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***Il re e le sue lingue. Comunicazione e imperialità / Le roi et ses langues. Communication et impérialité*, ed. FULVIO DELLE DONNE, BENOÎT GRÉVIN, Basilicata University Press, Potenza 2023 [= *Imperialiter*, 2], pp. 176, <https://doi.org/10.6093/978-88-31309-20-2>**

In the first chapter of the volume under review, its editor Benoît Grévin outlines the basic premise of the book and the questions it seeks to answer (p. 7–30). From a theoretical perspective, the author looks primarily for instances of the use of local languages as an assertion of a particular person's authority over a given territory, the use of imperial languages, or those associated with a religion considered dominant or even universal, such as Latin and Greek (but also Mandarin, Persian, Arabic), and finally the search for linguistic motifs, with the reconstruction of old languages no longer in use, in order to reference the glorious past of a given territory or of a ruler who exercised imperial power in centuries past, from where a given emperor or king derived his own *potestas* and *imperium*. The author stresses that it is important in this research not to succumb to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paradigms giving priority to national languages which, although spoken, did not usually achieve the status of an imperial language. When we consider French, for example, we should be asking which dialect we are referring to, and secondly, how many of the French king's subjects actually spoke the same French used in the royal chancelleries of France or England – this leads us to the conclusion that the matter of nationality was hardly relevant here. The question of High German and its significance for the Holy Empire, or the Tuscan dialect of Italian, sometimes used

at the court of the Austrian Habsburgs, could be treated similarly. Another issue is also related to the above – to what extent were the languages of power, the imperial ones, artificial, used only for certain specific forms of communication, as opposed to being living, and to what extent was their basic version used for royal communication regulated by the court. An important issue raised by the author is also the tension between attributing greater importance to national languages at the end of the Middle Ages and the continuing polyglotism of the elite at the same time, or possibly, between declared ethnicity versus actual subordination to a specific ruler in control of a particular territory.

In the second chapter, Guido Cappelli and Fulvio Delle Donne consider the question of the functioning of Latin as the language of empire and the imperial language (as one of the equivalents of *imperium*) in the west of Europe during the late Middle Ages, from the 12th to the 16th century (p. 31–49). In a sense, then, this is an essay dealing with the relationship between power and its exemplifications, including linguistic ones, often functioning independently of the *imperium* actually exercised, even being its substitute or existing in places abandoned by it: *il latino è la lingua dell'antico impero romano, ma è anche lo strumento imperiale per eccellenza: è essa, anzi, che crea veramente l'impero e lo rende superiore a ogni cosa* (p. 45). The second part of the article is devoted to a consideration

of the importance of particular languages in the courts of European rulers, primarily of the late Middle Ages, especially in the context of the relationship of Latin to the local languages or those dominant at the court of the rulers (the example of southern Italy: Latin, Castilian, Catalan, or southern dialects of Italian).

In the third chapter, Lars Boje Mortensen presented a study of imperial propaganda and the self-presentation of rulers in the literature of medieval Western Europe in the 11th–13th centuries (p. 51–67). One of the author's main theses is that in the period discussed in the text, despite the use of national languages in the literature, it is difficult to speak of national literature; rather, these were linguistic variations referring to earlier, Carolingian and Ottonian ambitions of *renovatio imperii Romanorum*. In the text, the author develops Christian Høgel's idea that medieval literature was not so much trans-national as trans-imperial¹, characterised by the emergence of a specific canon of texts used in the territory belonging to the *imperium* in schools, the use of a specific language in administration in the territories remaining in the orbit of the *imperium* and a specific linguistic code used to create ideas/images of the *imperium* – through propaganda and self-presentation. In other words, an imperial language would be one that is produced at the intersection of politics, education and culture, encompassing all these aspects. According to this view, the status of an imperial language in the Middle Ages was acquired by the following three: Latin, Greek and Arabic, as opposed to languages that were perhaps widely used but had no state status, such as Old Church Slavonic or Hebrew. At the same time, the above definitions make it possible to consider whether a few more languages acquiring imperial status, such as French, High German and Castilian, can be singled out in the late medieval period. The author decided to focus his text on the issue of propaganda or self-presentation of power, discussing examples of literature defined by being created for such a purpose, regardless of the genre they represented: panegyrics, historiography, epics and so on. The works of

