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MULTILINGUALISM IN EARLY MEDIEVAL BRITAIN

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Multilingualism in Early Medieval Britain

Elements in England in the Early Medieval World

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Abstract: In the words of its own historians, pre-Norman Britain held five languages and four peoples. Yet in modern scholarship, Old English is too often studied separately from the other languages that surrounded it. This Element offers a comprehensive synthesis of the evidence from the pre-Norman period that situates Old English as one of several living languages that together formed the basis of a vibrant oral and written literary culture in early medieval Britain. Each section centres around a key thematic topic and is illustrated through a series of memorable case studies that encapsulate the extent to which multilingualism appeared in every facet of life in early medieval Britain: religious and scholarly; political and military; economic and cultural; intellectual and artistic. The Element makes an overall argument for the dynamic extent of transcultural literary and linguistic culture in early medieval Britain before the arrival of the Normans.

Keywords: multilingual, transcultural, early medieval Britain, Old English, Celtic languages

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