French was a cosmopolitan vernacular in the late Middle Ages and the *lingua franca* for international communication, sometimes native speakers of French did make an effort to learn Middle Dutch.[41] Instruction books for Middle Dutch-French communication were printed in Antwerp from the late fifteenth century onwards.[42] Whilst these foreign language handbooks seem to have targeted primarily Middle Dutch-speaking audiences, they also found French-speaking readers, as is shown by the 1569 auction of books confiscated from the Protestant nobleman Charles de Houchin, from the region near Béthune.[43] Knowing foreign languages was important for merchants and cases have been recorded of French-speaking merchants sending their sons to live with Middle Dutch-speaking relatives or business relations in order to learn the language.[44] International trade and artisanal networks facilitated intensive contacts with Middle Dutch-speaking merchants during the later Middle Ages. Many towns in France hosted communities of merchants and artisans from the Low Countries, and through these channels Middle Dutch exerted a considerable influence upon French, Picard and Walloon.[45]

The sources for reading cultures in late medieval northern France presented here suggest strongly that this region was characterized by a long-lasting linguistic diversity and that, although French was the most important language, Middle Dutch was written, printed, read and heard in many of its towns. The historical sources presented here also contradict the commonly accepted idea of French being a language in a superior position with regard to other languages, most notably the German and Middle Dutch languages.[46] They rather point towards an open attitude from the side of the Francophones in northern France and their pragmatic attitude towards foreign languages and cross-linguistic communication, at least during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

In a similar vein, medieval French literature is often presented as a model that was eagerly copied, while Middle Dutch literature is often conceptualized as being mainly translated from French examples.[47] However, historical sources from the long fifteenth century point towards a particular receptiveness in northern France for French translations of religious texts that were written for specific contexts in the Low Countries and the Rhineland.[48] As a consequence of this, the textual basis of the reading cultures of lay people in Middle Dutch and in French was very similar, in spite of linguistic differences. As I will argue below, for this particular case we should not

40 Lusignan 2004, 198-200. See also Van Caenegem 1966-1977; Dauchy 1998; Dauchy 2002.
41 Armstrong 1965, 391.
42 Gessler 1931.
43 Lottin 2012, 311, 325. The book was bought at the auction in 1569 by a certain Jehan Zembourg, thus testifying to the continuing usefulness of the *Vocabulaire* for French readers.
44 Lévy 1950, 92-93.
45 Valkhoff 1941, 8-12, 20-31, 50-62; Lévy 1950, 57-59, 82-84.
46 Rey, Duval & Siouffi 2011, 334.
47 Rey, Duval & Siouffi 2011, 334.
48 Hasenohr 1988; Mertens 1994; Mertens 1993.

think in terms of different languages expressing different cultures. To the contrary, it was a shared religious reading culture that transgressed linguistic and political borders.

Shared reading cultures across linguistic differences

The most famous religious 'bestseller' of the late Middle Ages was beyond any doubt *De imitatione Christi*, generally ascribed to Thomas à Kempis and probably written in the early 1420s in Latin, but immediately after its composition translated into Middle Dutch and German, because one of the main aims of the text was to also engage lay people into love of virtue and to orient them towards inward contemplation through religious reading.[49] *De imitatione Christi* proceeded from the movement of the *Devotio Moderna* that originated in the valley of the river IJssel and in present-day western Germany. Many of their communities started as groups of lay converts who chose for a communal life of voluntary poverty in a urban house without officially entering a monastic community, also known as the Brothers and Sisters of the Common life. The Modern Devout were highly active in copying religious books and in preaching in the vernacular (*collationes*) for their own communities, but also for other lay people.[50]

