"UNE ET INDIVISIBLE": VARIATION AND IDEOLOGY IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF FRENCH

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Abstract. This article is an attempt to deal with a central paradox in the history of French. That paradox may be simply stated: there is abundant evidence throughout the history of the language, from the earliest documents to the present day, of extensive, deep-seated, and persistent variation. Yet the official historiography of French emphasizes, and has always emphasized, the unity, consistency, and absence of variation of what is normally referred to (in a revealing use of the singular) as "*the* French language". This article aims to explore further this paradox, to offer an explanation of why it exists, and to show how and why it is both scientifically inaccurate and ideologically motivated.

The emergence of this particular ideological perspective, which is by no means unusual as a component part of the mythology of national languages, may be traced to a number of quite specific historical circumstances. It did not arise by accident. The first of these, which has in the past given rise to considerable controversy, is in the sixteenth century, with the Ordonnances de Villers-Cotterêts of 1539. Where this is germane to the present argument is that, in this last component in a series of pieces of legislation probably ultimately intended to ensure greater accessibility to legal documents (by imposing the vernacular at the expense of a by then incomprehensible Latin), what was in fact made compulsory was the use of *langage maternel françois* despite the fact that it was certainly not the mother-tongue of very many of the population at whom the legislation was directed. Very possibly, the intention was innocent enough, even in its way laudable; but the outcome, perhaps only the predictable result of sociolinguistic ignorance on the part of whoever drafted the text, clearly had a dramatic effect on at least the written use of non-French vernaculars in substantial areas of France. I have attempted elsewhere (Trotter 2006) to suggest that the process was not quite as uniform, as universal, or as unimpeded as is often thought; and indeed, later legislation (notably the Revolutionary decree of 2 Thermidor an II [= 20 July 1794]; Brunot 1905–1979: 9.1, 186) reveals that this attempt at imposing monolingualism in written legal texts was not indeed as successful as is often supposed (cf. Hornsby 1998: 348).

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The next significant episode (passing over the seventeenth century, to which I will return below) is of course the Revolution itself. The broad outlines of Revolutionary linguistic policies, and their far-reaching implications up to and including the present day, are well known (Certeau et al. 1975; Balibar 1979). After an aborted attempt at embarking on a wholesale translation policy, the Convention rapidly shifted direction and, equipped with the now infamous Rapport Grégoire, embarked on a two-pronged assault on what at the time (and too often since) were and are termed *patois*. The major weapon in the campaign was a very eighteenth-century use of and belief in the power of education: introduction of French-speaking primary school teachers throughout the new Republic would ensure (although presumably only for that proportion of the population who would enjoy the new system) the introduction of "le langage de la raison". The second tactic was less enlightened, and more oppressive: starting with the not altogether unfounded observation that counter-Revolution and hostility to the Republic were strongest and most effective in minority-language areas, language, speakers, and military/political opposition were conflated, and treated henceforth as "the enemy within". The language in which this opposition to minority languages and regional dialects was couched is often violent, extreme, and the antithesis of what the naive reader might expect from an age of so-called enlightenment and toleration. Amongst the better-known exponents of a sort of "linguistic Terror" may be cited the illustrious Barère, the "Anacreon of the guillotine". Barère's language is of particular interest because of the context in which it is used, and the terminology which he deploys. The immediate context (1792) is the short-lived discussion between the Girondin and the Montagnard factions, immediately after the establishment of the Convention, over whether the new Republic was to be a federal or a united structure. That is why Barère groups together the "federalism" and "superstition" associated with and allegedly promulgated by the speaking of Breton. Federalism, as much as the counter-Revolution associated with other minority languages – Basque, "allemand" (by which he means Alsatian), Italian – was the immediate enemy, both politically and in terms of the spread and establishment of the Revolution and its values. And it is in the context of the Federalist threat that the expression "une et indivisible" is first deployed. Of particular relevance here is the provenance of this phrase itself. It was conclusively demonstrated a number of years ago (Peronnet 1985) that key elements of the imagery, and indeed the underlying ideology, of the Rapport Grégoire were religious in nature: not surprising, perhaps, given that the author was himself a priest. More interestingly, however, much of the terminology which we regard as archetypically eighteenth-century, and which we continue to use (in most languages) as shorthand for the rationalist and often downright anti-clerical attitudes associated with the eighteenth-century philosophers, is both religious in origin and indeed, during the period itself, religious in meaning too. Words such as

