The Values of French Language and Literature in the European Middle Ages

http://www.tvof.ac.uk/

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Our two over-arching research questions:

1. What is the relation historically between language and identity in Europe?
2. How are cognate languages demarcated from each other?

Why Old French?

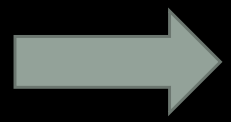
- No standard form, rather a collection of dialects, with no discernible single centre linguistically, culturally, or legally until c. 1300
- Spoken and written by non-native speakers for pragmatic reasons in a range of places in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East
- Culturally hegemonic, but the language is owned more by a class than a people or nation
- The differences and borders between Romance languages were not institutionally policed in the Middle Ages which means that the question of linguistic differentiation is more vexed
- The use of French as a supralocal written language for pragmatic and cultural purposes troubles the distinction between Latin and the vernacular that is so important to many areas of post-classical, pre-modern studies

The main objectives of *The Values of French* are:

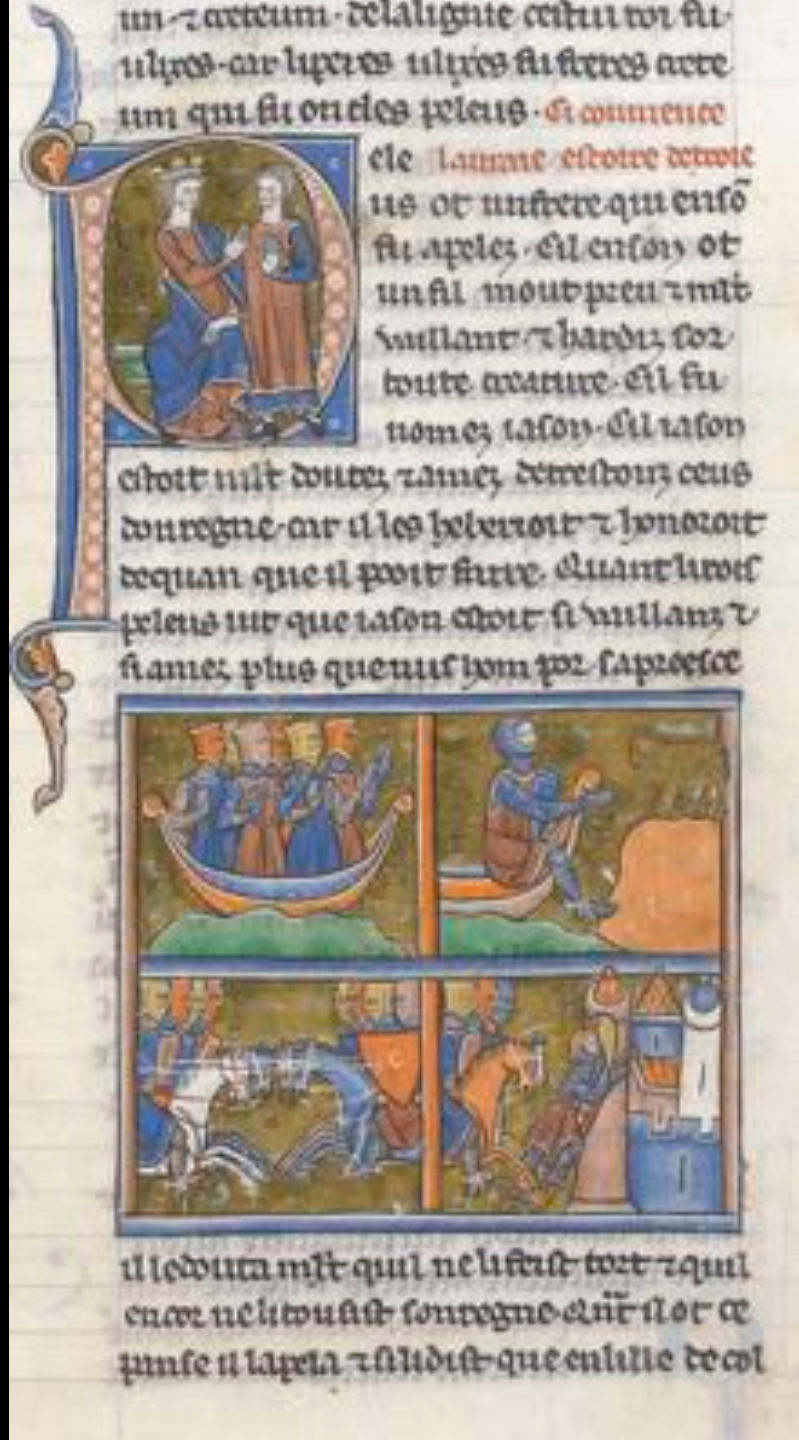
1. To develop a better understanding of the values of the use of French as a transnational and supralocal language in the Middle Ages (1100-1450).
2. To investigate the role that French played in the emergence of a European, transnational and supralocal identity (as opposed to a specific French national identity) at a crucial point in history (i.e. 1100-1450).
3. To conduct empirical research on a sizeable body of under-researched material that is central to the writing of European history in the Middle Ages, the so-called *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, in order to make this material available digitally.
4. To engage in more speculative, theoretical, and genuinely interdisciplinary enquiry about the contours of individual languages and linguistic definition, using medieval French as a case study.
5. To engage in more speculative, theoretical, and interdisciplinary enquiry about the nature of the 'literary' and its relation to the conception and practice of historical writing.

