

Porck, Thijs, Kees Dekker, and László Sándor Chardonnens, eds. 2025. *Cultural Connections between the Continent and Early Medieval England: Philological Studies in Honour of Rolf H. Bremmer Jr.* Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. Pp. xiii + 311. ISBN 9781843847526.

Reviewed by Rafael J. Pascual 
University of Granada
rjpascual@ugr.es

Professor Rolf Bremmer, the honorand of the volume under review, is well known among colleagues both for his distinguished scholarship and for his personal warmth and bonhomie (something nicely reflected in the photograph of the honorand on p. ii). As a learned Anglo-Saxonist and a non-native speaker of English, he is moreover someone for whom I have long felt genuine admiration, and I therefore welcome the publication of this volume as a cause for celebration. As the editors note, Bremmer held two professorial chairs at Leiden University, “Frisian Language and Linguistics” and “English Philology.” While his contributions to Old Frisian studies were already honoured in a festschrift published in 2017, the purpose of the present volume is to celebrate his contributions to English philology, a field with which all essays included here engage in one way or another.¹

In their introduction, the editors define philology as a mode of textual study grounded in close reading and in the analysis and interpretation of language. Languages and texts, they argue, are at the core of philology. One is therefore hardly surprised to read that Bremmer, speaking of language and literature, often used the phrase “We do both.” This volume will appeal to all those who, like me and many others in SELIM, believe that the divorce between linguistic and literary scholarship (a divide characteristic of many Departments of English these days) is both artificial and detrimental to medieval English studies.

The other major theme of the collection, as the title suggests, is the connection between Anglo-Saxon England and the European Continent, a topic close to the honorand’s heart and one which the editors eloquently connect with philology itself: Anglo-Saxon authors, in their zeal for interpreting texts, could themselves be regarded as philologists, and it was through Continental scholars such as Isidore of Seville that they came into contact with philological methods. The

¹ Research for this piece was funded by the State Research Agency of Spain (AEI) through the Ramón y Cajal programme (grant ID: RYC2022-035374-I).

introduction also contains interesting observations on the Leiden philological school and on Continental figures as important for Old English studies as Franciscus Junius. Those unwilling to see medieval English studies as a discipline artificially constrained by national borders will therefore want a copy of this book on their shelves.

The twelve essays collected in the volume are organized into four sections. The first of these, "Parallels and Differences," explores the connections between England and Frisia in the early Middle Ages through two contributions: John Hines's "The 'Anglo-Frisian' Runic Zone: From Context to Concept" and Andrew Rabin's "The Evolution of Legal Reasoning in England and Frisia, 900–1300." The parallels between Old English and Old Frisian are so striking that they have long attracted the attention of scholars, who have generally sought to explain them on a diachronic basis. In an essay that successfully combines philological and archaeological methods, Hines revisits the concept of the Anglo-Frisian runic zone and argues that it is best understood in terms of synchronic functional relations. Rabin, meanwhile, traces the progressively diverging development of legal reasoning in England and Frisia between the ninth and twelfth centuries in a contribution notable for its historical sensitivity and careful avoidance of presentism. Taken together, the two essays demonstrate the continuing value of comparative approaches to early medieval England and Frisia.

The second section, "Interactions," comprises three essays. The first of these is Gale R. Owen-Crocker's "International Conversations: Multilingualism among Elite Anglo-Saxons and Normans." Owen-Crocker begins with a scene in the Bayeux Tapestry which has, in her own words (65), long troubled her, namely scene 14 (a black-and-white image of which is usefully reproduced in the chapter), in which Harold Godwinson and William the Conqueror are represented in heated conversation. Could that conversation, the author asks, actually have taken place? After surveying a varied body of evidence bearing on multilingualism in Anglo-Saxon England, Owen-Crocker concludes that it is not unlikely that Harold used French in that exchange, especially in the light of his overseas travels and the often lengthy duration of international stays in the Middle Ages. Multilingualism is a concept more commonly associated with Middle English studies, and so its application here to Anglo-Saxon England is both welcome and stimulating—this is, I believe, a chapter from which historical sociolinguists would profit greatly.

