

Een bouc in walsche, a Book Written in French

*Francophone Literature in the Low Countries (1200-1600)*¹

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Abstract

In late medieval and early modern times, books, as well as the people who produced and read (or listened to) them, moved between regions, social circles, and languages with relative ease. Yet, in the multilingual Low Countries, francophone literature was both internationally mobile and firmly rooted in local soil. The five contributions collected in this volume demonstrate that while in general issues of 'otherness' were resolved without difficulty, at other times (linguistic) differences were perceived as a heartfelt reality.

Keywords: Low Countries; French; Dutch; Latin; multilingualism; manuscripts; printing; translation; medieval; early modern period

When in 1580 the Antwerp nobleman Jan vander Noot published a poem praising his native province (Ill. 1), he did so *in de tvvee talen die in Brabant*

1 We would like to take the opportunity to express our gratitude to all five contributors to this thematic issue for sharing their research with us, as well as for the pleasant collaboration. We would also like to thank Elisabeth de Bruijn (Universiteit Antwerpen), Frank Brandsma and David Murray (both Universiteit Utrecht) for their comments on this introduction. The research by Dirk Schoenaers incorporated in this introduction received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme as part of his MSC-Individual Fellowship *ReFraMed Histories* under grant agreement ID: 839498.

natuerlick ghesproken vvorden (the two natural languages of Brabant): Dutch and French.² As the fluid language border ran straight through the duchy, the fundamental bilingualism that characterized the Low Countries as a whole was strongly felt in this region.³ The same held true for Flanders, which, together with Brabant, constituted the cultural heartland of the Low Countries throughout the Middle Ages and thereafter. French not only played an important role in the francophone parts of the region, but also in territories where Dutch was the native language. Thus, when a certain Cornielie Brandt followed Vander Noot's example and published a hymn in praise of the province of Holland, he, too, decided to use both languages.⁴

For Vander Noot and Brandt, both Dutch and French were the literary languages of the Low Countries. Nevertheless, for a long time interest for the francophone literature of the region has fallen between the stools of Dutch and French literature departments: whereas historians of Dutch literature mostly focused on texts in Dutch, scholars working on French rarely looked beyond the borders of the present-day *Hexagone*. In recent years, however, a clear shift in interest has taken place. The AHRC-funded project *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France* (2011-2015) has played a driving role in this.⁵ More recently the teams of the UK-based *Values of French* (2015-2020) and the NWO-funded *Multilingual Dynamics of the Literary Culture of Medieval Flanders (ca. 1200-1500)* (2018-2022) have taken over the baton. We gladly present research by members of these two projects (Hannah Morcos and Lisa Demets respectively) in this thematic issue. The francophone production of the medieval and early modern Low Countries has now established itself firmly on the academic research agenda, but there is still a wide terrain that demands further examination, and a multilingual history of Low Countries literature remains to be written.

In 2015, *Queeste* renewed the journal's 'commitment to the varied and multilingual culture of the Low Countries' with a thematic issue on literature and multilingualism in the Low Countries which offered a platform to research that ventured to look beyond national and linguistic boundaries.⁶ It will not come as a surprise that French played a considerable role in all contributions.⁷ In the

2 'in the two languages that are naturally spoken in Brabant'. Vander Noot 1580, sig. *3v.

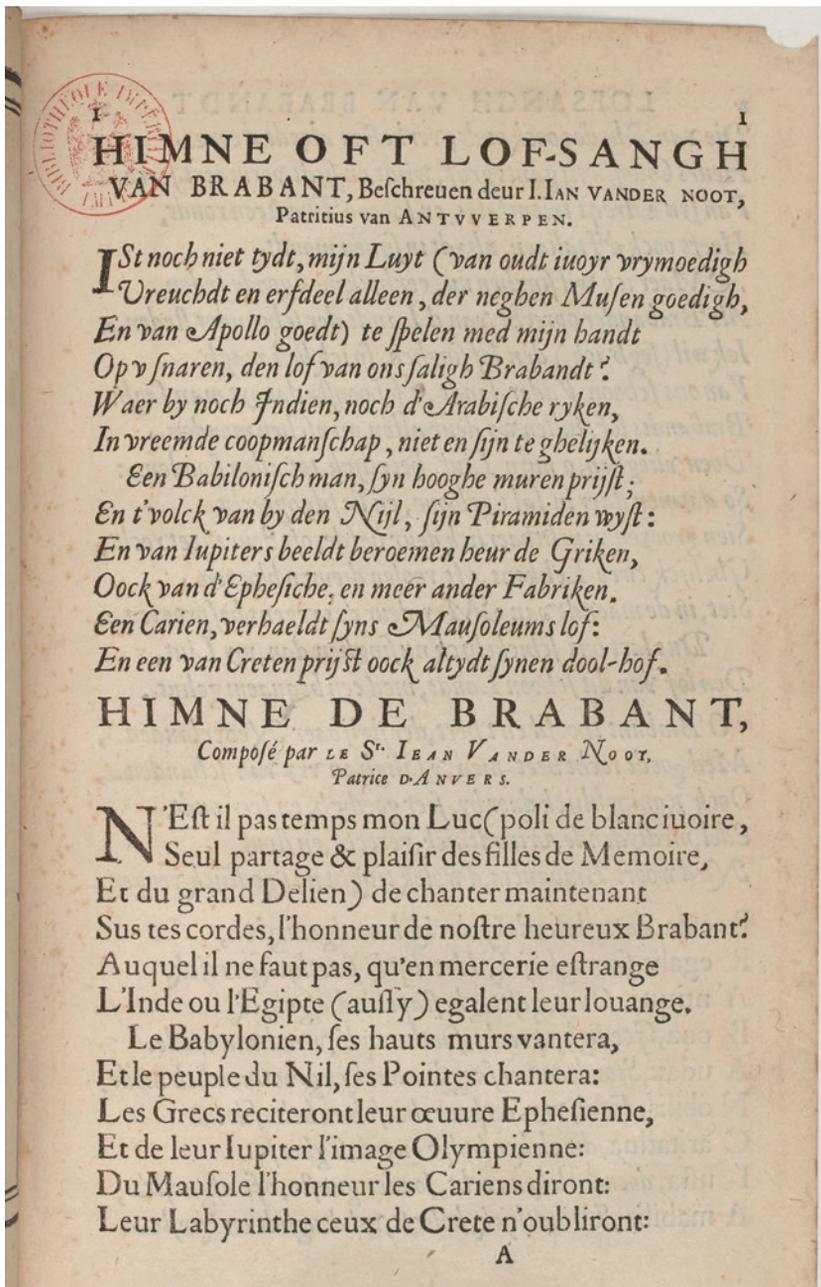
3 Armstrong 1965, 390-391; Lusignan 2004, 225.

4 Brandt 1595; Smith 2015.

5 See: Morato & Schoenaers 2018. For earlier research on multilingualism in the Low Countries, see also: Kleinhenz & Busby 2010.