such authors as Lambert of Hersfeld, Gunther of Pairis, Otto of Freising, Frutolf of Michelsberg and Godfried of Viterbo, who were exponents of imperial ideas, were briefly analysed, pointing out that some of them referred to the writing experience of the authors from the time of the Roman Empire. The author also addressed the interpretation of such historians from the periphery of the *imperium* as Saxo Grammaticus and Wincenty Kadłubek², observing that although they were far from claiming an imperial heritage, significant elements of universalism can also be seen in their works, e.g. through references to the papacy³. It is worth noting at this point, however, that certain universalist themes present in the aforementioned authors had after all already been noted⁴, also from a Polish perspective⁵.

In the next text in the volume, Benoît Grévin comments on the use of propaganda clichés of imperial discourse in the works from western and central Europe in the late Middle Ages, using the example of the transmission of ideas

² The juxtaposition of Polish and Scandinavian authors in relation to dealing with Roman issues is also not the author's original idea, see for example from recent years: R. RUTKOWSKI, *Jak opowiedzieć o zwycięstwie nad Cezarem? Próba nowego spojrzenia na przekaz Mistrza Wincentego* (I, 17), KH 126, 2019, p. 453–480.

³ The themes concerning the Master Wincenty's reference to Roman universalism are not new in the scholarship, see, e.g. J. SONDEL, *Rola „Kroniki” Wincentego zwanego Kadłubkiem w upowszechnianiu prawa rzymskiego w średniowiecznej Polsce*, ZP.UKSW 11, 2011, p. 39–68; K. CHMIELEWSKA, *Recepcja rzymskiej literatury antycznej w Kronice polskiej Mistrza Wincentego*, [in:] *Onus Athlanteum. Studia nad Kroniką biskupa Wincentego*, ed. A. DĄBRÓWKA, W. WOJTCWICZ, Warszawa 2009, p. 215–230.

⁴ For example, research into the relationship between Frutolf's work and texts written almost five hundred years earlier e.g. in honour of Byzantine emperors: W. AMARANTIDOU, *Uwagi o zależnościach między „Chronicon univervale” Frutolfa z Michelsbergu a „Getica” i „Romana” Jordanesa*, CPhil 3, 1999, p. 191–198.

⁵ The place of Poland in the thought of some of the above writers, treated as part of the *imperium*: A. PLESZCZYŃSKI, *Wiadomości Ottona z Fryzycji i Rahewina o Polsce na tle ich doniesień o wschodnich sąsiadach Niemiec*, RHf 81, 2015, p. 87–106.

¹ C. HØGEL, *World Literature is Trans-Imperial: A Medieval and a Modern Approach*, MeW 8, 2018, p. 3–21.

contained, among others, in the so-called *Letters of Peter della Vigna*, i.e. documents produced by the chancelleries of Frederick II, Conrad IV and Manfred (p. 69–103) on the periphery of the empire (e.g. in Bohemia or southern Italy), the Iberian peninsula, the Capetian, Plantagenet and Valois states, in Poland (interesting remarks on a certain backwardness in imitation, but there is no mention of the fact that it was only with the Angevins that certain formulas came to Poland) or in Hungary (interesting remarks on how the Angevins, then the house of Luxembourg, emphasised their universalist ambitions). On the one hand, some of them became the model for rulers and their chancellors at other European courts, from the Iberian peninsula to Scandinavia; on the other hand, research into these texts leads to the conclusion that they were not independent creations, as they were significantly influenced by the experiences of authors originating from papal circles. In the article, we can get to know the *Letters* in some detail, learn about their structure indicating that their compilers intended for them to be used as a guide (who divided the content into thematic sections to facilitate their use). The author compares the work with others written at the same time but originating in papal circles, such as the *Summa dictaminis* of Thomas of Capua, or the collection of letters by Richard of Pofi, pointing out that, for all intents and purposes, the hostile chancelleries represented the same traditions, since they were run by people who came from the same schools, belonged to similar court circles and had links with the same families. This is especially true of the so-called Campanian notaries, from southern Lazio and northern Campania.

