FREN 848: The Plantagenets: Ideology and the Court in 12th and 13th Century France Professor Caroline Jewers

2.00 MWF

The aim of this course is to explore some of the most important works of the French High Middle Ages through the optic of contemporary court politics and culture. Our particular point of focus will be the some of the many works associated with the Plantagenet courts of Henry II and Aliénor d’Aquitaine, and their troubled offspring. The role of political ideology in the literature of this period is extensive, and vital to our understanding of why romances, chansons de geste, and lyric poetry proliferated as they did. The Plantagenet dynasty, the Angevin kings of England, ruled an empire that extended over more than half of France: they were, perhaps, the most important patrons of literature in Old French and Occitan, and their encouragement of the arts was clearly an expression of their political power, as well as a reflection of their glittering courts. The elaboration of the myth of King Arthur owes much to his adoption as their icon: as we shall see, the Capetian kings of France, chief political rivals to Plantagenet power, made use of the legendary figure of Charlemagne in a similar way. Using a variety of genres and readings, we will look at how literature serves as a vehicle for feudal ideology. We will also consider the importance of architecture and other art forms. In addition to the literary works, there will be critical readings, and readings that give historical context. The class will consist of close readings of text (one read in OF, and the rest in parallel Lettres gothiques OF/Modern French editions), assigned secondary literature, and discussion. There will be a class presentation, a mid-term exam, a final exam, and final paper.


Selected lyric troubadour/ trouvere poems from the MA/PhD list (photocopies).