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enlightenment, *lumière(s)*, *éclairé*, and so forth, were not, at the time, the "langage de la raison", but at best a transposition of metaphors of religion, and (in Grégoire's case) not even that. When Grégoire asks whether the peasantry of France are more or less "éclairés", he is not asking whether they have become subscribers to the virtues and ideas of the Revolution. He is enquiring after their moral (i.e., spiritual) welfare, and that is why he is also interested in the impact of the survival of *patois* on their *mœurs*, and vice versa, in a sort of application of Sapir-Whorf *avant la lettre*.[1] It is only because of the twentieth-century back-projection onto the eighteenth century of values which we chose to ascribe to it, that terms such as *éclairé*, or indeed *enlightenment* or its equivalent in other languages (*lumières*, *Aufklärung)* are construed as the key terms of the rationalist enterprise of eighteenth-century thought and ideology, rather than the development of an originally religious terminology (Schalk 1968). The expression "une et indivisible" has a strikingly similar history. First used by Bossuet in 1704 (according to Frantext),[2] the term is (and could not be more) religious, referring as it does to the arcane mystery of the Trinity. Bossuet is of course simply translating into French a theological phrase which started life in Latin, and which is attested throughout the patristic and scholastic tradition as an attempt to express one of the central tenets of the Christian faith (in, for example, the Athanasian Creed). So, when the convention declared, in 1792, that the Republic must be not federalist but "une et indivisible", it was drawing like Grégoire, and indeed like the "enlightenment" which led up to and in some respects begat the Revolution, on a religious metaphor. It is hard to believe that, at the end of the eighteenth century, men like Barère or Domergue were unaware of this. The expression has since become an integral part of Republican ideology, featuring on (for example) the 1848 seal of the Republic, as well as in modern political discourse and pro-Republican ideology (see, for example, the following website: http://notre.republique.free.fr/uneindivisible.htm). Whether its religious origins are now recognized by the majority of those who espouse these values, may be questioned.

The religious metaphor was not only applied to the political entity. Precisely how the Republic should indeed be triune is and was never explained; but be that as it may, once the metaphor had been applied to the polity thus unified; it could be and was applied to the language too. Thus, Domergue makes exactly the same point about language as the anti-federalists had made about the suggestion that the body politic could be dismembered:

[1] "Quelle est l'influence respective du patois sur les mœurs, et de celles-ci sur votre dialecte?", question 27 (Certeau *et al.* 1975: 13).

[2] "La gloire du Saint-Esprit est celle du fils de Dieu, comme la gloire du fils de Dieu est celle du père et que la gloire de la trinité est *une et indivisible*", *Méditations sur l'Évangile*, FRANTEXT (consultation: 05.05.2006)

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> Tous enfants de la même famille, nous devons tous parler le même idiome, comme nous devons tous avoir la même pensée, être mus par le même sentiment. Que l'hymne des Marseillais, que les chants patriotiques, aiguillon des citoyens dans le sein des communes, terreur des ennemis dans nos camps, puissent enflammer tous les cœurs de l'amour de la liberté, de l'orient à l'occident, du sud au midi. Effaçons les jargons, comme nous avons effacé les provinces. *La République, une et indivisible dans son territoire, dans son système politique, doit être une et indivisible dans son langage* (my emphasis; François-Urbain Domergue, Adresse aux communes et aux sociétés populaires de la République française, le 23 pluviôse an II [= le 11 février 1794], in: Busse 1985: 140–141).

A one and indivisible Republic required, and deserved, a one and indivisible language. Thus was born one of the central tenets of post-Revolutionary Republicanism: that the language of the Republic should be, and should only be, French, and that (following on from Grégoire) one of the prime functions of the national education system (previously designated "public instruction") should be to inculcate French even (and possibly especially) into those children who were not, precisely, of *langage maternel françois*. The doctrine remains prominent on (for example) the website mentioned above: it is one of a number of central principles and precepts which are axiomatic for those who espouse a Republican cause (cf. also http://notre.republique.free.fr/langues.htm). The consequence of the ideological and practical decisions taken by the Convention was clear: for French to be the (only) language of the Republic, all other languages had, indeed, as in Grégoire's phrase, to be "annihilated". The question (Rapport Grégoire no. 29): "Quelle serait l'importance religieuse et politique de détruire entièrement ce patois?" says it all. Curiously, it was not until June 1992 that the constitution of the Fifth Republic embodied this aspiration in the lapidary phrase: ("la langue de la République est le français"). At first sight, this may seem an odd and for that matter redundant observation: exactly two hundred years after the Convention established the self-same principle, the Republic incorporated it in explicit form in this *n*th draft of its constitution. The key to this apparent paradox lies in the way in which attitudes to, and legislation regarding, minority languages and regional dialects had evolved in the second half of the twentieth century. It is only with such modifications to the "Republican" principle as the Loi Deixonne in 1951, and the threat of the (then imminent) European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages in November 1992, that the necessity for such a clause must have become apparent. And again, it is no accident that when pro-Republican ideologues address the issue of the need for a "one and indivisible" language for a "one and indivisible" Republic, they should treat all such legislation, whether French or European, in favour of minority languages as essentially constituting an attack on the Republic and its principles. That, too, is probably also why (again, at two

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centuries' distance) the term "federalist" (and *a fortiori*, its vulgar transmutation into "federast") should be so effective a term of abuse in the mouths of extreme right-wingers such as Le Pen. Europe is thus simultaneously the source of federalism, anti-Republicanism, and of a perceived attack on French itself, the unity of which is an essential element in the preservation of Republican values and politics. Multiculturalism, linguistic diversity and tolerance, may be part of the rhetoric of a French president seeking to counter the influence of English (for example, at the Francophone summit at Cotonou, in Bénin, in 1995, where Chirac made a speech replete with Revolutionary language[3]), but they are fundamentally at odds with core Republican values at a much deeper level.