The text by Annick Peters-Custot on the methods of presenting power by means of specific linguistic formulas at the Sicilian court of the house of Hauteville (p. 105–121) alludes to the above conundrums. At the same time, the article in question presents for the first time in the book a precise definitional distinction between the imperial language – used for political and thus, among other things, religious communication – and the language of *imperium*, i.e. the *de facto* language used in the territories subject

to a given power. The remarks on the Byzantine imperial language should also be regarded as relevant, although the overemphasis placed on the importance of Latin as a political language is a bit striking. At the same time, the author observes that Greek was a language of culture creation and philosophy, so what is missing here is the observation that its recognition in the eastern part of the empire as the main language was not only for strictly administrative reasons – the language used by the majority of subjects – but also for ideological reasons – the continuation of Roman traditions, where Greek had the status of a language of fundamental importance for defining political concepts. The introductory issues presented above lead the author to the analysis of the imperial languages of the Sicilian Norman state – according to her, such a status should be given primarily to Greek and Arabic, as it was in these cultural circles that the new rulers of southern Italy searched for models of power, only in third place leaving Latin. An important addition to the above considerations is certainly the observation that the apparent trilingualism supposed to testify to the multiculturalism of the Norman rule *de facto* confirms certain linguistic limitations faced by the rulers, since ruling such a multicultural society required the presence of parallel translations into several languages, so that the imperial language could be understood by the users of the languages of the *imperium*. From the perspective of Byzantinologists, the essay is an interesting piece on the attractiveness of the Byzantine imperial idea, which was also adapted by representatives of the ‘West’.

In Chapter Six, Aude Mairey discussed the methods by which representatives of the Plantagenet dynasty created the language of power in the context of consolidating their rule in the British Isles (p. 123–146). She mentioned, among other things, the evident references in royal rhetoric to the Byzantine heritage, e.g. Constantine the Great, the well-known Arthurian myths, and the making of the British Isles as the territory of the dynasty’s exclusive hegemony (e.g. through the actions of Edward I the Longshanks, the Hammer on the Scots). These ideas also resulted in universalist ambitions,

evident, for example, in the life course of the king of the Romans, Richard of Cornwall. The bulk of the article, however, is devoted exclusively to questions of the relationship between the Anglo-Norman conquerors and the Celtic vanquished, primarily in Wales and Ireland, not least in the context of the former's reformulation and appropriation of Arthurian traditions invoking imperial ideology.

The final text of the volume, by Benjamin Landais, takes us to a slightly later era, but nevertheless deals with virtually the same issues as the articles describing practices strictly derived from the Middle Ages. The author dealt with the communication strategies of officials representing the Habsburg dynasty in the peripheral territories of the empire (p. 147–174), taking Banat as his point of reference. Drawing on a study of the requirements for representatives of the imperial administration in the area, the historian points to the much greater importance of local languages in the administration of the province than might appear given both the fact of German colonisation (Donauschwaben) and the official, state language, which was German. It appears that not only were the then popular French and Italian often in use, with the Latin tradition playing an important role, but a great deal of importance was placed on the knowledge of local, folk languages among the imperial officials posted in this multinational area. Here, too, there is an important observation: multinational does not always mean difficult, for in such a polarised society it is easier to establish a single point of reference for all through propaganda, which would be the emperor. This is why efforts were made to ensure at least a minimum of communication between the representatives of the emperor and his subjects in the language of the latter. It seems that the general remarks in this text can be considered inspiring in the context of research on the tactics adopted by the metropolis towards the periphery in different eras and states with imperial ambitions.

A few technical comments. The individual articles have abstracts in English, likewise keywords. The texts have been published in French and Italian (on a choice basis, they are not bilingual). However, there is no listed bibliography,

we can only find literature in the footnotes. The book is supplied with brief biographical notes on the individual authors (p. 175–176), but lacks any indices. Thus, as can be seen, the work is virtually devoid of the critical apparatus required of academic publications. Despite some misinterpretations indicated above, given the substantive value of the monograph, it should have been mentioned and the book should be suggested for reading, especially to those who are interested in medieval historiography and the development of imperial ideas over the centuries.

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