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Fall 2017: Fren 700, Old French / Ancien français
Course # 26344

This course is designed to give an introduction to reading texts in Old French, and to understanding approaches to medieval French literature in general. It aims to give you some preparatory history of the language and information about historical context and culture, so that you can understand the origins and general development of Old French and its literature. This kind of grounding should enable you to handle the MA and PhD reading lists in an informed way. It is a literature class, but perforce with a concentration on the language component that will be an important part of our close reading. We will look generally at how Old French emerged from Latin, and see how vernacular literature grew and blossomed in the High Middle Ages. My aim is to get you reading as soon as possible, and the bulk of the semester will be devoted to textual discovery. There are a few rules (plus many exceptions!) and techniques that help us interpret Old French, but the very best way to develop reading proficiency is to plunge straight in: grappling with the language builds the familiarity that will increase your comprehension. We will also explore the interpretive possibilities of medieval texts and how to approach analysis of them. My aim for this class is quite simply to introduce you to the literature and culture that produced some of the greatest works in French and paved the way for what followed. Some key readings will be in OF only, with others available in dual language texts for speed.

What will we read? In OF, Aucassin et Nicolette, a selection of lyric poetry, 2 lais of Marie de France. In OF/MF, with sections read in OF, la Chanson de Roland, Le Chevalier au lion.

Texts:
1. Corpus de la littérature médiévale des origines au 15e siècle. Available online through Watson Library. It has an online dictionary, and all the 900 texts in it are searchable (very useful for final projects, if you are working on lexical issues!). And I recommend Greimas (A.J)’s Dictionnaire de l’ancien français jusqu’au milieu du XIVe siècle (ISBN 2033403270) - we have copies in our departmental library you can use, and there are copies for check-out at Watson. If you are building a library, I suggest purchasing one on a second-hand site like Alibris or Abebooks, where they are often very cheap.