The four seams of the project

1. Editions of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*
2. The nature of French in the Middle Ages
3. History and literature in the Middle Ages



4. Questions of European identity



What is the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* and why use it for this project?

- Origin and dissemination outside France
  - First redaction: Flanders (?) or Acre, early 13th c. (Genesis-Cesar)
  - Second redaction: Naples, c. 1330-40
- Ideas about European history and identity
- Largely unedited (and therefore neglected), but this raises interesting disciplinary questions

Histoire ancienne, first and second redactions

BnF f.fr. 20125 (Acre, 1280s)

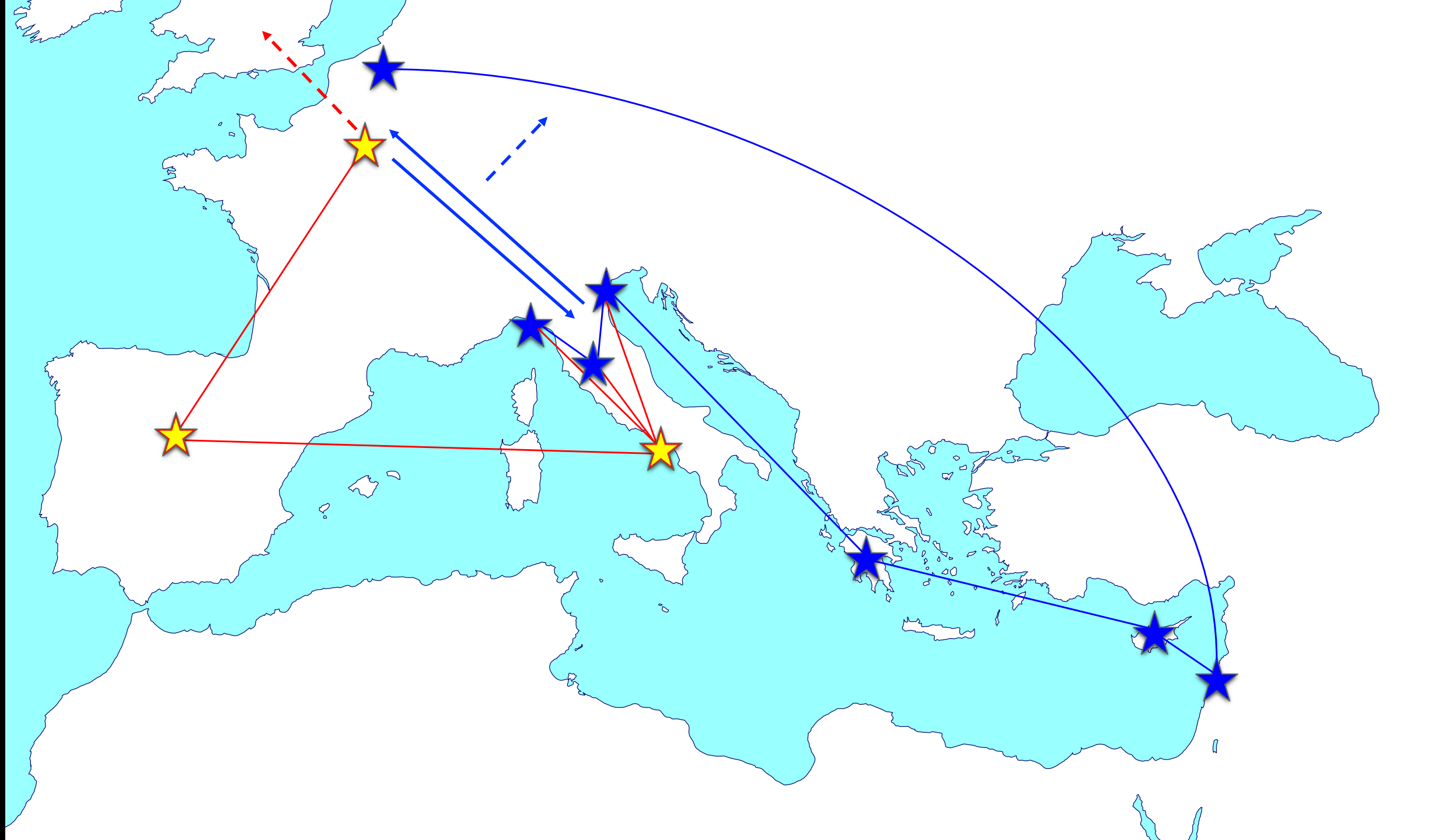
- Genesis: ff. 1-83
- Orient 1: ff. 83-89
- Thebes: ff. 89-117
- Greeks and Amazons: ff. 117-123
- Troy: ff. 123-148
- Aeneas: ff. 148-179
- Rome 1: ff. 179-199
- Orient 2: ff. 199-220
- Alexander: ff. 220-256
- Rome 2: ff. 256-369
- Conquest of Gaul by Caesar: ff. 369-375

