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## **Origins of the French Lexical Borrowings in Late Middle English Weaponry**

### **Abstract**

According to Philip Durkin (2014) French borrowings constitute a great part of the formation of new words in late Middle English, varying between 39% in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century to 17% in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (45% and 23% respectively if we include those whose origin is unclear, whether Latin or French). Among the number of French lexical borrowings incorporated during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, we may find native Romance terms as well as some others from different sources thanks to the previous contact of French with other languages. Most of the borrowings in the military terminology of the period have a French origin. Funk (1998: 221) mentions that most of the English words that concern the science of war are of French or French-Italian origin. Likewise, the military terminology in French contains a great amount of lexical borrowings from other languages that will be later incorporated in English. Duval (2009: 19) makes reference to the importance of the Frankish influence in the French lexical domains and activities related to war. The data base of this research is made up of 175 terms, which are limited to nouns referring to offensive and defensive weapons, from 67% to 74% of those items are borrowings from French. Most of them have a native Romance origin, but there are also terms from Celtic, Germanic and other languages. This paper focuses on the analysis and quantification of the French lexical borrowings in the late Middle English terminology of weapons, including borrowings first incorporated from Norman French and later from Central French. The main goal is to trace back the origins of those lexical borrowings and their acceptance into English and to analyse its quantitative impact on the late Middle English lexicon, a period during which many new terms were introduced from other languages that substituted and changed notably the native traditional vocabulary the English language previously had.

*Keywords:* Languages in contact, lexical borrowings, etymology, French, Middle English, military, war, medieval weapons.

No other European language is known to have changed so much in such a short period of time as English, from the pretty much pure Germanic Old English to the “Romanised tongue” of the early Modern English

period (Belda 2002: 33). These changes took place mostly during the Middle English period<sup>1</sup>, in which one of the major features is the amount of lexical borrowings<sup>2</sup> that English incorporated from French<sup>3</sup>. After the conquest of England by the Normans under William the Conqueror, French had become the language of the ruling class of the kingdom, and together with Latin these two languages had overshadowed English, which will be gradually gaining prestige once again during the period. With the introduction of a new nobility, a new clergy and soldiers from Normandy, French had become the language of the aristocracy and high clergy of England (Baugh & Cable 2009: 112). Even when English was becoming again the national language of England in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, lexical borrowings from French kept being incorporated into the language. According to Philip Durkin (2014) French borrowings constitute a great part of the formation of new words in late Middle English, varying between 39% in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century to 17% in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (45% and 23% respectively if we include those whose origin is unclear, whether Latin or French). This influence was so intense that some authors, like Stockwell & Minkova (2001) even say that “English becomes a hybrid”.

Sometimes the limits between the conventional division of Middle English into early Middle English and late Middle English are established depending whether the influence was mainly coming from Norman French<sup>4</sup> or from Central French<sup>5</sup>, like for example Fisiak (2004: 10) or Baugh and Cable (2009: 168), placing the division line in 1300 and 1204 respectively. In this article we will focus on elements in texts that appear between 1325 and 1500, since those are the years of the late Middle English period according to the third edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Durkin 2014), which will be one of the main tools to develop this research.

Military terms are directly linked with war<sup>6</sup> and during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries there are a series of military conflicts, mainly those from the *Hundred Years' War* (1337-1453) between the kingdoms of England and France, and also the *War of the Roses* (1455-1487) in England itself, through which takes place the so-called *Medieval Military Revolution*<sup>7</sup>. According to Funk (1998: 218) “during war-days science is working at fever heat to devise new weapons and new services; manufacturers are developing new products... and for all of these, names must be found. The burning action of war creates new military terms”. At the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the military equipment used by soldiers was not very different from that of a Gothic warrior by the last years of the Roman Empire (Oakeshott 1998: 76). The armament