The second essay in the section (and the fourth in the volume) is Concetta Giliberto's "Two Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Saxony: Ewald the Black and Ewald the White." Here Giliberto reconstructs the life and legacy of these two English missionaries to the Frankish Empire (both martyred in Saxony towards the end of the seventh century) through close reading of sources such as the *Calendar of St Willibrord*, the *Metrical Calendar of York*, the *Old English*

Martyrology, and especially Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*. Their lives and martyrdom are interestingly presented as testimony to the deep sense of moral responsibility underlying English attempts at the Christianization of Continental Germanic peoples. The third and final contribution in this section is Richard North's "'Worse than Heathens!' English Kings and Charlemagne in 786–96." In a characteristically learned essay, North seeks to answer the question "What did Charlemagne think of English kings?" through a survey of Alcuin's views on England, which are taken as reflecting those of Charlemagne himself. North concludes that Charlemagne probably held the view that Offa's faith was fraudulent, while also maintaining that Offa's response to Charlemagne may be regarded as the first instance of an English foreign policy.

Section three consists of four chapters. In "The Iconography of the *oculi mentis* on the Fuller Brooch as a Visual Kenning," Loredana Teresi argues that the imagery of the *inluminatio* (ultimately of Continental provenance) may be understood as analogous to the workings of kennings, or metaphorical compounds, in Germanic poetry. Readers who enjoy essays such as John Leyerle's (1967) famous piece on the interlace structure of *Beowulf*, in which parallels are drawn between poetry and visual art, will find Teresi's contribution particularly appealing. In "Consuming (in) the *Dialogi*: Food and Gardens in Werferth's Old English *Dialogues*," David F. Johnson contends that, although Gregory's *Dialogi* have traditionally been associated with hagiography, they are better understood as closer to *exempla*, a literary genre that came fully into its own in the thirteenth century. Johnson concentrates on stories dealing with the consumption of food in the Old English *Dialogues* before analysing how they are subsequently read, or consumed, by the so-called Tremulous Hand of Worcester. The essay demonstrates how Gregory the Great, despite being traditionally associated with Anglo-Saxon England, continued to exert influence well beyond the Norman Conquest. In so doing, Johnson establishes a meaningful connection between Old and Middle English literature, something which is much to be commended.

"The Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts of Caesarius of Arles," by Thomas N. Hall, the third contribution in this section on "Intellectual Influences," opens with an impressively learned survey of the impact of Caesarius's writings on the literature of Anglo-Saxon England, including Bede, Alcuin, Boniface, Ælfric, anonymous homilies, legal texts such as I Æthelstan, and the Exeter Book poems *Christ III* and *Vainglory*. The body of the chapter consists of an informative list of thirty-four manuscripts of Caesarius written or owned in Anglo-Saxon England, followed by an equally informative list of seven Continental Caesarius manuscripts with English connections. The chapter concludes with a number of insightful observations, among them the fact that Caesarius's *Sermo* 175 on Christ's post-Resurrection appearances is known only from English textual

witnesses, and with a call for renewed research into the influence of this important Gallic bishop. Hall observes that it is unlikely that new Anglo-Saxon manuscripts of Caesarius will be discovered, though, in the light of Elisabetta Magnanti and Mark Faulkner's recent discovery in Rome of a new version of Cædmon's *Hymn* in a manuscript of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, one has perhaps lost some confidence in such characteristically prudent observations.

The *Liber monstorum*, an eighth-century teratological treatise closely associated with Aldhelm and *Beowulf*, lies at the core of the next and final contribution to section III of the volume: Claudia Di Sciacca's "Criss-Crossing the Channel: Isidore, Aldhelm, Thomas and All That (Monstrous) Jazz." Di Sciacca focuses on two therianthropic or hybrid creatures, centaurs and onocentaurs, a decision partly justified by what she calls "a distinctive English fondness for hybridisation" (217)—a stimulating concept which I suspect may well lie behind several possibly comic moments in *Beowulf* (see Pascual 2021). The essay analyses the influence of Continental authors such as Isidore of Seville and Jerome on the configuration of the *Liber monstorum*, before tracing the treatise's subsequent influence on the work of Thomas of Cantimpré. In so doing, Di Sciacca demonstrates that literary influence across the Channel was bidirectional, and in establishing a connection between an Anglo-Saxon work and a thirteenth-century author the essay also interestingly parallels Johnson's contribution to the present volume.

