Institution: King's College London

Unit of Assessment: 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics

Title of case study: The Medieval Francophone World: Making Visible the Historical and Contemporary Meaning of Europe's Multicultural Past

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008–2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):**	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:**
Professor Simon Gaunt	Professor of French Language and Literature	From 1998

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014–2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact

Our research has rewritten decisively a key chapter of French literary history. Rather than seeing the French language as an expression of French national identity, we have shown that French and texts in French were vectors for cultures in contact that were not centred on France. King's research has changed curators' and librarians' understanding of their collections, resulting in different archival and display practices. Showcasing our work on premodern multilingualism and multiculturalism through digital media, exhibitions, blogging and workshops resulted also in changes in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in higher education, modifications to open-access dictionaries, and increased cultural and historical capital for school pupils, lifelong learners and exhibition visitors.

2. Underpinning research

Research on premodern French texts has tended to seek to 'fix' them in their 'correct' linguistic form, often a standard form of French from France, identifying variations in manuscripts copied elsewhere as linguistically defective. Whereas the standard question scholars ask of a medieval French text is 'Where does it come from?', our innovative research questions were 'Where does this text go?' and 'What does it become in manuscript form?' Through the analysis of the circulation and translation of texts across Europe, often among non-native speakers, we 'decentre' the history of French. In this alternative literary history [2], the French language and texts in French are not circumscribed, linguistically or culturally, by the idea of the nation. Rather, they are shown to be vectors for multicultural exchange and networks in which *language itself* may connote alterity. Seeing French as a networked language, across time, travelling through many places and peoples, leads us to understand better what is historically specific about the modern idea of 'French' as a national language, and we are thereby encouraged to reflect on contemporary understandings of nation as constructed rather than immanent.

In [1] Gaunt highlighted the significance of one iconic text for European cultural history and identity – Marco Polo's *Travels* – initially composed in an Italianate form of French. By tracing its translation and circulation in a range of European languages, Gaunt moved away from traditional philological efforts to identify its 'correct' form. Instead, the text is understood as a reflection on notions of cultural alterity constructed through language: just as Polo positions his account of the world between cultures, he positions it between languages by adopting a hybrid form of French. This book thus proposes an innovative interpretation of the question of the language of the original and offers new insights on the text's complex manuscript tradition.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded project *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France* (MFLCOF; 2011–15), led by Gaunt in collaboration with colleagues at UCL and Cambridge, proposed a radically different approach to French-language material by foregrounding manuscripts from outside France, valuing them as material artefacts and key informants for cultures and languages in contact. Setting aside notions of centre or origin, to highlight instead linguistic and geographic movement and variation, MFLCOF mapped digitally the European dissemination of six textual traditions. Its online database of c600 manuscripts [3]

quantified for the first time in detail the phenomenon of medieval French outside France, establishing thereby a new empirical basis for future research. Other outputs include a substantial volume of essays published in 2018 and a book [5].

The European Research Council (ERC)-funded project (2015–20), *The Values of French Language and Literature in the European Middle Ages* (TVOF), led by Gaunt, investigated how French was used as a language outside France, often by non-native speakers; the project has resulted in a major digital edition of the *Histoire ancienne* [4] in two manuscript versions (from Acre and Naples). Innovation in digital approaches to manuscripts lies at the core of TVOF; two powerful digital tools created by the team (a faceted search tool and parallel scrolling between different versions) have enabled sophisticated linguistic analyses and consideration of what this circulation of language and material objects tells us about geo-cultural contexts. A key insight here concerns the role of the manuscript in material form as agent and vector of networks.

This research has created two extensive open-access datasets, using innovative digital tools that map the dissemination and circulation of manuscripts, and have led to new insights into historical linguistics, historiography and the study of intercultural exchange [see C.3]. King's research, by building partnerships with key cultural institutions (national and regional museums, schools and dictionaries) has entered into multiple dialogues around its findings about the multicultural contexts in which French became a vehicular tool of expression.

This case study highlights four types of impact resulting from this research:
1. widening availability and awareness of holdings in national collections;
2. changing curatorial practices, leading to exhibitions and outreach events that engaged the public with new ideas;
3. reaching new audiences for Old French through digital media; and
4. enabling changes in pedagogy and dictionaries.

The beneficiaries of these conversations – museum curators and audiences, students and lifelong learners beyond the field of Old French – gained insights into the role manuscripts played as agents of cultural mobility and how the cultural deference that French as a national language has accrued may be understood historically. This understanding in turn contextualises perception of contemporary multilingual and multicultural societies.