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- 1 The Norman conquest began a process that would move English culture further from the Germanic tradition of the Northern Sea and come closer to the Romance speaking cultures of the continent, especially that of France (Short 2007: 12).
  - 2 “A word that at some point in the history of a language entered its lexicon as a result of borrowing” (Haspelmath 2009: 36).
  - 3 In this article, with the term *French* we make reference to the group of dialects known as *langue d’Oïl* which include “normand, picard, bourgignon et français” (Tritter 1999: 18).
  - 4 *Norman French* is the variety spoken in Normandy that came to England. It is known also as *Anglo-French* or *Anglo-Norman*. The last denomination is used by those who conceive the French language of England as a more distinct variety, whereas the other two are used by those to whom it is a continuation of the Norman dialect spoken on the continent (Duval 2009: 49).
  - 5 The variety spoken in the Île de France that from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards will influence both English and other varieties of French.
  - 6 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the term *war* is a borrowing that got into Vulgar Latin from a Germanic language replacing *bellum*. We can find it in many Romance languages (Spanish and Italian *guerra*, French *guerre*, etc.) In English was incorporated from Norman French.
  - 7 According to Ayton & Price (1998) it refers to the transformations taking place in the late Middle Ages, among which the changes in offensive and defensive weaponry are one of the most relevant features.

was becoming more and more obsolete as offensive weapons were improved causing the need to make better defensive armour and vice versa<sup>8</sup>. Military terminology is one of the semantic fields more affected by French lexical borrowings, we can find many examples still used in present day English, like *archer, ambush, arms, army, banner, battle, buckler, captain, combat, chieftain, dart, defence, enemy, garrison, guard, hauberk, lance, lieutenant, mail, navy, peace, retreat, sergeant, skirmish, siege, spy, stratagem, soldier, etc.* (Baugh & Cable 2009: 171).

It is hard to know up to what point the military terminology that we can find in the written texts of the period was used normally by English speakers in oral communication. Blake (1992: 531) points to Caxton as one of the most important figures in the aforementioned *romanisation* of the written language, replacing many native terms with French ones, especially in his translated books, so we can expect written literary works to have a high number of French lexical borrowings<sup>9</sup>.

Military terminology can include many different aspects depending on the point of view of a particular study, (clothes, ranks, tactics, tools etc.). In this article we will focus on the offensive and defensive pieces of weaponry used by the infantry, archers and cavalry, including those of the horses used in battle. Firearms are excluded although certainly they were starting to develop during those times but their use in war was rare and are viewed more as siege weapons or artillery<sup>10</sup>. There are some terms included that refer also to civil tools, that apart from their general ended up being developed also as weapons<sup>11</sup> and the same happens with some pieces of clothes.

Apart from the aforementioned French influence, we must remember that since the 12<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the period, we can find in England a multilingual society influenced by many languages and cultures<sup>12</sup>. We must mention that of Latin, especially by the end of the period, and also the Celtic languages spoken mainly in the North and the West of Britain. Latin remained as the most prestigious language during the whole Middle-Ages and was mainly a written language. Sometimes it is hard to identify a term as having a French or Latin origin in English, they can even be incorporated from Latin first in French and then through this language get into English. It can be even more complicated if according to Burnley (1992: 433) English uses the derivation processes it inherited from French to adopt a Latin term. In the case of weaponry terms we should not expect a lot of terms from Latin since lexical borrowings coming from this language in Middle English are normally associated to scientific, technical or religious fields (Horobin 2007: 68). In the case of the Celtic languages they belonged to both the Goidelic and Brittonic groups<sup>13</sup> and kept on having a continuous influence on English through the period. Other languages in contact with Middle English were Middle Dutch and Middle Low German, due to commerce and their relatively near geographical location. Italian was starting to gain importance at the end of the period as well.

8 "As an example, some of the weapons that were being used in the period were the battle-axe, the mace or the flail, designed rather to crush armour than to pierce it". (Gillingham 2005: 37).

