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East and West: Two Decades of Scholarship on the Medieval Francophone Periphery

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East and West: Two Decades of Scholarship on the Medieval Francophone Periphery[1]

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Abstract:
This article is essentially a survey of scholarship on French literature in Italy and Franco-Italian literature between ca. 2000 and 2020, with an introduction which attempts to situate recent contributions within the history of the discipline as a whole. Brief reference is made to scholarship on modern Francophone literature and a more extensive comparison with that on Anglo-Norman or "Insular French". Franco-Italian literature can best be seen as an integral but distinctive part of medieval literature in the *langue d'oïl*.

Cet article est un survol, un état présent, des écrits scientifiques sur la littérature française en Italie et la littérature franco-italienne dans les deux premières décennies du vingt-et-unième siècle. Une introduction situe les études récentes dans le cadre de la discipline en général. Non sans rapport avec l'intérêt dans la littérature francophone moderne, le domaine franco-italien se laisse comparer plutôt avec l'anglo-normand, et constitue une partie intégrale et particulière de la littérature médiévale en *langue d'oïl*.

Keywords:
Franco-Italian – Anglo-Norman – history of philology – medieval Francophonia
Franco-Italien – Anglo-Normand – histoire de la philologie – Francophonie médiévale

It may be delusional to speak of a «boom area» within the field of medieval French studies, but if there is one at the moment, it is that of Old French literature outside the borders of the modern hexagon of France. This is essentially similar to the importance which has accrued over the last half-century or so to the study of modern Francophone literature of the Magreb, various African countries, the Caribbean, Quebec, and so on. The latter phenomenon has had both positive and negative consequences (at least in North America), where study areas have thankfully expanded beyond the traditional canon at the same time, however, that medievalists have been replaced by specialists in modern Francophone, leaving many departments without full-time specialists in the Middle Ages. It has also led to a

[1] This is a modified text of a lecture presented to the IV Seminario sul Franco-Italiano at the University of Padova, October 8, 2019. It consequently bears the hallmarks of oral presentation. My thanks go to Francesca Gambino and Giovanni Borriero for the invitation to participate.

surfeit in doctorates in modern Francophone studies without corresponding availability of positions now that universities have their full complement of modernists and that universities are in any event cutting budgets in the humanities.

Let me recap some basics. If we exclude early monuments such as the *Séquence de sainte Eulalie* or the *Vie de saint Léger* and begin with the Oxford *Chanson de Roland*, most of the first texts in the *langue d'oïl* (*Le voyage de saint Brendan* by Benedeit, Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, the *Jeu d'Adam*, the Hildesheim *Alexis*, for example) are insular, that is to say, Anglo-Norman and, a little later, from the West of France (still part of the unified kingdom before 1204). Already we see the necessity of redrawing the literary and linguistic map, for this stage of «Old French» literature is not really French at all, but English. I am being purposely provocative here, of course, in the context of friendly Anglo-French rivalry, the residual reluctance of French scholars to admit the importance of English Francophonia after 1066, and an enduring tendency to consider Anglo-Norman as «bad French».

I have just used the term «medieval Francophonia» as if its meaning were self-evident, but it has not always been so. I am not sure I can, or would want to, lay claim to being the first to have used the term, although I did use it without a precise definition in *Codex and Context*[2], but it was certainly not in common usage before the turn of the last century. I also felt it necessary to characterise it in more detail in subsequent publications[3], and for whatever reasons, it has entered the critical arsenal and is now commonplace. The establishment of French-speaking communities in the British Isles after Hastings was a consequence of a real colonial enterprise with serious similarities to modern instances of colonisation. Many of the same issues modernists deal with are central to the study of Anglo-Norman England and Ireland: multilingualism, multiculturalism, encounters between legal systems, resolution of conflicts between different forms of religion and religious structures, consciousness of ethnicity and race, miscegenation and intermarriage, governance of a diaspora, and so on. Historians and historians of literature have, of course, long recognized post-1066 developments in Britain and Ireland as colonial and post-colonial, but literary scholars have rarely approached the study of Anglo-Norman and Hiberno-Norman texts specifically as such, even though that is what it by definition is. Whatever we call it, to quote a famous line from that children's classic, *1066 and All That*, «The Norman Conquest was a Good Thing»[4].

[2] Cf. Busby 2002.
[3] For example, Busby 2010 and 2011b; Busby – Putter 2010.
[4] Sellar – Yeatman 1930: 17.