3. References to the research

1. Gaunt, S. (2013). *Marco Polo's* Le Devisement du Monde: *Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
2. Gaunt, S. (2015). French literature abroad: towards an alternative history of French literature, *Interfaces*, 1, 25–61, DOI:10.13130/interfaces-4938.
3. http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/ (database).
4. https://tvof.ac.uk/ (database, edition, blog: DOI:10.6084/m9.figshare.c.4873335.v1).
5. Gaunt, S., Burgwinkle, W. & Gilbert, J. (2020). *Medieval French Literary Culture Abroad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Indicators of quality

- [1] was submitted to REF 2014; [4] and [5] are submissions in REF2021.
- [1], [2] and [5] are peer reviewed.
- [2], [3] and [5] funded by a GBP850,652 award from the AHRC (2011–15: AH/1000852/1). Gaunt PI.
- [4] funded by a EUR2,274,225 award from the ERC (2015–20: 670726). Gaunt PI.

4. Details of the impact

1. Widening availability and awareness of holdings in national collections
Collaboration between KCL and two major research libraries, Cambridge University Library (CUL) and the British Library (BL), directly resulting from MFLCOF and TVOF, improved the accessibility of holdings and raised public awareness of the movement of texts across linguistic and cultural boundaries. First, an exhibition in January – April 2014, *The Moving Word*, was curated by MFLCOF in CUL's public-facing Milstein Exhibition Centre. It featured c60 French-language manuscripts from Cambridge libraries which had not previously been accessible or displayed together. A virtual exhibition is still available online. Secondly, in 2018–19, and in the context of

ongoing collaboration between King's and the BL, KCL postgraduate research students working on TVOF curated a case in the BL's Treasures Gallery (a free public exhibition space). This involved producing text for panels for two manuscripts edited and/or digitised by TVOF (BL Royal MS 20 D I and BL Add. MS 15268). These manuscripts, made in Naples and the Holy Land, were displayed together for the first time, highlighting geo-cultural diversity in the production of French-language manuscripts.

The Moving Word [see B1, E.2, E.3] attracted 14,005 visitors, its monthly average exceeding those for the previous decade (3,181). March 2014 saw 4,020 visitors. Visitors' book comments (165 comments, of which 41 (24.8%) were made in languages other than English) indicated the geographic reach (13 countries) of the exhibition's public. These data demonstrate the reach and the positive impact of the exhibition on individuals from across the UK, Europe and further afield – and the virtual exhibition is still regularly consulted, receiving 12,502 page views between February 2017 and October 2020. The reach of the exhibition case in the BL is harder to gauge, as the gallery offers several cases simultaneously. However, there were c353,000 visitors in the 14 months the manuscripts were on display: if only 10% looked at our case, c35,000 people from all over the world saw the manuscripts and read about our research.

The visitors' book for *The Moving Word* [E.3] provided feedback from a sample of a mere 165 out of a total of 14,005 visitors, but its qualitative comments in a range of languages showed how the exhibition positively affected individual visitors from around the world. The display was described as *"very interesting and well-selected"* by a German visitor [E.3 p.5], a sentiment echoed in Dutch and Spanish [E.3 p.13]. A specific aim of the exhibition was to offer information about medieval book production and this aspect resulted in inspiration and pleasure for bookbinders (*"Thank you. As an amateur hand-bookbinder I find this fascinating"* [E.3 p.15]; *"Wonderful – can't wait to get back with my binding! An inspiration!"* [E.3 p.4]) who were driven to reflect on their craft (*"I particularly liked the section on binding and dyes"* [E.3 p.18]). Other comments elaborated on how the display introduced visitors to little-known and unusual objects (Chilean visitor [E.3 p.4]; comment in French [E.3 p.6]). The emotional and intellectual value of the surprise provided by the content of the exhibition is logged in enthusiastic comments calling it a *"moment inattendu"* [E.3 p.6: an unexpected moment], or describing it as *"Unbelievable! Awesome!"* [E.3 p.4].

Transformation of understanding was acknowledged explicitly when visitors not only registered their increased cultural capital – *"A glimpse of something I know nothing about!"* [E.3 p.17], *"An excellent exhibition, we both enjoyed learning something new"* [E.3 p.5] – but also suggested that this new knowledge may lead to active use: *"I would never even have thought of looking at French medieval manuscripts, but it turns out they are exactly what I need to know about"* [E.3 p.16]. Media coverage in the UK, France and Canada [A1-A.4 made explicit analogies between the fluidity of French in medieval and contemporary settings, citing the examples of Quebec and the adoption of French by non-native speakers [A.2 in particular, but see also E.3].