9 "...courtly literary works tend to employ many more French loans, particularly true of works that are translations of French originals" (Horobin 2007: 68).

10 According to Oakeshott (1997: 97-98), some small guns were used by the English in Crécy in 1346 and then became bigger and heavier.

11 "... les ouvriers font appel à les outils qui sont régulièrement mentionnés dans les chroniques guerrières" Beffeyte (2005: 50).

12 "We can find the meeting point of four different cultures in contact: its own, the Celtic, the cross-channel French and the international Latin tradition...the stage was set for innovation." (Short 2007: 193).

13 Old Celtic languages are divided in the *Brittonic*, *Goidelic* and the extinct *Celtiberian* groups.

We must take into consideration that English had been in a contact situation with other languages also in the centuries before, whose influence can be found in Middle English texts. Old English had been influenced mainly by Latin, Old Norse and the Celtic languages spoken in Britain before the arrival of the Germanic peoples. Although Latin had arrived in the territory with the Roman expansion, it is generally assumed that it did not influence much the Celtic languages spoken in Britain at the time like it happened in other places<sup>14</sup>. The main influence on Old English will come with Church Latin<sup>15</sup> and most lexical borrowings are related to this particular field. The Celtic languages spoken in the territory belonged to the Brittonic group and according to several sources they had a very small impact on Old English. On the contrary the influence of Old Norse during the days of the Danelaw was far more considerable in a lot of aspects. Many authors have different opinions regarding the contact of the language with English<sup>16</sup>.

Since this article will focus on the origins of the French lexical borrowings, we must remember that French had also been in contact situations with other languages before having its influence on English. Even though one of them is a Romance language and the other a Germanic one, both French and English have some points in common in this respect from a historical perspective; both were established in a territory where Celtic languages were spoken, both suffered later from Germanic invasions and both were influenced by Latin. In the case of French, the Celtic influence on the language had been also small but relatively higher than in the case of English<sup>17</sup>, the arrival of the Franks to Roman Gaul had an impact on the vocabulary of the variety of Vulgar Latin that will later become French<sup>18</sup> and Latin<sup>19</sup>. So the lexical borrowings from French can have a native origin or any origin from the languages we mentioned and others.

Since this article is concerned with weaponry, we must mention that most manuals mention military terms as one of the semantic fields in French with a high number of lexical borrowings from Frankish<sup>20</sup>. Some of these terms will end up in the English vocabulary via French. Like English, the Frankish language belongs to the West Germanic subfamily of languages, so in this case some terminology will come from a Germanic language into a related Germanic language via a Romance language. Another Germanic language that will be in contact with French is Old Norse, with the Viking settlement in the territory that

14 The use of Latin was limited to some urban areas and the surroundings of military posts, so it is very likely that spoken Latin in Britain did not survive the fall of the Empire (Herman & Arias 2013: 21).

15 "Latin was retained as the language of both oral and written communication in the Church through the use of Bible readings, commentaries, sermons, songs and prayers in Church services" (Clackson & Horrocks 2011: 295).

16 According to the traditional and most established view the degree of influence was intense like in any bilingual society with many lexical borrowings especially in fields where it is not common that they appear (Townend 2002). Thomason (2001) and Dawson (2003) propose that the result of the contact of the two languages is a koiné. For Emonds (2011) Middle English is not English with Old Norse influence but Norse with Old English influence, an "anglicised Norse" (2011).

17 According to Duval (2009: 16) we can find some 150 terms of Celtic origin in Modern French.

18 It is assumed that Frankish is the Germanic language from which most of the Germanic terms of French come from. Some authors, like Posner (2006: 233) think that the incorporation of Germanic elements in the vulgar Latin of northern Gaul was gradual instead of suddenly with the arrival of the Franks. We can find from 600 to 700 Frankish terms in Modern French (Duval 2009: 19).

19 As mentioned before it is sometimes hard to distinguish native French terms from vulgar Latin and later incorporations during the Middle Ages.