6 Mareel & Schoenaers 2015, 5.

7 Ine Kiekens wrote a contribution on the manuscript distribution of Hugh of Saint Victor's *Soliloquium de arrha animae* in the Low Countries. Margriet Hoogvliet took a reverse



Ill. 1: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, RES-YI-3, Jan vander Noot, *Lofsang van Braband, beschreven deur I. Jan Van der Noot / Hymne de Braband, composé par le sr J. Van der Noot*, Antwerp : G. Van den Rade, 1580, 1. Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

years since then, *Queeste* has continued to publish scholarly articles on the production and circulation of literature in Dutch, French, and Latin, on translation, and on multilingual reading cultures in the Low Countries.⁸ Nevertheless, these topics are still often approached from a distinctly Dutch-language perspective. This poses the risk of downplaying the actual impact of the literature in French (and Latin) that was written, copied, and disseminated in the Low Countries. Therefore, the current issue is entirely devoted to scholarship on francophone literature in the Late Middle Ages and – in the final contribution – also the early modern period. Given the focus of the contributions by Demets, Ana Pairet and Renaud Adam, this volume is also very much about the handwritten and printed books through which this literature was transmitted. The editors hope that by considering literary production in the Low Countries from a francophone perspective, this volume may serve to further widen the panorama of the region's multilingual literary contexts in issues to come.

The omnipresence of French in the Low Countries

We consciously use the term francophone (with lowercase 'f') to refer to the use of French in the pre-colonial context of the Low Countries.⁹ Throughout the Middle Ages, French was a native language in the region's southern areas (Artois, Cambrai, Hainaut, Liege, Limburg, Luxemburg, and Namur).¹⁰ In the Dutch-speaking territories in the North, and especially in bilingual Brabant and Flanders, French played a key role as well, often alongside or in competition with Latin, as is also evidenced in the contributions by Morcos and Demets. In these regions, French was used on an interregional level, for diplomacy and commerce, as well as on a local level, in domains such as administration and the law. Nonetheless, language choices in these

perspective, and highlighted the presence of religious reading practices in Dutch in late-medieval France. Adrian Armstrong zoomed in on Colijn Caillieu's Dutch adaptation of Amé de Montgesoie's *Pas de la Mort*. Violet Soen, Alexander Soetaert, and Johan Verberckmoes shed new light on multilingual printing, especially of catholic works, in sixteenth-century Cambrai. Alisa van de Haar discussed the phenomenon of the multilingual emblem book and its potential uses.

⁸ See, for instance, Anne Reynders on a Dutch translation of the *Roman de la Rose* (*Queeste* 2015-2), Adrian Armstrong on Antwerp editions of Jean Molinet's poetry (*Queeste* 2016-2), Rebecca Dixon on the *Fille du comte de Pontieu* (2016-2), and Elisabeth de Bruijn on a Dutch printed edition of *Olivier de Castille* (*Queeste* 2018-2).

⁹ For a discussion of the use of the term francophone in pre-colonial contexts, see: Putter & Busby 2010, 11-12.

¹⁰ Van Durme 2002.

fields were mostly determined by social and political circumstances and therefore subject to change. Broadly speaking, French was also the language of aristocracy, but again, attitudes towards French differed between regions and changed over time.¹¹ A good case in point is the county of Holland, where dynastic changes repeatedly affected the linguistic balance between the vernaculars used at the court. After the death of John I in 1299, the rule of the county passed to the francophone Avesnes, who in 1354 were followed by the Bavarian Wittelsbachs. In the fifteenth century, the Burgundian dukes rarely visited their northernmost territories and stimulated the use of French in all communications with supra-regional administration. Moreover, as Catherine Emerson observes in her reading of regional traits in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, the dukes' literary preferences further strengthened the cultural prestige of French among aristocrats throughout the Low Countries.

Because of the omnipresence of French, many native speakers of Dutch, especially those in urban environments, would have gained some passive knowledge of the language. The necessity for a more active command of French was also felt, however, as it was often a prerequisite for climbing the social ladder or engaging in any form of interregional communication (within or outside the Low Countries). The need for language education in mercantile milieus is reflected in international apprenticeships and the rise of the so-called French school in the fifteenth century.¹² Already around the middle of the fourteenth century bilingual conversation manuals such as the *Livre des mestiers* or *Bouc vanden ambachten* were available to those wishing to learn some basic French phrases.¹³ As is noted by Renaud Adam, from the middle of the sixteenth century, Antwerp printers published bilingual editions of romances with French and Dutch versions of the same text printed in opposite columns (Ill. 2). These bilingual books provided learners of French of Dutch with an enjoyable way to further train their language skills.

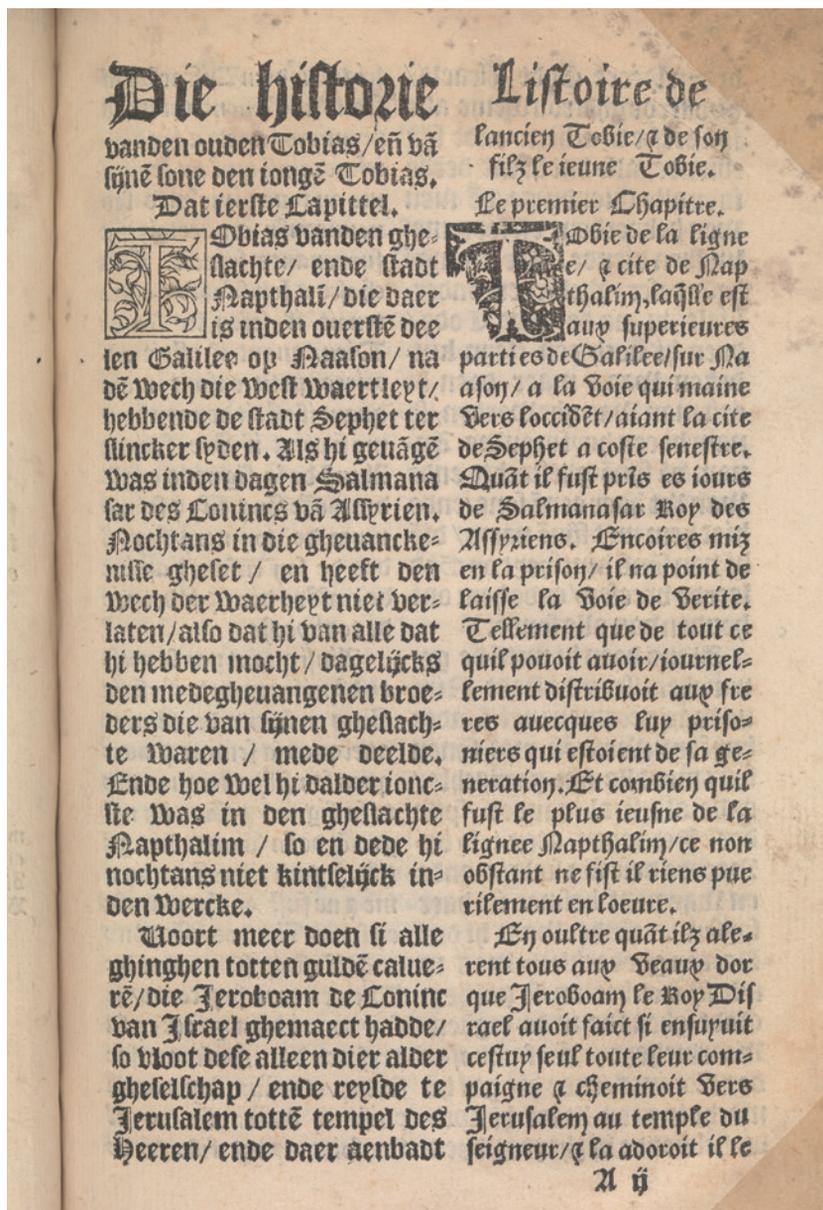
Native speakers of French?