This, then, explains the importance of having a "one and indivisible" language for a similarly "one and indivisible" Republic. That the concept and the language should have derived from religious imagery and from one of the central problems of Catholic theology, can only have added to its initial force, even if subsequently the origin of the metaphor and its non-secular connotations have undoubtedly been lost and even appropriated by an ideology which is now officially hostile to any role for religion in state affairs. The Revolution could very well have stopped there, and indeed it did. For the Revolution, an ideological desideratum was to show how everything had changed for the better in 1789: thus, a mosaic of diverse linguistic varieties, underpinning and perhaps consciously supporting the feudal ideology of "divide and rule", had given way to the democratically accessible, unified, universal "langage de la raison" and of freedom. The Revolution, on this reading, had absolutely no incentive to rewrite the history of French before 1789 except, perhaps, in order to emphasize and exaggerate the level of variation which had existed before, and to stress the invaluable benefits of abandoning what Barère with characteristically colourful language called "ces jargons barbares et ces idiomes grossiers qui ne peuvent plus servir que les fanatiques et les contre-révolutionnaires" (Brunot 1905–1979: 9.1, 181).

Nearly a hundred years later, however, and in the face of another threat to the Republic, this time external, the ideological imperative had changed. In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, viewed by Gambetta as the victory

[3] "La francophonie n'est pas seulement un constat, un outil, une chance de promotion pour nos peuples. Elle est un idéal politique : avec patience et pragmatisme, les institutions francophones, suivant une pente naturelle, affirment une identité politique. Chaque langue a son génie. Celle que nous partageons prédispose à une certaine vision des rapports entre les hommes et entre les communautés. Une vision qu'inspirent les valeurs de la solidarité, de la fraternité ; un sens de l'universel. Cette même langue a cerné, au siècle classique, la raison humaine. Elle a porté, au temps des Lumières, les valeurs humanistes. Et depuis deux siècles, c'est en invoquant des idéaux formulés en français que les hommes et les peuples réclament la liberté et l'égalité. Ce passé nous marque d'une empreinte profonde et nous oblige. Nous sommes les héritiers d'un patrimoine intellectuel et moral qui nourrit toujours l'imaginaire et la pensée, sur les rives du Mékong, du Niger ou du Saint-Laurent, dans les faubourgs de Beyrouth ou de Bucarest, au bord de tous les océans […]" (http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/francais/interventions).

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of the "Prussian schoolmaster", thought was given to how to address the shortcomings within the educational system which were alleged to have contributed to the defeat. On the one hand, this was the period in any case of nineteenth-century nationalism, inspired by Romantic ideals, and prompted by them to seek in the past (and especially the medieval past) lessons for the present and the future. Hence the invention of French nationalist philology, or rather the importation and nationalization of the original, borrowed from Leipzig and Halle. Encapsulated in Léon Gautier's famous comment that "Sedan a fait comprendre Roncevaux" (Dakyns 1973: 203), this was to lead to the establishment of chairs of medieval literature, and to a concerted programme of indoctrination of those who would become the future *poilus* of Verdun into the martial glories of the French past. The *Chanson de Roland* was at once an emblem of the nation, of Christianity, and of Frenchness. Roland was "la France faite homme" (Dakyns 1973: 203). Gaston Paris, as well as being instrumental in the constitution of this new literary history, turned his attention to the French language, and most famously, coined the term *francien* to designate the language of the Paris region (Chaurand 1983). *Francien*, as is now widely recognized, never existed, is not documented, and is indeed singularly unhelpful in any analysis of dialectal variation in medieval French, or to any discussion on the emergence of a French proto-standard in the Middle Ages. The term and the concept were invented (and not in the etymological sense of that word) for an explicitly and deliberately teleological purpose: in order to demonstrate that "French", in the form of a standard, national language, existed at as early a date as possible. Just as the military glories of the Middle Ages (Roland, then Joan of Arc) were to act as an inspiration and support of the militaristic campaigns which would lead to *la revanche* and the repossession of Alsace-Lorraine in 1914, so the national language, symbol of national unity and of national opposition to the Prussian schoolmaster and soldier, needed its antecedents in the glorious past. And those antecedents, in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary, were to be presented as having been standardized as early as possible, so that the (in reality) new national language could be shown to be as … old as possible. How, then, was this to be achieved? In the first instance, during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, the history of French was essentially the history of literary French. As much is explicit in (for example) Meyer-Lübke's opening statement in his historical grammar, first published in 1908:

> Die Rücksicht auf das Endziel der Entwicklung, die heutige Schriftsprache, hat es mit sich gebracht, daß auch in der älteren Zeit die mundartliche Gestaltung sehr wenig berücksichtigt worden ist (W. Meyer-Lübke, *Historische Grammatik der französischen Sprache*, I: *Laut- und Flexionslehre* (^{4}1934), ix, in: Völker 2003: 4)

Yet even this seemingly anodyne (if, to modern eyes, misguided) statement is open to all sorts of questions. In the first instance, as Kurt Baldinger demonstrated

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brilliantly less than twenty-five years later (Baldinger 1957), it is by no means unequivocally the case that the modern written language ("die heutige Schriftsprache") has not been influenced by dialectal forms. Secondly, Meyer-Lübke speaks of "the final goal of development" ("das Endziel der Entwicklung"), which of course somewhat gives the game away (cf. Völker 2003:4). The pattern is clear, and it is equally demonstrated in the work of the British scholar Alfred Ewert (1933):

> The history of the French language is […] concerned with the various changes through which Latin as spoken in Paris and its environs passed, with the elevation of this local language to the dignity of a national tongue, and with its adoption and development as the literary medium of French and French-speaking people throughout the world (Ewert 1933:1).

This in many ways, is almost the exact opposite of how the process is nowadays conceived as having operated. "Latin as spoken in Paris" is itself a quaint and slightly comic idea, inescapably evoking the "escholier limosin" in the Quartier Latin. The idea that spoken Latin in Paris was then transmogrified into both the "national tongue" (somewhat before there was a nation to have such an organ: see Davies 1997), and the literary medium of the overwhelmingly illiterate population, would indeed mean that "le jour de gloire est arrivé", but it surely bears only the faintest of resemblances to any plausible reality. Only by doing fairly serious damage to the chronological evidence can this thesis be sustained. Indeed, only by presupposing the existence of evidence which, as Lodge (2004) has demonstrated, is simply absent, does the statement make any sense at all: for of course, there is simply no evidence of this "Latin as spoken in Paris and its environs" until a long time *after* the presence both early literary and non-literary texts, and of self-evidently standardized literary texts, i.e. once we really begin to have available the mechanical means of recording speech in the late nineteenth century. So Ewert's entire argument is essentially back to front. *Endziel* has become *Ausgangspunkt*. But here, too, it is an argument which is inherently teleological: if it is agreed that the literary language is what we are interested in, and that that derives from Paris, then it is indeed logical to look back to see where it all came from, to start there, and thus to travel (no doubt, hopefully) in the direction of the predetermined *Endziel*. And subsequent scholars, especially those writing in English, it has to be said, have not been slow to follow on in Ewert's footsteps:

> It is clear that, by the end of the 12th century, the speech of the Paris area enjoyed a special prestige [...] (Price 1971: 12).
> The prestige of Francien, the dialect spoken in the Ile-de-France area, increased in the northern half of the country (Offord 1990: 5).

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> The language of Ile-de-France in general, and of Paris in particular, came to be accepted as the desirable norm of speech, and consequently as at least the basis for the desirable norm in writing (Rickard 1989[2]: 39).
> Why should the variety referred to as Francien have come to be perceived as the variety to be spoken by 'those who wanted to get on' or by 'those who had made it' to the detriment of the other varieties spoken in northern France? (Battye / Hintze 1992: 15).

All these scholars contrive to make statements which (forty or more years later than Ewert) failed to take account of the production of intervening scholarship (itself not, it must be said, produced, or apparently much read, in the United Kingdom); all recycle the same dubious statements about the relationship between speech and writing; most contrive also to wheel out the (by 1990, certainly) singularly discredited notion of "francien". Discredited, that is, not only as a misplaced description of a non-existent variety, but also in terms of the implicit unity, homogeneity, and influence which the term suggests. Assumptions about this lack of variation are deeply ingrained, *et pour cause*:

> The systematic study of variation […] has tended to be regarded at best as an irrelevance that linguists must remove by judicious idealization of the data (Green in Green and Ayres-Bennett 1990: 1).

Yet no medievalist can be unaware of the existence of such variation: "La donnée concrète de l'objet littéraire en langue romane est un excès de formes manuscrites variantes" (Cerquiglini 1989: 68-69). Only a "deep-seated hostility to variation" (Lodge 2004: 7; cf. Lodge 1993: 7, quoted in Völker 2003: 3) can explain how, in the face of evidence assembled by scholars such as Pfister, Dees, Roques (1980), Greub (2003), etc., assertions of this type can continue to be made. The shortcomings thereby revealed have been criticised often enough: but it is perhaps easier to advance an even somewhat over-simplified vision of linguistic evolution than to grapple with the reality of variation writ large. And within the French tradition at least, there is another force at work: Claire Blanche-Benveniste observes, pertinently, that:

> Dans les exposés de morphologie historique, […] l'histoire, la phonétique et la morphologie semblent s'être liguées comme des bonnes forces qui mènent nécessairement à la production de la «bonne forme» (Blanche-Benveniste 1988: 20).