British Library, Royal 20 D I (Naples, c. 1330-1340):

- Thebes: ff. 1-21
- Greeks and Amazons: ff. 21-26
- Troy (prose 5): ff. 27-193
- Aeneas: ff. 194-214
- Orient 2: ff. 214-223
- Rome 1: ff. 223-245
- Rome 2: ff. 246-363

Manuscript tradition

- Extensive (> 85 manuscripts)
- Enduring (13th c. to the late 15th c.)
- Wide geographical scope (northern France/Flanders, Acre, Italy, Spain, England …)
- Approach informed by actor-network theory



1. Editions of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*

Aims

- Produce the first complete edition of the *Histoire ancienne,* in both semi-diplomatic and interpretative forms
- Offer researchers the possibility of comparing multiple witnesses of the *Histoire ancienne,* and the tools to search and analyse them

What is innovative about our approach?

- Traditional philology searches to recuperate the 'text' behind the manuscript (manuscript = imperfect material manifestation)
- Our interest lies in the influence of time and space on language usage => begin with the manuscript

Our chosen manuscripts (1)

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 20125

- Origin: c. 1275-1280, Acre? Northern France?
- Most extensive witness of the first redaction
- Verse prologue and moralisations (present in only two other copies)
- Strikingly coherent system of segmentation at the level of the ‘paragraph’ and in terms of the punctuation of textual units
- Sophisticated and complex syntax
- Rich lexis
- Trajectory (annotations in Catalan, possibly added in Eastern Mediterranean)

Our chosen manuscripts (2)

London, British Library, Royal 20 D I

('2nd redaction')

- Origin: 1330-1340, Naples
- Earliest known manuscript of the second redaction, including new Troy section
- Different textual organisation and segmentation
- Verse passages omitted, prosified, or written as prose
- More abbreviated text (possible links to the northern French tradition)
- 'Italianisms'?
- Trajectory and possible influence

Manuscript number 3 tbc…

Digital methods and technologies

(1) Edition

- Born digital: transcriptions encoded in oXygen using XML (Extensible Mark-up Language), following TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) guidelines
  - flexibility
  - open access
- The encoding is tailored to our research questions
- Our files are structured according to the segmentation of the manuscript