The complex multilingual situation that characterized the Low Countries was reflected in its francophone literature. French was a first language to some authors, a second language to others. Native speakers demonstrated their literary skill at regional courts throughout the Low Countries. As is

11 Sleiderink 2010; Van de Haar 2019, 38-92; Gilbert, Gaunt & Burgwinkle 2020, 59-60.

12 Dodde & Esseboom 2000; Schoenaers 2017, 30-31; Van de Haar 2019, 143-149.

13 Gessler 1931; Sumillera 2014, 63; Demets & Huguen 2020, 239-242.



Ill. 2: The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 1702 C 1 [2], ajr. *Die historie vanden ouden Tobias/L'histoire de l'ancien Tobie*, Antwerp: Jan van Loe, 1547. Bilingual edition, the Dutch text is printed in a Fraktur letter, the French text in bastarda.

also signalled by Demets, Chrétien de Troyes, who was previously active at the court of Champagne, famously dedicated his *Perceval* to Philip of Alsace

(d. 1191), count of Flanders. After Philip's death, his successors, who up until 1280 also ruled the francophone county of Hainaut, remained invested in the completion of Chrétien's unachieved grail romance and attracted francophone authors from adjacent regions.¹⁴ The courts of Brabant, as well as Hainaut, Holland and Zeeland, equally appealed to French-speaking poets, indigenous or otherwise. Jacques de Longuyon from Lorraine dedicated his *Voeux du paon* to Thibaut de Bar (d. 1312), prince-bishop of Liège. In the following centuries this prince-bishopric in the east of the Low Countries would further develop into a flourishing centre of francophone historiography.

In the Burgundian Netherlands francophone authors moved between regions with ease. *Escrivain* David Aubert lauded Philip the Good (1396-1467) for recruiting translators, scholars, rhetoricians, historiographers, and scribes from all of his territories. Jean Wauquelin, *translateur de livres*, repeatedly travelled from his workstation in Mons to Bruges and Lille in order to consult with the duke. *Maître d'hôtel* and prolific author Olivier de La Marche originated from Burgundy, but spent most of his life in the Low Countries in service of the Burgundian dukes. Similarly, Jean Molinet, born near Boulogne-sur-Mer, and his nephew, Jean Lemaire de Belges, were enlisted as *indiciaires* or 'official' court historiographers. The prominent offices that some of these authors held at the Burgundian court, as well as the fact that some of them were later classified as *Grands Rhétoriciens*, have fostered the study of these individual writers although much more work remains to be done.¹⁵ This holds even more true for their lesser known colleagues.

It is useful to remember in this context that, even within the francophone areas of the Low Countries, linguistic unity did not exist, as each area had its own particular dialect.¹⁶ At the end of the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon was surprised to note that while the speakers of Picard (*Picardi*) were close neighbours of the 'actual' French (*veris Gallicis*), their habits and languages were astoundingly different.¹⁷ Some francophone authors from Flanders, Brabant, Hainaut, and Liège drew attention to the differences between their dialects and the French that was spoken at the French court, the so-called *langue du roi*.¹⁸ At the close of the fourteenth century, the Liège chronicler Jean d'Outremeuse claimed to write *en romans liegeois*.¹⁹ In the crusader epic

14 Stanger 1957; Collet 2000; Sleiderink 2010.

15 Zumthor 1978.

16 Clerico 1999.

17 Lusignan 2012, 103.

18 Rickard 1968, 21; Francard 1993, 318-319; Lusignan 2004.

19 Jean d'Outremeuse, *Ly myreur des histours* (ed. Borgnet 1867, vol. V), 571.

Baudoin de Sebourc (14th c.), the titular hero, a native to Hainaut, immediately recognized the Babylonian queen's Parisian accent, notwithstanding that she originated from Ponthieu near Flanders.

“Dame, dont estes-vous, et de confait pais,
 Qui si très bel parlès le langue de Paris?
 En France fustes née, je croi, par Jhésu-Cris.”
 Et la roïne a dit : “tu as dit voir, amis ;
 Droitement en Pontieu là fu mes corps nouris [...]”²⁰

(“My lady, where are you from and from which country, who speaks the language of Paris so beautifully? By Christ, I believe you were born in France.” And the queen answered: “You are right, my friend; I was raised in Ponthieu [...]”)

Circa 1510, the official Burgundian court historiographer Jean Lemaire de Belges signaled that, as compared to the French of Paris, the dialects of the Low Countries sounded antiquated and dull.

Et de ladite ancienne langue Vualonne, ou Rommande, nous usons en nostre Gaule Belgique, cestadire en Haynau, Cambresis, Artois, Namur, Liege, Lorraine, Ardenne et le Rommanbrabant, et est beaucoup differente du François, lequel est plus moderne, et plus gaillard [...]”²¹

(And we use the aforementioned Walloon or Rommande language in our Gallic Belgium, that is to say in Hainaut, Cambrai, Artois, Namur, Liège, Lorraine, Ardennes, and French-speaking Brabant. It is very different from French, which is more modern, and more exuberant [...].)

Adam notes that about half a century later, Antwerp printers like Christopher Plantin and Jan van Waesberghe were similarly preoccupied with the ‘modernity’ of their publications, both as regards ‘nouveau langage’ and outward appearance. While Lemaire de Belges’ statement is interesting for underscoring the difference between the French dialects spoken in the Low Countries and those spoken in France, it also reveals a certain sense of inferiority with regard to the French norm.

²⁰ Lusignan 2012, 148; *Baudoin de Sebourc*, chant XIV, vs. 752-756 (ed. Boca 1841, vol. 2, 22).

²¹ Lemaire de Belges 1969, 104-105.

The same sentiment can be found in a late sixteenth-century poem written by Philippe Bosquier, a Franciscan monk from Hainaut:

Et le moins que tu peus, voisine le françois
Craignant que, pour n'auoir leur doulxsonnante vois,
Tu ne sois plus raillé qu'vne vieille guiterre [...].²²

(Visit France as little as you can, fearing that, because you do not have their sweet-sounding voice, you would be mocked more than an old guitar [...].)