The insistence on early standardisation flies in the face of the objective scientific evidence – evidence available at the time when at least some of the manuals cited above were written:

> Vers 1200, on ne peut pas encore parler d'une koinè formée à partir d'un noyau linguistique parisien […] Vers 1200, le dialecte de l'Ile-de-France

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> commence à s'imposer dans la cour royale, mais sans irradiation linguistique sensible dans les régions linguistiques avoisinantes (Pfister 1993: 39-40).
> La notion de koinè écrite, ainsi que la notion corrolaire [*sic*] de scripta régionale, n'ont aucune adéquation observationnelle pour la période antérieure à 1300 (Dees 1985: 113).
> La primauté du francien liée à son caractère mesuré et central relève moins de la science que de la poésie, voire de la politique […] La genèse d'un usage écrit, traditionnel et interrégional, n'est donc pas la promotion politique d'un dialecte particulier, le francien. Elle est une pratique, qui tend à constituer un françois, langue des lettres et des lettrés (Cerquiglini 1991: 116, 118).

This brings us back to the issue of education. Education, as conceived in the nineteenth century, served a national purpose (Dakyns 1973: 195–205). The journal *Romania*, founded in 1872 in direct contrast to *Germania*, has, and not by accident, a famous epigraph from the Norman writer Wace (cf. Dakyns 1973: 199):

> pur remembrer des ancessurs / Les diz et les faiz et les murs.

So not only education, but science too was to be conscripted to serve "sous les drapeaux": Cerquiglini puts it thus:

> Pour se fonder comme science au XIX^{e} siècle, la linguistique dut se donner, par réduction, un objet stable et simple, régulier, homogène. De ce point de vue, l'ancien français, tel qu'il apparaît aux yeux des savants positifs qui entreprennent de le décrire, semble marquée d'une hétérogénéité constitutive. Car, à la variance textuelle incessante qu'offrent les manuscrits, s'ajoute l'infinie variation des formes du langage. Cette malléabilité de l'ancienne langue provoque la réflexion des grammairiens dès lors qu'ils comprennent qu'elle n'est pas toujours explicable par l'absence d'une graphie normée, ou seulement régulière. La pluralité suffixale, les alternances vocaliques radicales montrent que la morphologie est foisonnante; la multiplicité des constructions ainsi que l'apparente liberté séquentielle laissent entendre que la syntaxe est également une diversité de formes librement concurrentes (Cerquiglini 1989: 87).

What was to become *l'éducation nationale* was just that: an enterprise harnessed to national purposes. In that, albeit with a shift of emphasis, it followed the Republican and Revolutionary programme of a hundred years before. It is perhaps not altogether surprising, then, that in the competitive examinations of the French educational system, designed to create the next generation of teachers, the image of medieval French presented (for compulsory commentary in the infamous *épreuve de l'ancien français*) should be so resolutely anti-variationist, describing

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lapses from the two-case "system" of medieval French as (variously) "manquements" (Zink) or better still, as "infractions" (Bonnard / Régnier 1989: 24):

> Dès le XII^{e} siècle, auteurs et copistes multiplient les manquements, surtout ceux de l'Ouest […] Les Picards et les Champenois, plus scrupuleux et plus cultivés, ont meilleure réputation […] [Le système morphosyntaxique] se dégrade et si rapidement que, dès le milieu du XIII^{e} siècle, la langue parlée familière a déjà vraisemblablement fait litière. Les clercs s'efforcent néanmoins de le maintenir dans la langue écrite, avec plus ou moins de bonheur (Zink 1989: 33, 35)

Yet, since at least 1927 (Bédier), it has been quite well known that there is not in any single Old French text, a perfect example of the case "system" operating as the grammars say that it should:

> Si l'on met à part les plus anciens textes, ceux du IX^{e} et du X^{e} siècle, comme *Sainte Eulalie* ou *Saint Léger*, les règles de la déclinaison n'apparaissent en toute leur pureté que dans les grammaires modernes de l'ancien français (J. Bédier, *La Chanson de Roland commentée* (1927), in Ayres-Bennett 1996: 63).

Perhaps it is didactically essential to introduce some simplification when dealing with so complex and often chaotic a mass of material. Yet the end result is to require would-be teachers to describe an immensely varied and variable language (and a language in which such variation is not only endemic but fundamental) as though it was nothing of the sort. Simplification for pedagogic purposes leads to a travesty of scientifically-recognized reality (Lagorgette 2003). Rabelais wrote that "conscience sans science n'est que ruine de l'âme" (*Pantagruel* ch. VIII), but this is the opposite, education not at the service of and informed by science, but driven by an ideological need to demonstrate that the language is and was indeed " une et indivisible", even though it is not and was not any such thing.