2. Changing curatorial practices, leading to exhibitions and outreach events that would not otherwise have taken place

The Moving Word exhibition *"stimulated inter-institutional co-operation"* by demonstrating to CUL and Cambridge college libraries *"the sometimes overlooked richness of the Cambridge College collections"* [B.1]. As [B.1] states, it also helped pioneer the use of digital platforms to create global audiences for local exhibitions and the involvement of early career researchers in the curation process as part of their training. Both approaches were subsequently adopted as good practice, while *"the scholarly methodology promulgated by the project enabled the staff of the Department of Manuscripts … to find new ways of appraising the Library's collections"* [B.1]. A similar impact resulted from the collaboration with the BL. The BL is not just a research library, but a public-facing national institution, deeply invested in engagement, outreach and impact. Extensive collaborations for over a decade between the BL and KCL on medieval French have influenced the library's curation of its collections and its public-facing activities. As stated in [B.2], our collaboration focused curators' attention on parts of the collection that had hitherto been neglected and was the catalyst for successful new outreach activities.

Specifically, eight BL manuscripts, made in Italy or the Holy Land, have been digitised as a direct result of collaborations with KCL [C.1 discusses this]. Up to 31 October 2019, these eight digitisations account for 2,452 pageviews, with an average of 1.5 minutes' viewing time. The second-most-visited of these manuscripts (BL Add. MS 15268) is connected to the BL's Treasures Gallery exhibit curated by KCL researchers (see section 1 above) and featured in one of the blogs

written by them for the BL (1,056 unique page views). This suggests these public-facing activities generated a significant number of visitors to this digitisation. The MFLCOF/TVOF teams have authored nine blogs for the BL aimed at members of the public which received a total of 2,541 unique page views with an average of 6.1 minutes per page view. [B.2] also suggests that collaboration with TVOF led to increased uptake on other BL digital platforms.

With both the CUL and BL, a range of outreach activities took place around the exhibitions that were curated in collaboration with KCL which sought to raise awareness of medieval French as an aspect of British heritage, particularly among younger people. For example, two private views and manuscript-making workshops were arranged for prospective undergraduates at *The Moving Word* exhibition, each attended by 15 pupils in Years 12 and 13 and their teachers. A workshop led by postgraduate students with practical activities was attended by c60 Year 6 pupils from Ipswich. A teacher wrote: *"A fantastic day … our children are still talking about it."*

In London, TVOF organised a conference to coincide with the Treasures Gallery exhibition, which included a public lecture at the BL in June 2019, 'The Languages of Medieval History', by Professor Robert Bartlett. This lecture was attended by over 280 people of whom c220 were members of the general public, some attending a BL lecture for the first time. The response to the lecture was overwhelmingly positive [E.1]: 100% of the 90+ respondents to a questionnaire (excluding conference delegates) agreed (18%) or strongly agreed (82%) that the event was informative; 97% of respondents agreed (21%) or strongly agreed (76%) that the event had challenged or otherwise affected their understanding of the topic. Almost half of all feedback included qualitative comments with adjectives like *"entertaining"*, *"humorous"*, *"witty"* and *"engaging"*. Seventeen respondents (19%) singled out the lecture's accessibility for a non-specialist audience as praiseworthy. A key dimension of that accessibility was, in line with the intellectual agenda of KCL research, to highlight the similarities between medieval and contemporary multilingualism. Bartlett said: *"We live now in one of the greatest ages of human migration there has ever been. One consequence is that it brings people who speak one language in contact with people who speak other languages. So you find countries that traditionally for a long time, like England, have not been very multilingual, are now very multilingual. And so it is an issue to decide, how are we going to respond to this? What is the proper way to live in a multilingual society? People have to make decisions about schooling, what is a language that is allowed publicly and officially … all these important issues seem to me to be raised exactly the same in the Middle Ages and today"* [interview in C.3]. Feedback from the public highlighting the lecture's accessibility should be read alongside the fact that 12 respondents (13% total; 16% qualitative responses) stated explicitly that the lecture gave them a desire to find out more about the topic as a positive response to Bartlett's comparison with contemporary society.