Transcription in XML

```
        [et] a sa segnorie que nus ni ot nient sil non en nulle creature<pc rend="1"
        /></seg>
    </ab>
</div>
<div type="1" xml:id="edfr20125_00359" n="80rb">
    <head type="rubric">de ce encore ausi parole<pc rend="4"/></head>
    <ab>
        <seg type="2" xml:id="edfr20125_00359_01"><q type="NI">Segnor</q> ne fu mie
            merueille q[ua]r de plus crueuse espee ne peust mie estre destrainte ne
            assaillie la contree<pc rend="1"/></seg>
        <seg type="4" xml:id="edfr20125_00359_02">Tuit fure[n]t ensi sosmis au roi fors
            les terres des prestres que li roi deuant lor auoient asises<pc rend="1"/>
            [et] cil prenoient lor uiures tant seulement des frome[n]s le roi sicom lor
            prouendes deuisees lor estoient<pc rend="1"/></seg>
        <seg type="4" xml:id="edfr20125_00359_03">Ensi passerent li<num>·vi·</num>an qui
            a non orent li an de besoigne<pc rend="1"/> [et] de destrece si e[n]tra li
                septimes<pc rend="1"/></seg>
        <seg type="4" xml:id="edfr20125_00359_04"><persName>Ioseph</persName> qui bien
            sot le termine dou tans qui deuoit ramener la leece fist assa[m]bler deuant
            lui les pueples<pc rend="1"/> [et] les gens de tot le regne<pc rend="1"/>
            [et] ne mie a un ior ne trestoz ensamble<pc rend="1"/> mes en pluisors
            parties si co[m] il uenoit as bones uiles<pc rend="1"/> [et] si lor dist<pc
                rend="5"/></seg></ab>
</div>
<div type="1" xml:id="edfr20125_00360" n="80rb">
    <head type="rubric">Coment <persName>ioseph</persName> parla as pueples
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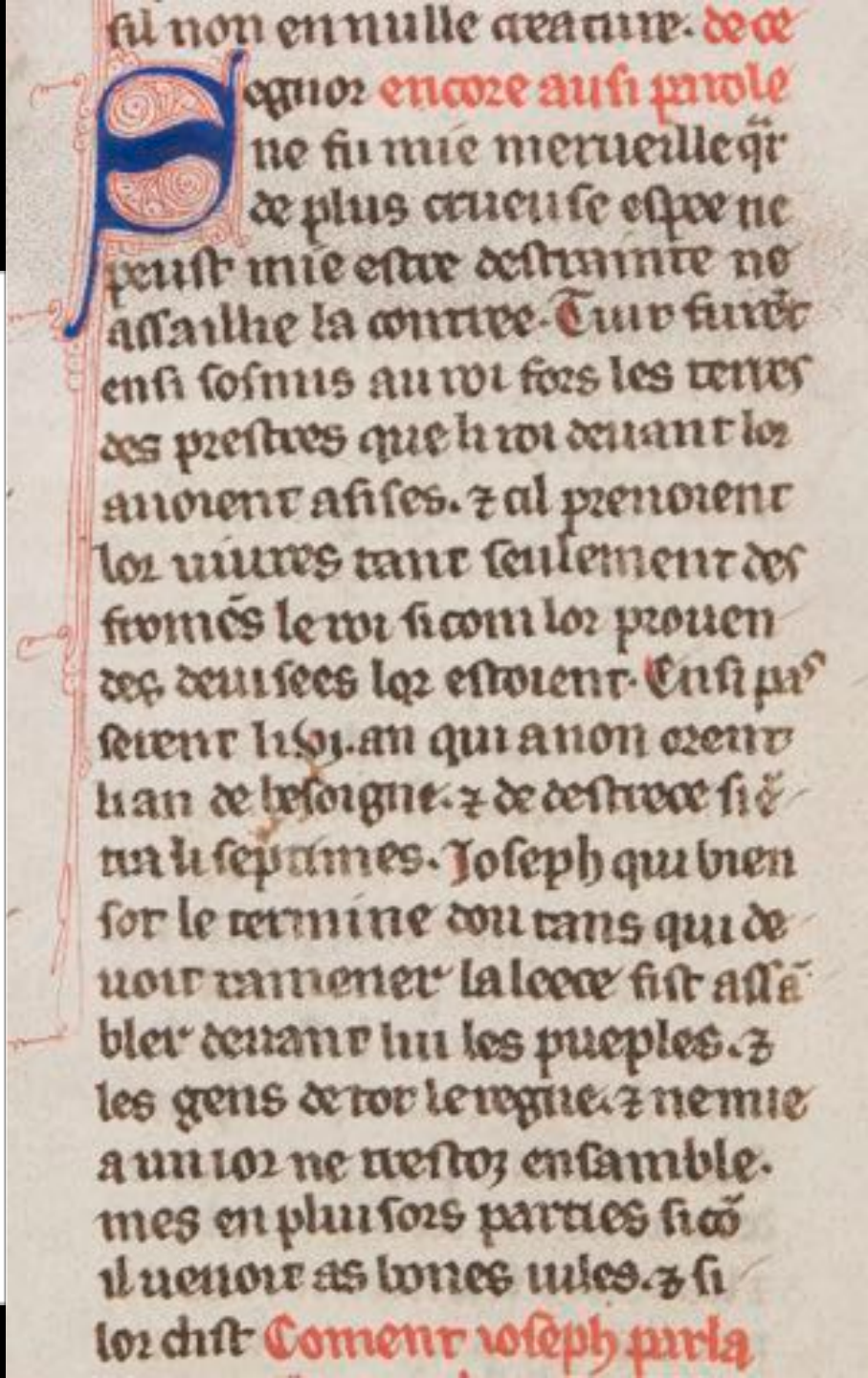

Proto-edition

Readers will be able to compare:

- Diplomatic & interpretative texts
- Fr. 20125 & Royal

http://www.tvof.ac.uk/histoire-ancienne

What will all this give us?

- An edition of a hitherto unedited text
- A new approach to editing, based on the manuscript rather than the text
- A searchable linguistic database that is designed for scholars in linguistics, not just literary scholars
- A searchable database for discursive features that again are of interest to linguists, not just literary scholars

2. The nature of French in the Middle Ages

1. What is (a) language?
2. What is literature? 'literary' versus 'non-literary' discourse?
3. Literacy / Orality: Communication?

Miniature of the Tower of Babel, *Histoire ancienne*, BL, Add. 25884 (4/4 14th c.; France)

[t]he term "text language" is intended to reflect the fact that the linguistic activity of such languages is amenable to scrutiny only insofar as it has been constituted in the form of **extant texts, which we might think of as its "native speakers", even if we can't interrogate them in quite the same way as we can native speakers of living languages**. Another crucial difference between text languages and living languages is that the data corpus of a text language is finite; new data only become available when previously unknown documents are discovered, whether in the form of manuscripts, printed texts, tablets, etc. (Suzanne Fleischman 2001, 34)

Verse vs. prose

Histoire ancienne, §698_05

Mais je ai sovent oi dire [et] si est verites provee, que **tels** cuide vengier sa honte, **qui** durement l'acroist [et] amonte.

But I have often heard it said, and it is a proven truth, that such a man thinks to avenge his shame when he in fact greatly increases and adds to it.

Por ce dit l'om en reprover:
'**Teus** quide sa honte venger
Qui en dobles l'aoite e creist'

(*Chron. des ducs de Normandie*, 35953-35955)

For this reason, the proverb says: such a man thinks to avenge his shame when he in fact doubles it and increases it.