Thanks to the ALF, the FEW, the new NALF, and, now, the DRF, there is a vast amount of incontrovertible evidence which demonstrates the variability of language in modern France. Much of the knowledge embodied in these remarkable reference-works was of course available first-hand in the late nineteenth century, at precisely the time when the programme for the rewriting of the history of French was being activated. Meyer-Lübke's historical grammar of French was published a year before the (revised version of the) Schwan-Behrens grammar of Old French, part three of which is a still in some respects unsurpassed summary survey and documentation of medieval French dialects. Nineteenth-century scholars like de Wailly (1868) or Suchier (1887, 1911) happily normalized their texts in the direction of precisely the ancestor of modern French which they took to be the central, Ile-de-France or "francien" form. This was not done out of ignorance, and indeed it demands very considerable knowledge to do this sort of thing. It was done

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deliberately, because that is what they thought the texts had originally been written in, before ignorant scribes damaged them (Rothwell 2005), and how they should be edited. But in the process, countless details of evidence of variation were eliminated from the history of French and a fundamental truth was forgotten: "Leur ancien français était meilleur que le nôtre" (Möhren 1997: 138). Since then, our awareness of the diversity of medieval French, like that of modern French, has increased still further, notably with the advent of materials such as the atlases published by A. Dees in the 1980's (Dees 1980, 1987). Moreover, investigation (long overdue) of quantities of not only non-literary, but relatively "lower-register" material representative of the attempts at writing of non-aristocratic and uneducated people, has led to a slowly growing awareness that the relative regularity (in grammatical matters) of the literary texts is by no means universally shared. Whilst we can never have access to a true range of sociolects of medieval or early modern French, it is possible to aspire to greater awareness of the diaphasic and diastratic range than has hitherto been achieved. Amongst other things which consideration of less literary registers have brought to light is the predictably greater number of "infractions" – of all sorts – which may be encountered in less elevated material, in some but by no means all instances occasioned by contact with other languages (Trotter 1997; 2003a; 2003b). Moving forward in time, even the seventeenth century, normally regarded as not only the apogee of classical perfection and stability (at the time and since), on closer inspection, preserves documentary evidence of more irregularity and variability than has hitherto been supposed (Ayres-Bennett 2004; Ernst 1985; Ernst/Wolf 2001–2005).

In the final section of this article, I want to return to the central question of this perennial diversity, and to demonstrate how it works in the case of one, specific example.

The concept concerned is SPLEEN, for which there is considerable variation (in lexis) across France, both in the medieval period and now. 'Now' in practice means 'in modern times', at roughly the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth centuries, with the compilation of the ALF and then the FEW, complemented later by the NALF series in the mid- to late-twentieth century. In all these case, of course, the fact that the informants would have been elderly at the time when the research was carried out, means that the real linguistic time of the recorded data is probably several decades before the collection – let alone the publication – date. Be that as it may, the case of the words used for SPLEEN (both human and in dialectological surveys, more commonly animal) is indicative of a general pattern, and one also explored to good effect by Yan Greub in recent work on regionalism in Middle French (Greub 2003) and on the continuity of regional variation (Greub 2005). The pattern may be summarized as one of **continuity in variation**: modern evidence correlates with past evidence (often to an astonishing extent).

The particular word of interest here is the relatively rare French *mice*, Francoprovençal and Occitan *melsa*. Against the 'normal' reflexes of Latin < SPLEN, and *rate* or dial.: *ratel(le)* < ML *rata*, Gallo-Romance preserves also a rival

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Gmc. word < *MILTIA (FEW 16,558a), attested in English, German, Dutch, etc., and giving reflexes also in other Romance languages (FEW: Italian, Aragonese, Catalan: cf. REW 5579). This could not be regarded as a 'standard' word in either medieval or modern French, but it exists, and its existence proves that there was and is diatopic variation within French of a type which runs counter to the 'unidimensionalist' (Lodge 2004: 250) ideology of French language historiography.