3. Reaching new audiences through digital Media

MFLCOF and TVOF are digital projects in the field of Old French. Their work has reached new audiences for this field well beyond academic users. The field of Old French has c100–200 specialists worldwide. A broader pool of c1,500–2,000 medievalists worldwide (faculty and graduate students) is potentially interested in scholarly content on this subject. A central element of this impact case study is that our activities, work undertaken and collaborative partnerships have resulted in a reach that far exceeds the numbers of researchers and students working in the field or cognate areas, demonstrating the significance of the research is recognised beyond the academy. Thus, traffic on both websites significantly exceeds the numbers of researchers working in the field or cognate areas:

- As of 30 November 2020, www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk (launched 2015) records a total of 9,840 users, 15,692 sessions, 49,692 page views, with an average of 3.16 views per session and a bounce rate of 58.52% [D.2]. Although traffic on the site peaked in November 2015, the site is still visited by an average of 249 viewers per month. The site records users from over 100 countries, with most in the UK (2,263 = 23%), US (1,718 = 17.5%), Italy (1,121 = 11.39%) and France (718 = 7.3%). 31.63% of users consult the site directly, with others navigating to the site via search engines (52.13%), social media (2.16%) or referral from other sites (21.2%).
- Launched in February 2016, www.tvof.ac.uk records 12,122 users up to 31 November 2020 [D.1], who consulted the site in 27,714 sessions, making 70,831 page views, with an average of 2.56 page views per session and a bounce rate of 54.91%. TVOF has made sustained use of social media and blogs to highlight contemporary relevance. 45.2% of sessions result from direct navigation to the site, remaining sessions are initiated via search engines (30.1%) or via

social media (18.4%). Single page visits are highest for the blog. While just over 29.4% of site users are in the UK, other users are in the US, Italy, France, Switzerland, Spain, Canada, Germany, Belgium and Russia. Since the website's first full year in existence, the number of users has increased by 942% and the launch of a French-language version in 2019 produced a jump in users from France of 31.8%.

A number of conclusions may be drawn:

- Although it is not possible to calibrate this precisely, the two websites have a significant audience of non-academic users, suggesting reach due to an interest in the topic.
- Google analytics suggest a bounce rate of 26–40% is excellent for *all sites*, with 41–55% average, 56–69% higher than average, and over 70% poor. Bounce rates of 58.52% and 54.91% for academic sites are exceptionally good: 50% of users are navigating around the sites.
- The volume of returning users who are necessarily not specialists suggests the site is impacting upon their views and general cultural awareness, even if this is difficult to calibrate: it is likely that the BL blogs, attention in the French media, and retweets and re-postings draw non-specialist readers to our blogs. Blogs on the TVOF website highlight contemporary topics and points of contact or possible dialogue between the medieval and modern periods, such as Europe, gender, race relations, religious conflict and language politics. Our most popular blog (on Europe) received 860 page views, the average time spent on the page being 5 minutes 12 seconds; most of our blogs are read by 300+ people.
- The international reach of the websites is also very good.
- Sustainability: the MFLCOF website will be maintained and remain fully functional until 2024; the TVOF website and database until 2030, thus creating a platform for the sustainability of the impact. From July 2020, all XML files underpinning the TVOF website were made available in open access, meaning the technological developments of the project are transferable with potential impact in other disciplines and other sectors (see also section 4 below).

4) Impacts upon pedagogy and dictionaries

MFLCOF and TVOF projects have supported impacts upon pedagogy beyond KCL, and on dictionaries, changing pedagogical methodologies and widening understanding:

- Bristol University reports setting c100 undergraduates tasks using the MFLCOF and TVOF websites. The University of Liège, University of Neuchâtel, New York University, Paris-Sorbonne University and University of Zurich report using both sites for training graduate students (again c100 students) as the structured nature of the data is a better platform for pedagogy than other resources.
- Data from the TVOF database has been imported into open-access international etymological dictionaries (such as the *Dictionnaire étymologique de l'ancien français* based in Heidelberg), using bespoke software developed by King's that in due course we hope will be used in other contexts. The software is also available in open access via Figshare and as of 1 December 2020 in the two months the files had been available there had already been 63 downloads.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

A. Portfolio of press coverage on *The Moving Word* exhibition in 2014: A.1 Heritagedaily.com; A.2 TV5 Monde; A.3 Huffpost Canada; A.4 FranceTVInfo.

B. Testimonials from: B.1 Cambridge University Library; B.2 the British Library.

C. Videos: C.1 The Values of French; C.2 Digital Tools; C.3 Why does multilingualism in the Middle Ages matter today?

D. Statistical reports on web usage: D.1 TVOF; D.2 MFLCOF.

E. Qualitative data: E.1 BL lecture; E.2 and E.3 (Visitors' book) *The Moving Word* exhibition.