Few manuscripts of *De imitatione Christi* translated into French survive,[51] but it was reprinted very frequently, sometimes with the title *Eternelle consolation* or *Internelle consolation*: at least 39 reprints before 1550 are known.[52] The reading culture in French of lay people, as reflected by wills and post-mortem inventories, indicates that people from the middle classes, too, owned this text. This shows that French-speaking lay audiences did respond to the religious message of *De imitatione Christi* and its call for humility and self-examination in a similar way to lay people in the north. For instance, the 1519 post-mortem inventory of the estate of Jacqueline Martin, widow of Jean Forestier *l'aîné* and living in Amiens, records among her collection of 21 books a copy of *l'Imitation de Nostre Seigneur*.[53] Jacqueline was quite well-to-do, because she and her late husband were fur merchants, but they also had a workshop in their house, which would rank them among the richer artisans rather than the urban élites. Jean Turquam, a goldsmith in Paris, also owned a book with the *Imitacion Christi*, according to the 1519 inventory of his library.[54] *De imitatione Christi* in French must have been in high demand, as is testified by the 1522 post-mortem inventory of the stock of the Paris bookseller Jehan Janot, which shows that he had no less than 300 copies in stock.[55]

Another northern text that was widely read in French translation is Ludolph of Sax-

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49 Von Habsburg 2011, for the relevance to lay readers see 43-48, for translations into Middle Dutch and German see 60.

50 Van Engen 28-83, 266-288. In French publications the *Devotia Moderna* is not at all associated with lay religiosity, but it is considered synonymous with the institutional reform of the Collège de Montaigu by Jean Standonck and his activities in order to propagate a strict monastic observance in France; cf. Renaudet 1958.

51 Five manuscripts are presently known. Source: http://jonas.irht.cnrs.nl.

52 Source: http://ustc.ac.uk. See also Delaveau & Sordet 2011; Delaveau & Sordet 2012; Von Habsburg 2011, 79-105.

53 Amiens, Archives communales, FF 162/23.

54 Paris, Archives nationales, Minutier central, XIX/68.

55 Paris, Archives nationales, Minutier central, CXXII/4. I have used the modern and unpublished transcription in the library of the IRHT in Paris. An abridged edition can be found in: Runnalls 2000.

ony's (1300?-1378) *Vita Christi*. The Latin text was translated several times into French, of which the Franciscan friar Guillaume Le Menand's translation, dedicated to king Charles VIII (1470-1498), was the most widespread: only five manuscripts survive, but this translation was frequently reprinted throughout the sixteenth century.[56] In 1522 the Paris printer Janot had an impressive amount of 750 copies in stock.[57] Thus it is not surprising that this title appears frequently in wills and post-mortem inventories of lay people, showing that it found a large audience of readers in French-speaking areas. The presence of *ii grant liures appellez Vita Christi historiee en maulle couverts de cuyr rouge* (two large books entitled *Vita Christi*, illustrated and printed bound in red leather) in the workshop of the Amiens wool merchant Pierre de Coyn, as stated in the 1517 inventory, indicate that this book was probably read to his employees before, after, or during their manual work.[58]

Another pan-European religious 'bestseller' is Henry of Suso's *Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit* (1330-31) and its slightly later Latin translation *Horologium sapientiae* (1331-34).[59] At least 55 manuscripts of the French translation, bearing the title *Horloge de sapience*, have presently been identified, and four printed editions between 1493 and 1533 are known.[60] Fragments of the *Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit* also circulated in French with the title *Tresor de sapience*, of which 25 manuscripts survive.[61] Finally, the first part of Suso's text, also known as the *100 Betrachtungen* and copied in astonishingly high numbers in the Low Countries, was printed at least once in Paris, in 1507, with the title *L'instruction et contemplacion de la vie contemplative*.[62]

French translations of Suso's work were also circulating among lay audiences. In his *Montaigne de contemplacion* Jean Gerson recommended it highly to his sisters (1400), due to it containing spiritual exercises on the marriage of the soul with Godly Wisdom that do not entail the danger of reminding one of the carnal pleasures of human marriage.[63] Archival evidence confirms that Suso's texts did actually reach audiences of lay readers. In his 1418 will, Pierre de Hauteville, lord of Ars-en-Beauvaisis and living in Tournai, bequeathed a miscellany book with the *Orloge de sapience* among its texts to his fellow townsman Pierre Soris, prosecutor at the court for civil law in the same town.[64] Pierre de Hauteville was close to royal power: he was cup-bearer to King

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56   Sources: http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr and http://ustc.ac.uk.