The self-mockery in these lines must be understood in the context of an underlying modesty topos. Nonetheless, it confirms that speakers of both variants felt the difference between the French of France and the dialects of the Low Countries, and that the latter were valued less highly. Another native of the French-speaking Low Countries, Paul du Mont, experienced this first hand.²³ Having been accused of using too many Dutch words in his texts, he felt obliged to defend himself:

[C]omment seroit il possible, que moy, qui suis naturel du pays ou que l'on parle François Belgique, ignorant le langaige Flaman, et qui quasi toute ma vie ay esté nourry es Vniuersitez de Louuain ; Paris et Douay, que mon langage resentist la façon de parler du Flaman ?²⁴

(How would it be possible that I, a native of the country where Belgian French is spoken, who does not speak the Dutch tongue, and who for virtually all his life has been nourished by the universities of Louvain, Paris, and Douai, that in my language the Dutch way of speaking would resonate?)

Accusations like these certainly added to a potential inferiority complex on the part of native speakers of French from the Low Countries.

Understandably, apologies for the allegedly poor quality of their French can be found more frequently in the French writings of native speakers of Dutch. The anonymous author of the *Chronique rimée des troubles de Flandres*, written shortly after the 'Ghent War' of 1379-1385, apologized beforehand for the Flemish traits of his language *que ne vault le quart d'une abengue pour justement rimer en roumans* (which is worth next to nothing if

²² Bosquier 1589, sig. A3r.

²³ On Du Mont, see: Sauvage 2007.

²⁴ Du Mont 1581, sig. ē5r.

you want to write French verses by the book). Nonetheless, he trusted that his audience would understand if he did not fully live up to the standards of proper French (*se de droit roumans y faille*).²⁵

The aforementioned Jan vander Noot, being a member of the aristocracy, albeit of the lower echelons, spoke and wrote French fluently.²⁶ His oeuvre is characterized by multilingualism and autotranslation, especially involving Dutch and French. He did not always take his native tongue as point of departure for his translations, however. When following the style of the Pléiade poets that he admired so much, Vander Noot is known to have practised in French first, only then translating his own work into Dutch.²⁷

The multilingual contexts of French literature

Literary actors in the Low Countries fostered a sustained dialogue between French literature and textual production in Latin and Dutch. Demets shows that while the fragmentary survival of thirteenth-century manuscripts with Dutch texts does not allow for any firm conclusions about the multilingual reception of Dutch literature in this period, there are some indications that in monasteries or at the Flemish court the same people read or listened to texts in Latin and French. A similar overlap involving audiences of French and Dutch literature may only be surmised from subtle allusions to French narratives in Dutch romances and the professional profiles of their alleged authors. Additionally, the following quotation about memory practices taken from the *Nederrijnse moraalboek* (Lower-Rhenian Morality Book), which was copied in Guelders c. 1270-1290,²⁸ may hint towards an audience that listened to edifying histories in French (*walsg*) and Dutch (*duotsg*):

Want als man siit gevarwet en storie van troies of en andere.
man siit di^e dait van den gu^oden luden di^e hi^er bevoren waren. regte also
of si tegenwordig weren. Jnde regte also i^est van den worden. Want als
man hort en bu^ok lesen walsg is of du^otsg. man verstit daenture van
den guden luden di^e gewe^est heben gelik of si tegenwordig weren.²⁹

25 Quoted from the edition by Pirenne 1902, 2. On the *Chronique rimée*, see: Demets & Hugen 2021, 241-245.

26 There has been some discussion, however, on the difference in quality between his Dutch and French poetry. Brachin 1959, 1-2; Waterschoot 1975, 141.

27 Waterschoot, 1975, 141.

28 Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, MS IV 369.

29 *Moralia dogma*, ed. Gysseling 1987, 355.

(When people see a painted image of a story about Troy or a different tale, they see the actions of good people from the past, just as if they were present. And it is the same with words. Indeed, if people listen to stories being read from a book, whether it be in French or Dutch, they understand the experiences of admirable people from the past as if they were present.)

The French model claims that *quant on ot ·i· romans lire, on entent les aeventures ausi com on les veïst en present* (when people listen to a story in French they hear the events as if they saw them before their own eyes),³⁰ Maybe the Dutch author aimed to produce a faithful translation (*romance = walsg*), while simultaneously making the message more relatable to a Dutch-speaking audience by underscoring that Dutch stories were as effective as their French counterparts. But it is no less likely that he recollected real-life recitals, in which the same group of people listened to French and Dutch stories about Troy or other subjects.

Renaud Adam rightly points out that the loss rates of late medieval and early modern books remained high. Even so, later centuries have yielded more substantial evidence for the multilingual reception contexts of French literature in the Low Countries. In this respect, booklists in inventories and wills, as well as ownership marks in extant manuscripts and printed books have proven to be particularly informative. In 1452, Pieter II Adornes (d. 1464) who repeatedly held important offices in Bruges city government, bequeathed his Latin and Flemish books to the Jerusalem Chapel 'so every person could benefit from them'. Adornes explicitly noted that he had acquired these books together with his wife, Elisabeth Braderickx (d. 1452). Their copy of the *Somme le roi*, a book written in French (*een bouc in walsche*), was to be given to Gertrude (*Trudeken*), their daughter, no doubt as a memento of her parents. While it is in itself interesting that the donation to the Jerusalem chapel only referred to books in Latin and Dutch, we should be hesitant to conclude that the prospective patrons of the newly established library had no use for French books. After all, there was an obvious reason for Adornes to bequeath the French penitential to Gertrude, who, like her aunt before her, had entered the prestigious Benedictine abbey of Messines near Ypres.³¹ In the principally Dutch-speaking cities of Flanders and Brabant, French books were found not only among the possessions of aristocrats and merchants, but also of priests, canons, and members of religious orders.

³⁰ *Moralium dogma philosophorum* (ed. John Holmberg 1929), 86-87.

³¹ Derolez et al., *Corpus Catalogorum Belgii* (hereafter: CCB), I, 17-26.