Section IV, "Manuscript Connections," opens with Annina Seiler's "*Mæw* or *Meg* ('Seagull')? Mercian Dialect Features in an Early Old English Glossary from the Continent," one of three essays included in the section. Seiler examines a corpus of approximately twenty-five Old English glosses to Latin words preserved in St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 913 and notes that, although the glossary has been associated with the school of Theodore and Hadrian, it had never received detailed linguistic analysis. Her essay addresses that gap through a careful examination of graphemic features, such as the doubling of vowel graphs to indicate vowel length and the use of the digraph <ae> for <æ>, together with phonological phenomena including smoothing, second fronting, and the use of *ȝ* for *w* in nouns with stems in *īwa* and *i*—for illuminating comparisons with the recently discovered version of Cædmon's *Hymn*, see Magnanti and Faulkner (2026, 15–16). On the basis of this evidence, Seiler argues that the glosses, strikingly homogeneous linguistically, were produced by a speaker of West Mercian around the middle of the eighth century. As such, they are not only among the earliest surviving witnesses to Old English, as Seiler notes, but also intriguingly close to the language of *Beowulf*, a connection which may well deserve further exploration (for possible connections with the date and provenance of *Beowulf*, see Fulk 1992, 381–92 and Neidorf and Pascual 2014).

In the next contribution, “Riddling across the Channel: The Poems on fols 1r and 35r–v of Brussels, KBR, ms. 1828–30,” Patrizia Lendinara studies a series of additions made to the manuscript cited in the title. The codex consists of two parts differing in both date and provenance. The second part (fols 36–109) was probably copied in England before making its way to the Continent, where it was eventually bound together with the first part, a tenth-century manuscript containing Arator’s *Historia Apostolica*. Prior to this binding, however, eight Latin poems, one of them by Alcuin, had been added to the first part of the manuscript by one or more twelfth-century Continental hands. The poems analysed by Lendinara, and the circumstances of their transmission, bear witness to the enduring popularity of riddling verse on both sides of the Channel (and so this chapter will be particularly appealing to readers of Old English riddles).

The final contribution to the volume, László Sándor Chardonnens and Kees Dekker’s “*Quid Saxonica cum magia?* Old English in an Early Modern Manuscript,” examines British Library, Sloane MS 3822, a composite folio manuscript of 175 paper leaves assembled by Elias Ashmole (1617–92), the well-known antiquarian whose interests extended to magic and the occult. The manuscript’s heterogeneous contents centre on astral or astrological image magic, a form of Arabic ritual involving sigils. Its oldest layer was copied around the turn of the seventeenth century by the astrologer-physician Simon Forman (1552–1611), who included an Anglo-Saxon alphabet together with a Pater Noster in Old English ultimately deriving from Ælfric’s translation of Matthew as preserved in MS Bodley 343. These two items, located respectively on fols 138r and 139r of Sloane MS 3822 and helpfully reproduced on pp. 275 and 278 of the present volume, may have been added because Forman regarded them, in the authors’ words, as “codes to long lost yet recoverable, hidden truths” (287). The essay is learned and stimulating, and I would be curious to know what Ælfrician scholars and those interested in the Old English metrical charms make of it.

The volume concludes with a bibliography of Bremmer’s publications on Old English philology, including the doctoral dissertations supervised by him, together with a general index, an index of manuscripts, and a *tabula gratulatoria* testifying to the international respect and admiration inspired by Professor Bremmer, a figure in whom medieval philology has found a tireless and inspiring ambassador.

References

- Fulk, Robert D. 1992. *A History of Old English Meter*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Leyerle, John. 1967. "The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37: 1–17.
- Magnanti, Elisabetta, and Mark Faulkner. 2026. "A New Early-Ninth-Century Manuscript of *Cædmon's Hymn*: Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Vitt. Em. 1452, 122v." *Early Medieval England and Its Neighbours* 52 (e9): 1–18.
- Neidorf, Leonard, and Rafael J. Pascual. 2014. "The Language of *Beowulf* and the Conditioning of Kaluza's Law." *Neophilologus* 98: 657–73.
- Pascual, Rafael J. 2021. "Hrothgar's Warhorse and the Audience of *Beowulf*." *Medium Ævum* 90: 123–32.

(Received 10/05/2026)