57   'Item sept cens cinquante Vita Cristi' (source: see n. 55).

58   Amiens, Archives communales, FF 160/14. Corbellini & Hoogvliet 2013.

59   The European reception of this work is currently being investigated by the members of the ERC Starting Grant team OPVS, directed by Géraldine Veysseyre, see www.opvs.fr. For a useful introduction to Suso's work and a bibliography, see Van Aelst, Rozenski & Gay-Canton.

60   Sources: http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr and http://ustc.ac.uk. See also Sulpice & Veysseyre, forthcoming.

61   Hasenohr 1988, 281. It is difficult to distinguish this text from the printed editions of Jacques Legrand's *Livre de bonnes meurs*, which was printed under the same title and attributed to Jean Gerson.

62   *L'instruction et contemplacion de la vie contemplative*. Paris: Philippe Pigouchet and Simon Vostre, 1507. One copy: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. C 3293, 1bis and 5bis. *Sig.* a ii recto: 'Cy sensuit la translation sententiale et pres que mot a mot des Cent articles desquelz parle lorloge de sapience par vng venerable docteur inspirez diuinement'. For the translations into Middle Dutch, see Van Aelst 2011.

63   Glorieux 1966, 47.

64   Derolez 2001, nr. 165: 'Item je donne a Pierre Soris, procureur en court laye, demorant en Tournay en la rue de Coulongne, 1 grant livre de papier bien espes, loyé en aisselles, qui contient pluseurs volumes, [...] l'orloge de sapience'.

Charles VI of France and he played an important role as the prince in the literary society the *Cour amoureuse,* founded by the same French king. Membership to the *Cour amoureuse* was not restricted to members from the high aristocracy; it was also open to lawyers and merchants. One of its 600 members was Pierre Soris, and this is probably the reason why the book with the *Orloge de sapience* moved through the links of this social network from the high nobility to a lay reader in an urban context.[65]

Suso's work was also present in Amiens, showing that it played part in the reading culture of lay people there as well: Nicolas Caignet, mayor of Amiens, had a copy of the *Orloge de sapience* in his study (*escriptoir*) according to the 1519 inventory of his estate.[66] Finally, an inventory from 1514 shows that Jean Rimache, a woollen cloth merchant living in Amiens, had stored a copy of the *Trésor de sapience* in the hallway leading to the workshop in his home – another important indication that religious books were also read by lay people in combination with manual work.[67]

Gerard van Vliederhoven's *Cordiale quatuor novissimorum* (1380-1395) is now almost forgotten, but in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries it counted among the most widely read texts that were originally written in the north-east of the Low Countries. As the other texts discussed here, the *Cordiale* was closely associated with the *Devotio Moderna*, although its author did not actually belong to the Congregation of Windesheim, but was a priest and member of the Order of Teutonic Knights in Utrecht. This strongly Bible-based text belongs to the late medieval *Ars moriendi* tradition and deals with the Four Last Things of human life: Death, Last Judgement, Hell and Heaven.[68] Very soon after its composition the text was translated into the Middle Dutch and Middle Low German vernaculars. These translations circulated mainly outside monastic contexts.[69]

The French translation of Gerard van Vliederhoven's work was made by Jean Miélot around 1455.[70] Although the manuscript tradition has not yet been studied systematically, it is certain that several luxury manuscripts were owned by the Dukes of Burgundy and their circle.[71] The French translation was printed as early as 1476 by William Caxton in Bruges, first reprinted in Audenarde, and then three times in Paris up to 1502.[72] Archival sources show that this work actually did find lay readers in France. For instance, in 1484 Nicolle de le Faille, priest in Tournai, bequeathed a copy of the French *cordial, traitant des quatre novissimes* to the daughter of *maistre* Jehan Donnet.[73]

A last text from the Low Countries that was translated into French to be discussed

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65 For the membership of Pierre Soris, see: Bozzolo & Loyau 1992, 276.