Conversely, French-speaking town dwellers in Saint-Omer and Tournai owned books written in Dutch.³²

Multilingual readership can be further inferred from macaronic texts, bi- or trilingual multiple-text manuscripts, or books with owner's marks or marginal annotations written in one or more different languages. The remarks noted in the margins of a sixteenth-century manuscript with large excerpts from the first version of Jean d'Enghien's *Livre des croniques de Brabant* demonstrate that the scribe who copied the book was a native speaker of Dutch and assumed that other users of the manuscript would understand his Dutch annotations.³³

Demets shows that during the thirteenth century manuscripts with French texts were almost exclusively manufactured in the southern, French-speaking areas of the Low Countries (including Walloon-Flanders). By the second half of the fifteenth century, artisans in Flemish cities, especially Bruges, had taken the lead in the production of luxuriously decorated manuscripts with French literary texts. Their clientele consisted of Burgundian aristocrats, but also included patrons from abroad. Manuscripts with French, Latin, or Dutch texts were copied and illustrated by French-speaking (or bilingual) book professionals, but Dutch-speaking craftsmen also contributed to books written in French.³⁴ The instructions for the artists in the Arsenal *Livre appellé Decameron* (ca. 1445) copied by Guillebert de Mets from Geraardsbergen (Grammont) are in Dutch (Ill. 3).³⁵

With few exceptions, Burgundian book collectors exclusively owned manuscripts written in French. At the death of Philip the Good in 1467, nearly

32 See Hoogvliet 2018, 326-329, who also mentions the Flemish lawyer Philip Wielant (1483) and two examples from Brussels: the priest Michael Lievens (1495) and the merchant Ioannis van Elsenae (1491). Other collections with books in (Latin,) French, and Dutch include those of John VI, lord of Ghistel (1417), Johannes Suweels (Anderlecht, 1489), Arnold Volkaerts (Brussels, 1484), Wouter Lonijns (Anderlecht, 1484) and Thomas de Plaine (Mechelen, 1531). CCB, I, 183-85; IV, 22-27, 67-69, 96-98. Van Hoorebeeck 2014, 448-456; 460-463.

33 Brussels, KBR, MS 21983-21984.

34 The instructions for the artists in the only surviving copy of the Dutch translation of Christine de Pizan's *Cité des dames* (Londen, British Library, MS Add.20698) were written in French. See: Lie, Meuwese, Aussems, & Joldersma 2015, 27. The painters who worked on this volume mainly illustrated manuscripts in Latin and French.

35 Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 5070, illustrated by the Mansel Master and the Master of Guillebert de Mets. Another, Parisian, example from the early fifteenth century is an inscription 'hort dit wort' ('Listen to what I say') in a miniature representing the death of Cassandra in a copy of the *Livre des femmes nobles et renommées* (c. 1403), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS français 598. The inscription was no doubt added by the productive *Maître des cleres femmes*, a Flemish painter working in Paris. Before the manuscript entered the French royal collection it was subsequently owned by Jean de Berry and the dukes of Bourbon.



Ill. 3: Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 5070, f. 132v. Livre appelé Decameron (c. 1445). Dutch instructions to the artist in the lower margin are in Dutch. Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

four fifths of the books in the Burgundian library contained French texts; Dutch books amounted to less than 3% of the total number. The two hundred volumes once owned by Louis of Bruges, lord of Gruuthuse, confirm the

absolute dominance of French: just seven are (partly) in Dutch, ten (partly) in Latin.³⁶ Before 1500, French translations of Dutch literature – even in the broadest sense of the word – were exceptionally rare. Leaving aside Jacques de Baisieux' thirteenth-century *Dis de la vescie à prestre*, which the author purportedly translated *de tieus* (from Dutch), all known examples are dated to the fifteenth century. Except *Harau Martin*, a French translation of Jacob van Maerlant's strophic dialogues dated to c. 1450, these are historiographical texts, which can be related to a Burgundian context.³⁷ However few these translations might be in number, they support the idea of a modest, albeit pragmatic interest in Dutch narratives among the Burgundian aristocracy.

The status of Dutch at the Burgundian court is also addressed in the contribution by Emerson, who poses the intriguing question if some tales in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* set in Dutch-speaking regions were not in fact 'a way of expressing anxiety [...] with regard to the status of words when those words are pronounced in Dutch?' She observes, however, that a story's geographical location was generally determined by the career of the narrator to whom it was attributed, the perceived 'otherness' of its characters or events, or otherwise of little consequence to its interpretation.

Analogous to tendencies in the production of illuminated manuscripts, most publications printed in Bruges before 1500 were in French; Latin and especially Dutch were the exception. Nearly half of the printed titles in Antwerp before 1600 were in Latin, but French materials still constituted about fifteen percent of the overall production.³⁸ Adam demonstrates that between 1550 and 1600 Antwerp printers supplied two thirds of profane francophone literature in the Low Countries and thus overshadowed the output of French-speaking centres such as Douai and Arras. While in the

36 Wijsman 2010, 156-157; 363-364.

37 On *Harau Martin*: Armstrong 2020. The fifteenth-century examples include Jean d'Enghien's *Livre des cronicques de Brabant* with translations of the *Brabantsche yeesten* and the verse chronicle about the wars of Grimbergen (*Grimbergsche oorlog*), the *Chroniques et gestes des nobles seigneurs de Brederode*, the *Chroniques des pays de Hollande, Zellande et aussy em partie de Haynnau*, and most likely also the 'second redaction' of a short report on the assassination of John the Fearless. There are other sixteenth-century examples, including translations of the prose redaction of the *Grimbergsche oorlog* and the French version of *Till Eulenspiegel*. Dlabáčová & Hoogvliet (2020) mention French translations of *Een devote meditatie op die passie ons liefs Heren* and Gerrit van der Goude's *Boexken vander Missen* (both printed by Willem Vorsterman in 1524 as *Ce livre devot a escript un honorable homme d'eglise nomme sire Bethleem* and *L'Interpretation et signification de la messe*), and – albeit through a Latin intermediate – Hendrik Herp's *Spiegel der volcomenheit* (between 1549 and 1552). Renaud Adam signals the French version of *Reynaert de vos* printed by Christopher Plantin in 1566 in an ambitious print run of 1600 copies.

38 *Universal Short Title Catalogue*.

fifteenth century, craftsmen left the Low Countries to establish printing houses in France, a number of sixteenth-century French printers, like Jean Thibault (printer, typesetter, astrologer and surgeon), travelled in the opposite direction to set up shop in Antwerp. Sometime before 1525, Merten de Keyser (Martin Lempereur) relocated from Paris to the new publishing metropolis on the river Scheldt, where he famously published Bible translations in French and English, and French versions of humanist and protestant writing.³⁹

French books printed in the Low Countries (especially Bruges) served as a model for many (if not all) Dutch translations of literature associated with the Burgundian court. Moreover, the woodcuts and type used for French editions of literary texts were re-used in the printed editions of Dutch translations.⁴⁰ Emerson observes that while the work of Burgundian authors like Raoul le Fèvre, Pierre Michault, and Olivier de La Marche was soon translated into Dutch, there is no full translation of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, which may be (partially) due to the lack of an early indigenous edition of the text. Moreover, it seems that in the sixteenth century the urban audiences of Dutch printed books no longer considered the courtly origins of French literature as an attractive selling point, which further explains that while separate stories were indeed translated into Dutch, the collection as a whole remained untranslated.