Verse *in* prose

mais | ie ai souent oi dire [et] si est verites | provee que tels cuide uengier sa | honte qui durement lacroist [et] amonte

§698_05 (f. fr. 20125, f. 198v^{b}, L5 f. 122v^{a})

Mes ie ais souuent oy dire | | [et] si est uerite prouee q[ue] tel cuide sa honte | uengier q[ui] m[o]lt durement la croist [et] amo[n]|te ·

(D f. 145r^{a}-145r^{b}, B f. 188v^{a}, L 173v^{a}, Pa f. 181r^{a}, Rennes f. 202v^{b})

3. History and literature in the Middle Ages

- A theoretical reflection grounded in a case study.

- To investigate the categories of 'history', 'fiction' and 'truth' as they were understood in the Middle Ages, rather than simply applying the modern notions of 'history', 'fiction' and 'truth' anachronistically.

- Working categories:

vernacular rhetoric : **vernacular texts considered to belong to different genres in fact have a shared rhetoric deriving from oral delivery** (e.g. *formulae*, pragmatic references…), but transmitted by writing.

historical knowledge : factual truth (i.e. what actually happened) vs. interpretative truth (i.e. causal relations between events; moral meaning of events).

History, fiction and truth?

The corpus

- 12th- and early 13th-century texts in French, but with a broad European circulation: *chanson de geste*, *roman d'antiquité*, *Histoire ancienne*, *Faits des romains*.
- Supra-local dimension: reception in the multilingual Italian culture of the 13th and 14th centuries.
- These French texts are an exceptionally successful vernacular conduit and repository for knowledge.

European literature is an “intelligible unit,” which disappears from view when it is cut into pieces. Ernst Robert Curtius (1953)

Europe is not so much a place as an idea, Peter Burke (1980)

Europe is both a region and an idea, Robert Bartlett (1993)

although the idea of Europe was available in this period, it was rarely highly productive before the fifteenth century and when used often exclusive or normative. Concern for Europe is a post-medieval phenomenon, with … particular and … changing contours.

People who thought about toponymy at all, even mapmakers, who thought about it all the time, rarely used the word Europe (Latin *Europa*) to describe the geographical or cultural entity we now call Europe. The word of choice among the dominant groups in society, at least from the eleventh century on, was *Christianitas* (Christendom). We may learn a great deal from this fact. Europe was where Latin Christians—Roman Catholic Christians—dominated the political and demographic landscape.’ (William Chester Jordan, ‘”Europe” in the Middle Ages’, in Pagden, *The Idea of Europe*, pp. 74-75).

T/O maps from Isidore manuscripts:

Ci dient li pluisor qu'Eneas ot un frere Friga fu nomes qui avec Eneas ne s'en ala mie ains remest en Frige c'est en la terre de Troies · et o lui sa maisnee mais quant il vit quil n'i poroit arester qu'il ne li convenist estre de sous autrui segnorie; il s'en parti et o lui grans gens toz de sa contree et de sa lignee et lor femes et lor enfa[n]s et si se mistrent en mer en nes q[u'i]l orent faites faire et apareillees · Cist alerent mout par mer et en pluisors lius se combatirent et por ce q[u'i]l ne voloient estre de sous nuilui poeste · si ne voloient il estre en nul lui arestant entretant si morut Friga et il firent roi d'un fill sien Fra[n]chion ot a non · et tels i a qui dient qu'il fu ses nes · mais mout estoit prous chivaliers et de grant force · Fransios erra tant par mer qu'il vi[n]t en Europe · et la issi il a terre · si porp[ri]st le regne entre le Rin et le Dunoe ou adonc n'avoit habite ne mes nulle humaine creature · Segnor cil puplerent cele terre quar d'aus criut et issi mout grans pueples · E de ces dient li pluisor que li Fransois issire[n]t et orent non fransois por lor roi qui estoit preus et hardis et Francion ot a non en lor premerain language ·