20 Some examples *butin, escarmouche, espion, flèche, guerre, hache, trêve* or *troupe*. (Walter 1994: 236). Many of them will get into other European languages through French.

will later become Normandy, but unlike in the case of English, its influence was scarce<sup>21</sup>. Later on, other languages, mainly Germanic and Romance, like Middle High German, Middle Low German, Middle Dutch or Italian will also have their influence on French, due mainly to their geographical location.

So *a priori* we can expect to find a considerable number of lexical borrowings in this field, especially from French and a good number of them with ultimate origins in the Frankish language.

There are two related objectives in this research, the first one is to provide quantitative results about the French lexical borrowings and native terms or borrowings from other languages in Middle English weaponry. The second one is to provide quantitative results about the ultimate origins of the French lexical borrowings.

In order to achieve these goals, a list with a selection of terminology has been created using the *on-line* version of the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) from the University of Michigan and both the *on-line* and print versions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*). This research focuses on nouns since they constitute most of the lexical borrowings, other word classes are less frequent. (Durkin 2014: 44). Figurative terms (such as *steel* or *brand* to refer to the sword) are excluded. In the case of derivatives formed in Middle English from borrowed roots, they will be treated as borrowings. Obviously borrowed compounds will be treated as borrowings and compounds from native terms as native, but compounds formed in Middle English with a borrowed term and a native term (*loanblends*) will be treated and quantified as both. The criteria of inclusion of a term in the list are that the term refers to a military weapon according to the requirements mentioned before and that it is a written text between 1325 and 1500. This can be done attending to the definitions and dated quotations from direct sources of the period, offered by these two dictionaries.

The list consists of 175 terms, the forms given are chosen from those that the *MED* provides as entries<sup>22</sup>. The two elements of the *loanblends* created in Middle English will be taken separately. The terms are (in an alphabetical order): *abilement, aketoun, alet, anelas, appareil, arblast, armature, armes, armure, arwe, assaut, atir, aventaille, bacinet, baselard, bard, bat, battle-axe, bavier, besagu, bideu, bil, blasoun, bokeler, bolt, bord, boue, brace, brandellet, brest, brest-plate, briganders, brinie, broche, chaucer, chaumfrein, clubbe, coife, coler, corset, coutel, couter, cover, crosse-boue, curasse, culter, daggere, da-pacem, dart, doublet, fauchette, fauchoun, flauncher, fleil, forke, gauntelet, genulere, gere, gisarme, glaive, gore, gorger, gorget, greves, gusset, habergeoun, hache, hachet, halberd, harneis, hauberk, helm, helmet, hod, horete, jakke, jaumbe, jaumber, jaumbeus, javelot, jesseraunt, ketel-hat, knif, knivet, lange-denes, launce, launcegai, legharness, lesarde, levour, lome, mace, maillet, maille, main-fer, malle, martel, materas, misericorde, moton, ombre, ord, paitrure, palet, pane, paunce, pauncere, paunsone, pavise, pece, pectoral, peitrel, pisane, plakart, plate, pol-axe, poleine, polron, prikel, quarrel, quirre, quiser, quisseu, quisson, raft, rere-brace, rere-dos, rouel, sabatine, sabatoun, salette, sax, scouchoun, sheld, shin-baude, shitel, sithe, skene, sleve, sling, solier, spar, sparthe, spaudeler, spere, splete, splente, spud, staf, steng, stomacher, stufte, surcote, sword, takel, talevace, targe, target, tasse, thwitel, toile, tonlet, trappour, umbrel, umbrere, vaumbrace, vaumplate, viser, voider, vumbarde, wede, wei, wepen, wifle, wonde.*

The first number offered here represents the number of terms with a high certain origin in the language mentioned while the second one offers also those with a probable but dubious origin in the language or any other. The percentages are offered in rough numbers, the first one represents terms with high certain origins in the language and the second one the sum of both certain and probable origins:

21 It can be seen in the toponymy of Normandy and some maritime terms (Renaud 1989: 145).

22 In the cases where the *MED* does not give an entry, that in modern form of *OED* will be used.

- Native terms: 30 / 3 (17% - 19%)
- Old Norse: 9 / 4 (5% - 7%)
- Celtic<sup>23</sup>: 1 / 1 (0.5% - 1%)
- French: 118 / 12 (67% - 74%)
- Other languages (Middle Dutch and Middle Low German): 3 / 2 (2% - 3%)
- Unknown<sup>24</sup>: 1 (0.5%)

As expected the number of lexical borrowings from French (118 terms and 12 with a probable French origin) outnumber by far those from other languages and even native terms<sup>25</sup>. These are *abilement*, *aketoun*, *alet*, *appareil*, *arblast*, *armature*, *armes*, *armure*, *assaut*, *atir*, *aventaille*, *bacinet*, *baselard*, *bard*, *battle* (-axe), *bavier*, *besagu*, *blasoun*, *bokeler*, *brace*, *brandellet*, (brest-)plate, *briganders*, *broche*, *chaucer*, *chaumfrein*, *coife*, *coler*, *corset*, *coutel*, *couter*, *cover*, *curasse*, *daggere*, *dart*, *doublet*, *fauchette*, *fauchoun*, *flauncher*, *fleil*, *gauntelet*, *genulere*, *gisarme*, *glaive*, *gorger*, *gorget*, *greves*, *gusset*, *habergeoun*, *hache*, *hachet*, *halberd*, *harneis*, *hauberk*, *helmet*, *horete*, *jakke*, *jaumbe*, *jaumber*, *jaumbeus*, *javelot*, *jesseraunt*, *launce*, *launcegai*, *lesarde*, *levour*, *mace*, *maillet*, *maille*, *main-fer*, *malle*, *martel*, *materas*, *misericorde*, *moton*, *ombre*, *paitrure*, *palet*, *pane*, *paunce*, *pauncere*, *paunsonne*, *pavise*, *pece*, *peitrel*, *pisane*, *plakart*, *plate*, *poleine*, *polron*, *quarrel*, *quirre*, *quiser*, *quisseu*, *quisson*, *rere-brace*, *rere-dos*, *rouel*, *salette*, *scouchoun*, *solier*, *spaudeler*, *stufte*, *surcote*, *talevace*, *target*, *tasse*, *toile*, *tonlet*, *trappour*, *umbrel*, *umbrere*, *vaumbrace*, *vaumplate*, *viser*, *voider* and *vumbarde*. The terms with a dubious incorporation from French in Middle English are *anelas bat*, *bideu*, *bord*, *forke knivet*, *pectoral*, *sabatine*, *sabatoun*, *shin-baude*, *stomacher* and *targe*.

In order to examine the ultimate lexical origins the main tools will be both the *OED*, the *MED* complemented by *Le grand Robert de la langue française* and Meyer Lübke's *Romanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Derivatives and compounds will be treated like in the previous quantification. Among the French lexical borrowings, including those with a dubious origin we can find the following numbers and rough percentages:

- Native French terms: 74 / 8 (62% - 82%)
- Latin: 4 / 2 (3% - 5%)
- Germanic<sup>26</sup> (esp. Frankish): 17 / 5 (13% - 17%)
- Celtic: 6 / 3 (5% - 7%)
- Italian: 4 / 0 (3%)
- Occitan<sup>27</sup>: 0 / 4 (0% - 3%)
- Middle High German: 1 / 0 (0.77%)
- Middle Dutch: 1 / 0 (0.77%)
- Old Norse: 1 / 0 (0.77%)

23 Most likely these terms entered English from the Celtic languages of Britain in the Middle Ages and not in Old English times.