Gheraert Leeu, who was active as a printer in Gouda and Antwerp between 1477 and 1492, and his Haarlem associate Jacob Bellaert (active between 1483 and 1486) pioneered a multilingual publication strategy, which, as Pairet argues, may have been inspired by the example of William Caxton, who moved his presses from Bruges to Westminster in 1476. At the turn of the sixteenth century, a new generation of Antwerp printers (e.g. Willem Vorsterman and Michiel Hillen van Hoochstraten) continued this form of simultaneous printing and published Dutch editions of romances and news books in parallel with editions in other languages, most importantly French.⁴¹ The characteristic use of type – *Bastarda* (later *roman*) for French, *Fraktur* (later *civilité*) for Dutch – confirmed traditional usage, and allowed readers to recognize versions in different languages at the blink of an eye (see also: Ill. 2). In 1536, Ghent printer and typesetter Joos Lambrecht noted

39 Visser 1969, 108-109, 121, 129, 143; Bijl 1978, 59, 77, 133-134; François 2015, 210-211.

40 See for instance the Dutch translations of Olivier de La Marche's *Chevalier délibéré* printed in Schiedam and Leiden. Speakman-Sutch 2017. For the use of French prints as models, see: Hellinga 2014; Schoenaers 2017, 25-28; De Bruijn 2019.

41 Walsby 2017.

with embarrassment that many of his Dutch-speaking acquaintances were unable to identify a text set *in Romeynscher letter* (in roman type) as Dutch, but thought it had to be Latin or Greek.⁴² In the multicultural melting-port of Antwerp, which was a base of operations for merchants from across Western Europe, foreign-language books undoubtedly met local demands, but this type of publication was also eminently suited to the export market, which significantly increased its sales potential.

In the arena of literary performances, French poetry and drama competed in multilingual contests organized in the context of religious processions, archery competitions, or cross-regional literary festivals set up by local chambers of rhetoric.⁴³ At the occasion of processions and joyous entries in Brussels, rhetoricians like Jan Smeken and Jan Pertcheval were tasked with writing the French and Dutch explanations for the *tableaux vivants*.⁴⁴ Rhetoricians in the Low Countries, whether their native tongue was French or Dutch, drew on a shared 'poetic capital' of literary devices, and in their translations of French allegorical poems Dutch-speaking authors (e.g. Colijn Cailleu and Pertcheval) regularly tried to outshine their francophone contemporaries.⁴⁵

This evidence of multilingual literary reception in the Low Countries chimes with Margriet Hoogvliet's work on religious reading cultures in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Studying the reception of devotional literature in Northern France and the southern Low Countries, Hoogvliet concluded that these areas 'formed a linguistic contact zone with shared texts and a religious reading culture that was largely common for speakers of French and Middle Dutch.'⁴⁶ In view of the cultural openness and exchange of (religious) reading materials across national and linguistic boundaries, Hoogvliet and Anna Dlabáčová have more recently called for the 'de-territorialization of languages and culture' in the Low Countries.⁴⁷ In this volume, Lisa Demets similarly expresses reservations towards the use of 'transcultural' as a label for the transmission of manuscripts and texts between different linguistic and social groups in the medieval Low Countries. Indeed, cultures (like any imagined community) are not primarily defined by language, geographical borders, or socio-economic context, but

42 Waterschoot 1992.

43 Van Bruaene 2017, 71-72.

44 Duverger 1935, 91; De Leeuw & Sleiderink 2017, 124.

45 Armstrong 2015.

46 Hoogvliet 2018, 340.

47 Dlabáčová & Hoogvliet 2020, 101-102.

rather by the complex interplay of shared and competing narratives, beliefs, and values that they represent.

An authoritative language of romance and learning

Booklists as well as extant manuscripts and printed books demonstrate that French romance literature remained popular in the Low Countries well into the sixteenth century. Ana Pairet shows that at the close of the fifteenth century, printers in the Low Countries were key figures in the multilingual and pan-European distribution of francophone non-Arthurian prose romances. Renaud Adam confirms that over sixty years later, market-savvy printers like Jan van Waesberghe and Jean Bogard were convinced that the stories about Renaud de Montauban and Maugis d'Aigremont would still appeal to contemporary audiences, and, more importantly, believed that there was a profit to be made. Unsurprisingly, these locally ingrained medieval romances (*De vier heemskinderen* and *Malegijis*) also remained popular with Dutch-speaking readers and were reprinted several times throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In bilingual or francophone circles, French was equally embraced as a language of knowledge and learning. Besides liturgical books and saints' lives in Latin, the Brussels canon Richard de Bellengues (d. 1471), who hailed from Rouen, owned several books in French: gospel books, a romance about Merlin, a *Tresoir des histoires*, philosophical and encyclopaedic texts (Seneca, Boethius, *Sidrac*), didactic allegories (*Liber scaccorum*), and volumes about astronomy and medicine.⁴⁸

At the turn of the thirteenth century, in the Low Countries as elsewhere (first and foremost England and Normandy), French gradually took root as a language of scholarship and learning. The chroniclers discussed by Morcos and Demets stood at the cradle of Old French prose historiography and thus were leading exponents of this development. Their efforts were supported by local noblemen and -women with close connections to the Flemish court.⁴⁹ Writing for Roger IV (r. 1208-1230), castellan of Lille, the anonymous compiler of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* combined information from authoritative Latin sources (Virgil, Jerome's *Vulgate*, Orosius' *Historiae adversus paganos*, etc.), with stories from the vagrant French *romans d'antiquité* about Thebes and Alexander, which he equally considered to be *estoire sans*

48 CCB, IV, 67-69.

49 Spiegel 1993, 12-14; Gaullier-Bougassas 2012, 7-16.

nulle fable.⁵⁰ Roger's intellectual profile likely resembled that of Baldwin II, count of Guînes (?-1206) near Flanders. Baldwin's contemporary Lambert of Ardres described the count as *laïcus, illiteratus* and *liberalium [...] ignarus artium* (a layman, illiterate, and uneducated in the liberal arts).⁵¹ In spite of his wide range of interests, the count's lack of Latin proficiency barred him from access to specialized knowledge, a limitation which he overcame with the help of erudite scholars who informed him in French of the latest scientific developments.

The count of Guînes enjoyed performances of professional storytellers, but also listened to French translations of the Song of Songs, gospel readings and saints' lives. His physician, Master Godfrey, translated large portions of the *physicae artis* into French and the surveyor Simon of Boulogne offered Baldwin a self-made translation of Solinus' *De mirabilis mundi*. The comital library was so well-equipped that Baldwin's expertise in the fields of theology, philosophy, and the wisdom of fables measured up to the erudition of Augustine, Dionysius the Aeropagite, and Thales of Miletus. When it came to *chansons de geste, fabliaux*, and adventure stories or chronicles, the count's repertoire surpassed that of the most renowned storytellers.⁵² Likewise, a list of French books from the library of William I of Hainaut (d. 1337) dated to circa 1325 mentions romances about Merlin and Lancelot, stories from the *Geste des Loherens*, and song books, but also a mirror of princes, histories of Rome, Brunetto Latini's encyclopaedic *Livre dou tresor*, treatises about virtues, biblical texts, and a book about birds.⁵³

The French songs, romances, and crusader histories that circulated at the court of Flanders all leant towards the lighter side of the aristocratic literary spectrum. Aside from saints' lives and historiographical texts translated from Latin sources, vernacular adaptations of Latin scholarship are surprisingly absent from the material evidence Lisa Demets has collected for the presence of French books at the Flemish court. Undoubtedly, this lacuna (at least partially) results from survivorship bias and/or the fact that the patrons and owners of many thirteenth-century manuscripts can no longer be identified. At the turn of the fourteenth century, count Guy of Dampierre (?-1305) entrusted his chamberlain and barber with some of his belongings, among which a book about chess and a chronicle of Flanders (in Latin or

50 *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS français 20125, f. 2va, § 1.1. v. 252, quoted from Morcos et al. (eds) 2020.