Many say that Eneas had a brother who was called Friga who did not go with him, rather he stayed in Frige, which is a land dependent on Troy, and with him all his household, but when he saw that it was not possible to stay there, since he did not wish to be subject to another lord, he left and with him many people from his land and lineage, and their wives and children, and they set out to sea in ships they had built and equipped. They travelled far and wide by sea and fought in several places since they wished to submit to no one and to settle nowhere until Friga died, and they made one of his sons king, who was called Franchion. And there are some who say he was his nephew, but he was a very bold knight and very strong. Francion travelled by sea far and wide until he came to Europe, and there he landed. He took the lands between the Rhine and the Danube, where no human being had previously lived. My lords, these men populated this land, for from them grew and came forth many great peoples. And some say the French descend from these men and that they were called French after their king, who was brave and bold and was called Francion in their first language.

Ex precedenter memorata confusione linguarum non leviter opinamur per universa mundi climata climatumque plagas incolendas et angulos tunc primum homines fuisse dispersos. Et cum radix humane propaginis principalis in oris orientalibus sit plantata, nec non ab inde ad utrunque latus per diffusos multipliciter palmites nostra sit extensa propago, demumque ad fines occidentales protracta, forte primitus tunc vel totius Europe flumina, vel saltim quedam, rationalia guctura potaverunt.

Sed sive advene tunc primitus advenissent, sive ad Europam indigene repedassent, ydioma secum tripharium homines actulerunt; et afferentium hoc alii meridionalem, alii septentrionalem regionem in Europa sibi sortiti sunt; et tertii, quos nunc Grecos vocamus, partim Europe, partim Asye occuparunt.

The confusion of languages recorded above leads me, on no trivial grounds, to the opinion that it was then that human beings were first scattered throughout the whole world, into every temperate zone and habitable region, right to its furthest corners. And since the principal root from which the human race has grown was planted in the East, and from there our growth has spread, through many branches and in all directions, finally reaching the furthest limits of the West, perhaps it was then that the rivers of all Europe, or at least some of them, first refreshed the throats of rational beings.

But, whether they were arriving then for the first time, or whether they had been born in Europe and were now returning there, these people brought with them a tripartite language. Of those who brought it, some found their way to southern Europe and some to northern; and a third group, whom we now call Greeks, settled partly in Europe and partly in Asia.

Philology is the handmaid of the historical disciplines

(Curtius, p. x).

The concept of world literature could not but shatter the

French canon (Curtius, p. 271)

The project seminar and the conferences: ERC and European dimension

- Seminar meets three times a year: 10 international funded participants from Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland and the US
- UK participants from Birkbeck, Cambridge and Oxford
- Participants represent traditionally polarised positions in linguistics, literary studies, manuscript studies and philology
- The collaboration with colleagues in linguistics has been particularly fruitful
- Two international conferences
- Website and blog