66 Amiens, Archives communales, FF 163/31.

67 Amiens, Archives communales, FF 158/1.

68 Byrn 1979, 55-65.

69 Dusch 1975.

70 Delsaux 2010, 164. According to Byrn 1979 the text was translated twice into French, but he does not provide sources.

71 Five manuscripts are presently known, source: http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr. For a discussion of the illuminations, see: Eichberger 1992, 134-137.

72 Source: http://ustc.ac.uk. *Les quatre dernieres choses.* Bruges: William Caxton, 1476, Audenarde: [Arend de Keysere, 1480-81], Paris: Laurent Petit, 1490; [Paris: Antoine Caillaut, about 1490], Paris: Jean Hérouf, 1501 (= 1502).

73 Derolez 2001, nr. 202.

here,[74] although much later than its original composition and disseminated on a rather small scale, is Hendrik Herp's *Spieghel der volcomenheit,* dating from the years 1455-1460. This highly complex text, which initiates the reader into several progressive stages of mystical experience, has often been linked to the *Devotio Moderna.* However, it should instead be seen as a part of the Franciscan observant movement and its concern for the religious education of the laity, as well as for the reforming of monastic spirituality through the observation of stricter rules.[75] The first part of the text, which is concerned with spirituality in the *vita activa,* bears the title *Premiere partie du directoire des contemplatifz* in translation and was printed twice in Paris, in 1549 and 1550.[76] These printed editions were targeting lay readers rather than monastic audiences, as is clear from the inclusion of a second text in the printed editions with the title *Mirouer de la court*; while attributed here to Jean Gerson, in reality it is a catechetical text intended for laypeople with the title *Mirouer de la vie de l'homme et de la femme* in the only surviving manuscript.[77] The second part of Herp's work that discusses more advanced forms of contemplation was printed only once in Paris, in 1552. This work was printed with explicit permission from the Faculty of Theology. In the context of the religious repression of Protestants in this period, this permission indicates that Herp's work was considered an unsuspected and orthodox Roman Catholic text.[78]

The five examples discussed here show that religious texts originally composed for a specific context in north-western Europe – such as communities of lay converts, the *Devotio Moderna* – were also successful in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century France, to such a point that the religious literature from the north became a model for French readers. It also shows the particular receptiveness by lay and religious readers in northern France for texts originating from the Low Countries and western Germany. This shared religious culture also manifested itself also in devotional practices, most notably the devotion to the *Zeven Weeën* (Seven Sorrows of Our Lady). Confraternities of the *Zeven Weeën* were founded in the southern Low Countries from the early 1490s onward, initially encouraged by Philip the Fair, later by emperors Maximilian and Charles V. The devotion to the Seven Sorrows had a political objective as well: establishing peace and stability in the Low Countries. In addition to texts, this devotion was visually expressed in panel paintings with a specific iconography and in spectacular theatre plays in the towns of Flanders.[79] Although the devotion to the

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74 More texts could have been discussed here, such as Johannes van Gruitrode, *Speculum aureum animae peccatris* (before 1471), Middle Dutch translation: *Spiegel der bekeeringen der zondaren*, French translation: *Miroir d'or de l'âme pécheresse*. The research for the 'Cities of Readers' project will study more texts that were read in Middle Dutch and French.

75 Dlabačová 2014.

76 Paris: Jean Réal for Poncet Le Preux, 1549 and 1550.

77 Paris, BnF, MS fr. 17100. For this text see: Hasenohr 2002, 600.

78 Henri Herp, *La seconde partie du livre appelle le directoyr dore des contemplatifz*. Paris: for Poncet Le Preux, 1552: 'vue par la faculte de theologie'. The French translation of Herp's text was reprinted twice later in the sixteenth century: in Arras in 1596 and in Paris in 1599. Source: http://ustc.ac.uk.

79 Van Bruaene 2008, 66-71. I owe these observations to Anne-Laure van Bruaene. Van Bruaene's interpretation of the Seven Sorrows as predominantly inspired by Burgundian politics has been challenged recently by Polkowski 2012, 83-125. For the shared culture of the towns of northern France and the southern Low Countries, see also Lusignan 2012, 235-273.