24 *Spud*. According to the *OED* this term has an unknown origin. Although from its form and its meaning we can estimate that it could be a term with at least an ultimate Latin origin.

25 As mentioned before we include also compounds formed in English in which one of the terms has a French origin.

26 This cover term refers to older Germanic languages like Frankish or Gothic, other Germanic languages like Middle High German, Middle Dutch or Old Norse, which are also quantified.

27 Dubious native Occitan terms or with ultimate origins in other languages, esp. Iberian Romance languages.

- Arabic<sup>28</sup>: 1 / 2 (0.77% - 2%)
- Unknown: 3 (2%)

We must remember that this is not a quantification of Old or Middle French weaponry but only the terms that will be later incorporated in English via French. As we can see in these rough percentages based on weaponry, the lexical borrowings from French that we can find in Middle English do not only intertwine the history of the English and French vocabularies but also that of the languages that French had contact with, whose words will end up being part of the English lexicon. As we can see more than half of the elements have a native French origin (62%–82%; *abilement, alet, appareil, arblast, armes, armure, assaut, atir, aventaille, bacinet, baselard, bat, battle(-axe), bavier, besagu, bideu, bokeler, bord, brace, (brest-) plate, broche, chaucer, chaumfrein, corset, coutel, couter, cover, curasse, fauchette, fauchoun, fleil, forke, genulere, glaive, gorger, gorget, jaumbe, jaumber, jaumbeus, levour, mace, maillet, maille, main-fer, martel, ombre, paitrure, palet, paunce, pauncere, paunsone, peitrel, pisane, plate, polron, quarrel, quirre, quiser, quisseu, quisson, rere-brace, rere-dos, rouel, scouchoun, solier, spaudeler, sur(-cote), toile, umbrel, umbrere, vaumbrace, vaumplate, viser, voider and vum(-barde)*). Dubious terms are *coler, daggere, horete, jakke, stuffe, pane, stomacher, tasse*) and there is a considerable number of elements from the Germanic languages with which Vulgar Latin got in contact in the area that today is northern France (13%–17%; *aketoun, blasoun, brandellet, coife, dart, flauncher, gauntelet, habergeoun, hache, hachet, hauberk, helmet, malle, (launce-)gai<sup>29</sup> partly (sur-)cote, targe, target*). Dubious terms are *gisarme, pane, stuffe, tasse, trappour*). Celtic influence is relatively higher than in the case of English (5%–7% *javelot, launce, launce(-gai), materas, pece, tonlet*). Dubious terms are *anelas, moton, trappour*), Latin is surprisingly low (3%–5%; *armature, doublet, misericord, pectoral*). Dubious terms are *anelas, coler*) in this field, and there are some languages like Middle Dutch (0.77%; *plakart*), Middle High German (0.77%; *halberd*), Occitan (0%–3% All of them dubious: *gusset, sabatine, sabatoun*) and Italian (3%; *briganders, pavise, salette, talevace*) that are near to French in geographical terms, so contact between speakers could have been more or less frequent. More striking is the case of Arabic (0.77%–2%; *jesseraunt*). Dubious terms are *bard* and *(vum-)barde* where lexical borrowings could have been incorporated from other Romance languages or directly in French due to the contact with Arabic speakers in the times of the Crusades. Finally, it is quite surprising to find a term from Old Norse (0.77%; *harneis*), whether it came directly or via other language is not clear.

The information here included comes partly from the contents included in my PhD thesis which will be concluded by September 2016 with the title *Orígenes y tipología de los préstamos léxicos en la terminología armamentística en inglés medio* supervised by Dr. José Ramón Belda Medina in the University of Alicante (Spain). This study consists of an exhaustive study of the terms concerning military weaponry in Middle English, dealing with both the origins and typology of lexical borrowings in Middle English with an individual analysis of the terminology included in this article.

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<sup>28</sup> Probably via other Romance languages.

<sup>29</sup> *-gai* has a Gothic origin according to *LGR*.

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