51 An edition and French translation of the relevant fragments of Lambert of Ardres' *Historia comitum Ghisnensium et Ardensium dominorum ab anno 800-1203* in Aurell 2014.

52 Aurell 2014.

53 CCB, IV, 242-244; Van der Meulen 2007.

French?), as well as *romances* about various saints and the miracles of Our Lady. Besides these and other hagiographical texts, Guy's son, Robert of Béthune (1249-1322) is known to have owned French lawbooks, stories about Godfrey of Bouillon, a romance about Merlin, biblical texts and an illustrated scroll written in Flemish.⁵⁴

Demets' quantitative approach to the manuscript evidence allows her to further specify and nuance some tendencies previously noticed in French translation studies, like the preponderance of historiographical texts, saints' lives, and narratives related to the crusades and *Outremer* among the translations that were produced in the Picard area during the thirteenth century. However, before c. 1400, the Picard and Walloon regions also generated translations of biblical texts, fables (*Isopet*), and other edifying stories (*Visio Thugdali*), as well as learned literature translated from Latin (*Anticlaudianus*, Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*) and Hebrew (astrological treatises by Abraham Ibn Ezra). At the request of Guy IV of Châtillon, count of Saint-Pol (r. 1292-1317), a physician called Jehan de Prouville expounded (*explane*) a compilation of surgical advice and medicinal recipes *traite en roumant du latin* (transmitted into French from Latin).⁵⁵ In the second half of the fifteenth century, several French translations of Latin and Greek authors – intermediated by the Latin versions of Italian humanists – were dedicated to Charles the Bold and pioneered the vernacular dissemination of classical and humanistic writing in the region.

The appreciation of French literature in Dutch-speaking circles

Authors of 'serious' books, like Jacob van Maerlant (?-c. 1290), and the anonymous authors of a Dutch *vita* of Saint Lutgardis of Aywières (*Kopenhaagse leven van Lutgart*) and a life of Jesus (*Vanden levne ons heren*), frequently spoke out against fanciful stories about popular heroes for distracting attention from urgent matters, such as personal salvation. Nonetheless, among the authors and audiences of Dutch romances, French appears to have been generally acknowledged as an authoritative language for epic and romance.⁵⁶ It is, however, less clear, if in Dutch-speaking circles French was equally appreciated as a language of learning. Scholarly and edifying

⁵⁴ CCB, III, 18-19.

⁵⁵ Pignatelli 2011.

⁵⁶ On the attitude of medieval Dutch poets towards French literature, see: Sleiderink 2010. For a complementary view: Brandsma 2018.

works, but also practical *Fachliteratur* constituted a significant part of the French literature that was read and produced in the Low Countries. Even so, in these genres, translations from French into Dutch are relatively rare, especially prior to 1400.⁵⁷ In the area of learning, the vernaculars mostly followed parallel paths, meaning that French and Dutch-speaking authors separately translated the same (or similar) authoritative sources from Latin. With very few exceptions, French literary texts that were translated into Dutch have no Latin counterpart.⁵⁸ It is, however, very possible that there are still more cases in which French translations served as ‘interlingua’ between Latin and Dutch that have yet to be identified.⁵⁹

Some Dutch-speaking translators of French learned writings obscured the linguistic origins of their source materials. Notwithstanding that the Flemish poet of *Der vrouwen heimeelijcheit* (‘The Secrets of Women’) almost certainly used an Old French model, he invariably referred to a Latin source. The Latin title (*Secretum mulieris*) in the colophon of the only extant manuscript further buried the evidence of the French adaptation that intermediated between the Latin and Dutch redactions of the gynaecological treatise (Ill. 4).⁶⁰ Likewise, the author of the earliest Middle Dutch version of Mandeville’s travels substituted all references to his model’s French (*romance*) origins with *duutsch*, thus hiding the true nature of his translation.

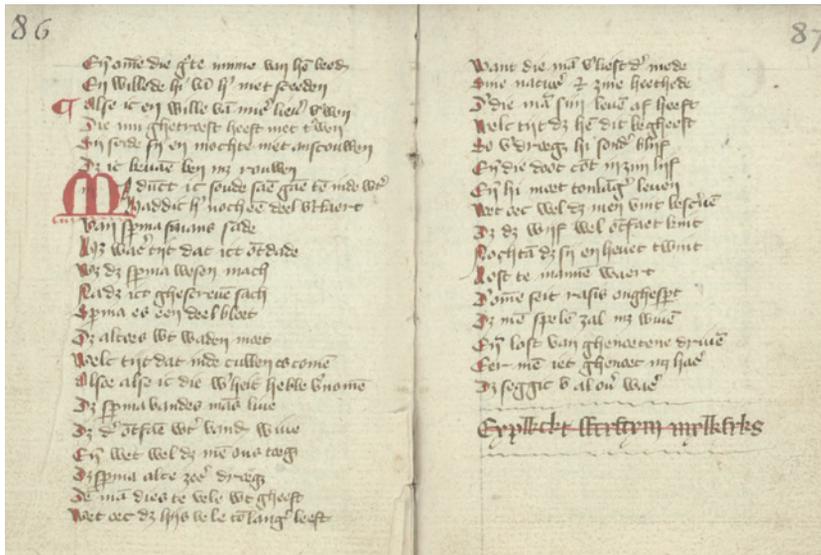
The linguistic selection of source materials was determined by the authoritative status of Latin authors, by prescriptive ideas about translation which advocated verbatim renderings of biblical texts, but also by practical issues. In some fields (e.g. medicine) Latin textbooks were no doubt more readily available than French adaptations. Whether a vernacular source

57 Aside from romance, French texts were also regularly translated into Dutch in the field of religious literature: Dlabáčová & Hoogvliet 2020, 104-112. Obviously, part of the Dutch-speaking audience had no need for translations and read (or listened to) French texts in the original language. The existence of Dutch translations shows, however, that some readers preferred to read these books in their own native vernacular.

58 For instance the *Roman de la rose*, *Sidrac*, Guillaume de Digulleville’s *Pèlerinages*, *Somme le roi*, and allegorical poems by Olivier de La Marche and Pierre Michault. Notable exceptions are the Dutch translation of *Moralium dogma philosophorum* in the so-called *Nederrijns moraalboek*, which is based on a French version, the French adaptation of *Flandria generosa B*, which was translated into Dutch before c. 1280, and *Secres des dames* which was translated as *Der vrouwen heimeelijcheit*. Additionally, Mandeville’s travels also circulated in several Latin versions and was translated twice (at least partially) into Dutch. Jacob Vilt’s Dutch translation of Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae* was based on the French version by pseudo-Jean de Meun.