Seven Sorrows seems to have been closely connected to the political situation in Bur-
gundy and the German Empire, the inventories of the estates of people living in Am-
iens mention several paintings with this particular iconography, showing once again
that devotional practices and supporting reading cultures were shared across political
and linguistic borders.[80]

Conclusion

The presence of Middle Dutch reading cultures in the northern French-speaking ar-
eas during the late Middle Ages, together with the receptiveness of the lay inhabitants
for texts and practices originating in the Low Countries and in western Germany,
shows that future research cannot study this area any longer as solely French speak-
ing and as being characterized by an exclusively French cultural identity: the presence
of spoken and written Middle Dutch, French-Middle Dutch bilinguality, combined
with highly frequent cultural exchanges and intensive connectivity with northern
Europe, was at the heart of its identity. Future research will have to consider northern
France during the late Middle Ages as a linguistic contact zone, while taking into ac-
count the multilingual skills of many of its inhabitants and a generalized receptiveness
to texts and practices from the northern European regions.

The study of historical reading cultures is an important method for revealing pat-
terns of linguistic diversity and cross-linguistic processes of exchange of religious
knowledge. The study of texts translated into French and their lay owners shows that
texts that were composed in a specific context in the Low Countries and western
Germany – marked by the presence of communities of lay converts, the *Devotio Mod-
erna*, and observant movements that were actively instructing lay people – were also
relevant for lay readers in French-speaking areas. This suggest that the French speak-
ing world was closely connected to other European regions and that it has probably
known movements of lay religiosity fed by religious reading cultures in the vernac-
ular parallel to those in northern Europe, but not necessarily depending on them.[81]
This shows that future research needs to proceed beyond the ideology of stable and
monolingual national identities and has to have an open eye for European patterns of
shared religious textualities.

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80 Amiens, Archives communales, FF 155/2, Jean le Forestier, merchant (1509): 'Ung tableau de toile tinglé sus bos,
où est painct les Sept dolleurs', FF 158/1, Jean Rimache, merchant (1514): 'Ung ymage des Sept dolleurs Nostre
Dame, mise sus bos', FF 163/1, Jean Trouvain, prêtre (1519): 'une autre tableau de toile, ou est emprainct Nostre
Dame des sept douleurs', FF 169/11, Madeleine Randon, wife of a tanner (1522): 'ung petit tableau de bois, où est
empraint Nostre Dame des VI doulleurs', and possibly also: FF 163/27 Antoine Boursse, glove maker (1519): 'Ung
tableau de bois de quesne ou est empraint nostre dame des VII vertus'. The archives in Amiens have not yet been
searched systematically for paintings with this iconography.
81 Roest 2013.

Samenvatting

In de ideologie van Franse Republiek wordt het gebruik van alleen de Franse taal gezien als een noodzakelijke conditie voor het handhaven van de nationale identiteit en voor het waarborgen van gelijke rechten van alle burgers. Door de conceptualise-ring van minderheidstalen als cultureel irrelevant of zelfs potentieel bedreigend, zijn regionale varianten van het Frans en het gebruik van andere talen dan het Frans wei-nig of helemaal niet bestudeerd in het historisch onderzoek. In dit artikel wordt stu-die van historische leesculturen, met name het lezen van religieuze teksten in de late Middeleeuwen, gebruikt als methode om inzicht te krijgen in het lezen van teksten in het Middelnederlands in gebieden die traditioneel als louter Franstalig beschouwd worden. Er is historisch bronmateriaal bewaard gebleven dat laat zien dat in Door-nik, Sint-Omaars, Dowaai, Metz en Parijs religieuze teksten in het Nederlands wer-den gelezen tijdens de lange vijftiende eeuw. Daarnaast zijn er een opmerkelijk aantal religieuze teksten die of in de volkstaal, of in het Latijn geschreven zijn voor een spe-cifieke religieuze context in de Nederlanden of het Rijnland, vertaald naar het Frans. Dit geeft aan dat de religieuze leesculturen in de vijftiende en vroege zestiende eeuw werden gedeeld door verschillende taalgebieden en dat religieuze leesculturen uit de Nederlanden een voorbeeld werden in overwegend Franstalige gebieden, ondanks linguïstische verschillen.

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