There is only one text known to contain the word (*mice*, *miuce*) in O.F. (mid-s.xiii ChirAlbT, glossary s.v.); there are no other strictly French attestations in FEW, TL, Gdf; and the word is not attested in AN despite proximity of ME (*milte* glosses *esplen* in BibbR 159 and in other glossary sources), cf. MED **milt(e**.
It is amply attested in modern-day Lorraine, the presumed regional origin of ChirAlbT (cf. ALLR carte 305; Zéliqzon 1924: 452a; Bloch 1915 sub **rate**). A plausible working hypothesis is thus that the hapax Lorraine attestation is a survival of an earlier stage in the spoken language, which modern dialectal usage preserves, as it were, below the surface of the written standard which was superimposed on the Lorraine *scripta* of the Middle Ages, from the fifteenth century or so onwards.The word is of course of a type which does not readily lend itself to being recorded in everyday documents – or perhaps, the type of documents in which it is possible that it might have been recorded are not the type which are likely to have survived. ChirAlbT is a rare, north-eastern French surgical treatise, and a comparatively rare witness to Lorraine French of the thirteenth century; in other medical – all from elsewhere – other terms are used: this is the case in early-s.xiv Mondeville (HMondB), as well as in the mid-s.xiii translation of Roger Frugard's *Chirurgia* (in HuntAgnMed), and in the (Picard) *Chirurgie* of the Abbé Poutrel (ChirPoutreS) from c. 1300. There is one similarly isolated example in (Swiss) Francoprovençal (Fribourg 1400); five medieval Occitan texts preserve the word, two from Foix: the mid-s.xiv *Elucidarium* (Eluc), presumably the source of FEW 16,558a (= Rn 4,484a) and also (but not recorded FEW, Rn, Lv) AlbucE, s.xiv$^{2/4}$); plus three s.xv Languedocian attestations in RecMédC (*ricettari* from Auch and Chantilly; Tarn-et-Garonne, Haute-Garonne?), all unknown to the dictionaries (Ø FEW, Rn, Lv). Again, all of these last are technical or scientific texts.

A second 'wave' of forms is attested (a) in modern Francoprovençal, in both France and Switzerland, and (b) with a sufficiently wide distribution across much of southern France to suggest that the word was general in Occitan (FEW 16,558a). The medieval attestations from s.xiv/s.xv are thus to be regarded not as isolated *examples*, but as isolated *evidence*. As well as the simple attestations by normal transmission there are also 'Ablaut' forms which add broadly to the existing picture. One of these (FEW) in the Haut-Rhin (*mɔ̃zɛl*) seems likely to be a result of local Alemannic influence (Alsacien) but it has been mapped in accordance with the implied FEW categorization; REW 5579 cites a very similar form 'lothr. *mzel*'.

In addition to the above (all classified under FEW type I), there are then two further 're-importation' waves: from Italian into S.E. France (FEW type II) and

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from Germanic dialects (FEW type III): Wartburg says from 'd[eutsch]' but the distribution in N.E. France, and the predictable appearance of the word across Walloon-speaking Belgium, suggests a range of adstratum varieties as the sources of the Romance forms.

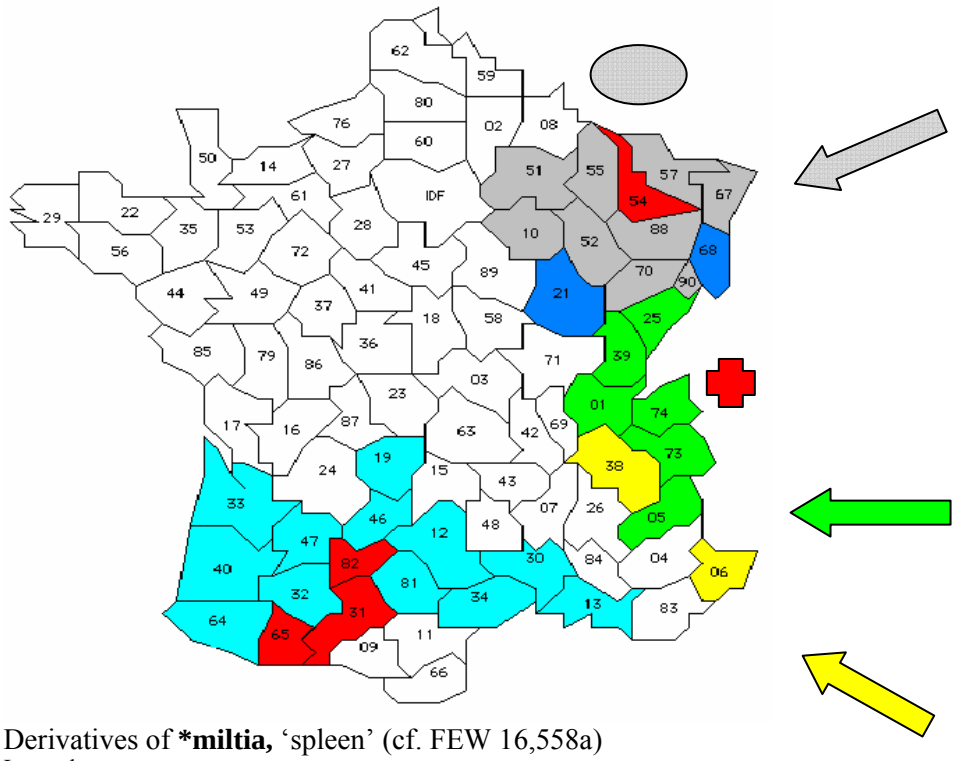
The distribution/evidence for reflexes of ***miltia** needs also to be set alongside the pattern of the competing terms: *esplen* (< SPLEN) and *rate* (< RATA, etymology disputed). The former (*esplen*) is attested (FEW 12,200a; Gdf 3,535c; TL 3,1218; Ø Rn; Lv 3,269a; AND **espleen**) from 1250 onwards (BibbR) in French; the FEW reports an isolated case of a locution in medieval Occitan ('c.1250' = Rn 2,104b or Lv 3,269a?), but this is in fact an expression ('manjava a gran espley' Rn 2,104b, 'mangeait à grande hâte') which Lv corrects to 'in grosser Fülle, sehr reichlich' (Lv 3,269a), rightly assimilates to Rn 3,183b **esplec**, 'abondance, satiété, excès', but then – dubiously and perhaps unnecessarily – decides is an isolated attestation of *esplen* ('es ist doch ein *esplen* anzusetzen, von dem ich allerdings keine anderen als die bon R. beigebrachten Beispiele kenne' – which should perhaps have been a danger sign. Far preferable to leave the two relevant Rn quotations (Daude de Pradas, Peire Cardenal) as instances of a semantic extension of *esplech* to mean 'abondance, satiété, excès', and keep the spleen out of it (cf. the ambivalent comments by PCardL 136). RecMédC adds to this shaky evidence a number of attestations from all three manuscripts edited (s.xiv: Princeton; s.xv: Auch, Chantilly), from the Haute-Garonne/Tarn-et-Garonne area of the western Languedoc (RecMédC glossary sub **esplen**). *Esplen* appears to be the 'normal' form in French medical texts from the Middle Ages (e.g. ChirPoutreS, HuntAgnMed, HuntMed). *Esplen* is connected to the CL *lien* (ThesLL 7^2,1377) and both appear (EM4 s.v.) to go back to the same, Indo-European root.