59 Apart from Jacob Vilt’s Boethius-translations, there is also the Dutch *Lucidarius* printed in Brussels by Thomas van der Noot between c. 1505-1530, which was based on the French *Second lucidaire*. Klundert 2005, 181-191.

60 Kuiper 2011, 8; Lie 2011, 44.



III. 4: Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 444, *Der vrouwen heimelijcheit*, f. 86v-87r. The Latin colophon covers up the francophone origins of the source text.

was positively or negatively evaluated depended on the (inferior) quality of individual texts, but potentially also on local praxis. While Jacob van Maerlant refused to repeat the factual inaccuracies of Robert de Boron's French retelling of the Passion story, and attributed the failure of Willem Utenhove's Dutch bestiary project to a sub-standard French model, he recommended French chronicles (likely local versions of the *Pseudo-Turpin* chronicle) as reliable sources for information about Charlemagne.⁶¹ Demets' observation that in thirteenth-century Flanders chronicle manuscripts were more likely to be written in French, goes a long way in explaining Maerlant's favourable attitude towards these French history books.

Positive evaluations were likely also motivated by the popularity of the French models, by mechanisms used to strengthen the authority of francophone learning, or by the intellectual profile of the Middle Dutch translators. Conceivably, the Antwerp *Sidrac*-translator (1318/1329?) bought into the elaborate source fiction, which presented the French Q&A as a palimpsest of multiple versions in Greek, Latin and Arabic, ultimately derived from divine inspiration. Jacob Vilt, who used a French intermediary for his translation of Boethius' *De consolacione philosophiae* (completed in

61 Brandsma 2021, 150; Jacob van Maerlant, *Der naturen bloeme*, 'Prologhe', vs. 104-111 (ed. M. Gysseling 1981); *Spiegel historiael*, IV, 1 § 29 (ed. De Vries & Verwijs 1863).

1466), had no apparent reason to doubt the information in his French model, which (misleadingly) advertised that his composite source text was the work of Jean de Meun, the author of the immensely popular *Roman de la rose*. Moreover, as a self-proclaimed layman who took an interest in philosophy, but who was by no means an expert, the Bruges goldsmith ideally fit the intellectual profile of the French adaptation's targeted audience.

While Vilt's *Boethius* and a nearly contemporary translation of Christine de Pizan's *Cité des dames* (also from Bruges) were not widely disseminated, Dutch versions of the *Roman de la rose*, Laurent d'Orléans' *Somme le roi*, and Guillaume de Digulleville's *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* were considerably more successful.⁶² The latter two texts were also published in print and even had several reprints, which further confirms that by the end of the fifteenth century native Dutch speakers commonly considered French literature as a trustworthy source for moral and spiritual guidance.

Locally ingrained yet internationally mobile

All five contributors underscore that French literary texts that were produced and read in the Low Countries were on the one hand firmly rooted in local soil, but also characterized by their embeddedness in cross-regional and/or international networks. Lisa Demets draws attention to the network of crusader families with Flemish connections involved in the creation of several French prose translations of the *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi* (or *Pseudo-Turpin* chronicle). She also highlights the central role of powerful women like the French queen Blanche of Castile in the transmission of francophone books to the Flemish court, as well as the importance of laywomen in propagating French vernacular literature in general. Finally, the Anglo-Norman connections and preoccupation with crusader-related content attested in some thirteenth-century manuscripts associated with the court of Flanders resonated with issues that determined Flemish politics at the close of the thirteenth century.

Hannah Morcos reminds us that the first universal chronicle written in French prose was essentially a Flemish project. The original outline of the unfinished *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, written between c. 1208 and 1230, traced 'the biblical origins of the counts of Flanders via the Trojan line of the Franks'. Its projected geographical scope covered the empires of the Orient, Greece, Troy, Rome (including the Punic wars with Carthage), the

62 Van der Poel 1989, 21-22; Van Oostrom 2017, 351-358; Biesheuvel 2005.

Holy Land, and the Christian kingdoms of Western Europe. Manuscripts with the first redaction of the Flemish chronicle migrated to *Outremer*, Cyprus, the Italian peninsula, and France.⁶³ In the 1330s, its historiographical narrative was overhauled a first time to better suit the dynastic ambitions of the Angevin rulers of Naples. The palimpsest, as Morcos suggests, is a particularly apt metaphor for the chronicle's layered composition. The thirteenth-century compiler brought together material from internationally recognized authoritative sources in Latin and romanced histories written in French. More importantly, Morcos convincingly demonstrates that he also borrowed extensively from the local *Liber floridus*, completed c. 1121 by Lambert of Saint-Omer, who subtly tailored well-known accounts about Troy and Alexander to the sensitivities of a twelfth-century Flemish audience.

Whether or not the literary framework of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* was based on one or more real-life story-telling events, its narrators were connected by virtue of their association with the Burgundian court. Moreover, as Catherine Emerson observes, their professional activities in the service of Philip the Good partly determined the geographical setting of their stories, even if these were rooted in older models. Interestingly, there also seems to be a difference in the neutral attitude, shared by some stories, towards Brabant as the court's 'default' location, and the perceived exotism of peripheral Holland.

Ana Pairet exemplifies the mobility of printers and books in late medieval Europe. Her research confirms that *Paris et Vienne* was first published in French by the native *Liégeois* Guillaume Leroy, who c. 1473 started a printing business in Lyon. By retracing the editorial history of this love-story from Lyon (Martin Huss) across Italy and England (William Caxton) to Antwerp and beyond, she shows the cross-regional contacts of Gheraert Leeu, who was instrumental in making *Paris et Vienne*, which in various ways thematized 'multilingualism, translation and cultural identity', into a European bestseller.

Finally, Renaud Adam observes that many of the literary texts printed in French in the Low Countries during the second half of the sixteenth century were of Spanish (e.g. the *Amadis* romances) or Italian (e.g. the oeuvre of Matteo Bandello) origin, but also draws attention to the pedagogical oeuvre of Gérard de Vivre, who was born in Ghent and settled in Cologne in 1563. Adam further demonstrates that commercially minded printers in the Low Countries kept a close eye on the international market and adapted the

63 For a succinct introduction to the *Histoire ancienne*, see: *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France*.

visual aesthetic of their publications to the tastes of the different audiences they wished to reach.

The five contributions in this issue show that texts as well as books in French, Latin, and Dutch were as interrelated and mobile as their authors. As awareness of the francophone literature of the medieval and early modern Low Countries continues to grow, such interplay and mobility will increasingly come to the fore. In this view, studying this aspect of francophone literary culture also broadens and deepens our understanding of the Dutch and Latin literature of the Low Countries, since texts in all three languages are ever more firmly connected in an intricate and multilingual weave.

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