Rate (FEW 16,673a; GdfC 10,478b; TL 8,333; Ø Rn; Ø Lv; AND **rate**[1]) is attested from s.xii onwards throughout France; the diminutive *ratelle* from s.xiii, «veraltet seit anfang 17. jh.» (FEW 16,673b) is common in Francoprovençal and Occitan dialects.

Rebecca Posner, writing on diachronic change in French, has stated that:

> The more remote an object or event in time and space, and the less sound information we have, the freer we feel to speculate: it is usually assumed that change was occurring with great rapidity in Late Latin and in Old French, but that the pace of change has slowed to almost a halt since the seventeenth century. But if we are interested in the mechanisms of change, rather than in reconstruction of the past, it is in the present that we may find answers (in conformity with the uniformitarian principle, that things in the past do not differ essentially from the way things are now) (Posner 1997: 2).

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Derivatives of ***miltia,*** ‘spleen’ (cf. FEW 16,558a)
Legend:

medieval attestations: Switzerland, afrb. 1400 (FEW 16,558a); Occ., «Foix 14. jh.», Eluc, transl. of *Elucidarium* (Rn4,184a); additional attestations not known to FEW, in RecMédC, *ricettari* from Auch and Chantilly (s.xv), languedocien; O.F.., s. xiii = Chir AlbT (= FEW type I)

simple reflexes, modern Francoprovençal (FEW 16,558a, type I)

simple reflexes, modern Occitan (= FEW type I), cf. also THESOC (http://195.221.140.202/) from which is taken the ALG attestation from 40 Landes

modified forms (“Ablaut”), FEW 16,558a, only indicated in those places where there is no simple reflex (Burgundy: ALB carte 1360, lacking in FEW)

FEW 16,558a, forms derived from Italian, itself having taken the word from Lombard (langobardisch), REW 5579 (= FEW type II)

forms directly borrowed from “d[eutsch]” (= various Germanic dialects?), «in früherer zeit», FEW 16,558b (= FEW type III)

Even were we to subscribe to this in some respects rather odd view, it is clear that what the evidence demonstrates is that throughout the history of French, the unity which proponents of the Revolutionary and Republican ideals seek is in fact nowhere to be found. ‘Things in the past’ indeed ‘do not differ essentially from the way things are now’, or if they do, then they do so in a process which historians would call change over *la longue durée*:

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> La reconnaissance d'un continuum entre les variétés linguistiques n'a pas que des implications en rapport avec le modèle descriptif. Elle est aussi liée à une conception du changement linguistique, lequel, au lieu d'être une suite de discontinuités entre des structures homogènes, est appréhendé comme une série de transitions graduelles (Francard 1991: 379).

Over the duration of the history of French so far, it is indeed a case of *plus ça change* – or not –, *plus c'est la même chose*. Slowly but surely, the historiography of the language is itself changing, to accommodate that reality, a reality which has been, until recently, not so much "une et indivisible", as "une et … invisible".

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