To offer an *état présent* of insular Francophone studies goes far beyond the scope of this talk, but I will just briefly make a few points. Firstly, there has been recent discussion of the term «Anglo-Norman» and efforts to deploy alternatives, such as «the French of England» or «Anglo-French»[5]. The problem with the first of these is that excludes Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and fails to acknowledge the provenance in Normandy of the particular variant of the *langue d'oïl* and its culture implanted in the islands after 1066. The same is true of the second, as well as "insular French", although this term at least could be said to cover both Britain and Ireland if we include both islands. I suggest retaining «Anglo-Norman» and using other terms when appropriate in the context. I nevertheless pay tribute to Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and the website, «The French of England» at Fordham University[6]. The discussion on this topic pales in comparison with the vicious and existential polemic centering around the term «Anglo-Saxon» in Old English studies. Despite, like Anglo-Norman, reflecting the provenance of language and culture, «Anglo-Saxon» is becoming taboo, as it is seen as representative of a white male scholarly patriarchy and has been espoused by the extreme right as an expression of racism[7]. *Et j'en passe*.

I raise here another delicate issue as it pertains to the present state of Anglo-Norman studies and, to a lesser extent, to that of Old French studies in general. Few, if any, scholars in France deal today with Anglo-Norman. In Britain, there is only one person in post who specializes in it (and that post was only saved after an active letter-writing campaign to the university in question). Let us not be coy: we are talking about Oxford, which had to be reminded of its great tradition in Anglo-Norman studies. Other distinguished traditions of Anglo-Norman studies in Canada and Scandinavia are likewise dying out, if not completely dead. When the active emeriti finally hang up their magnifying glasses, the sub-discipline will only have a generation left. Scholars in Middle English studies, however, are well aware of the importance of both Anglo-Norman and continental French literature in the medieval British Isles and realize that without taking them into account, the risk of distorting and misunderstanding Middle English texts is great. The consequence of this is an increasing tendency among specialists in Middle English to read Anglo-Norman and Old French without the kind of philological and linguistic training that such study demands, in other words, to dabble ('dilettarsi' in Italian). In a sense, they cannot be blamed as specialists of the medieval *langue d'oïl* wither and die, not to be replaced by their institutions. There are, of course,

[5] Cf. Butterfield 2009 and Wogan-Browne 2009.

[6] See https://frenchofengland.ace.fordham.edu [accessed: 27.03.2020].

[7] See, for example, https://quillette.com/2019/10/22/higher-educations-medievalist-moral-panic/ [accessed: 27.03.2020]. The International Society of Anglo-Saxonists is now The International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England.

honorable exceptions, but this development is disturbing in general, and reflects poorly on the training of medievalists in both Britain and North America. The teaching of medieval Latin is equally problematic. The best romance philological training nowadays can be found in Italy.

Secondly, recent scholarship appears to be refining the notion that French replaced English as a literary language in the early twelfth century. Certainly, the ability to commission and enjoy literature passed in large measure to speakers of French, but manuscripts continued to be copied in English and older manuscripts continued to circulate and be used[8]. The majority population on the big island remained Anglophone, otherwise the English would all be speaking French today[9]. And in our arrogant claims that Old French literature has the chronological priority, we should not forget that literature in Old English and the Celtic languages has a long tradition before the middle of the twelfth century and the rise of French.

Thirdly (if I may be permitted to blow my own trumpet), my recent work has surveyed the use of French on the western periphery of medieval Francophonia, namely Ireland, where the language was a literary vernacular as late as the middle of the fourteenth century, when it was finally supplanted by English in the towns; in rural areas, French never encroached on the use of Irish. In Ireland, there is copious evidence for the use of interpreters from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries; in England, there were interpreters in the immediate aftermath of Hastings. Were there French-Italian interpreters in the Middle Ages? A book on medieval interpreters remains a real *desideratum*. The centre of Irish Francophonia was the Southeast, especially the towns of Waterford, Kilkenny, Wexford, and New Ross. In addition to the well-known cases of *La geste des engleis en Yrlande* (1189?) and *The Walling of New Ross* (1265) and a few minor pieces, I have now attributed Jofroi de Waterford's translations (c. 1300) of the *De excidio Troiae* of «Dares Phrygius», the *Breviarium Historiae Romanae* of Eutropius, and the *Secretum secretorum* of the Pseudo-Aristotle to Waterford, not Paris as has usually been assumed[10].

When I began to sketch out my map of medieval Francophonia, it became clear that it was both dynamic and diverse. Bearing in mind that there are porous border areas which may be bilingual or use hybrid languages, the map essentially

[8] Cf., for example, Da Rold s.d. on the useful website *The Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1060 to 1220* at http://www.le.ac.uk/english/em1060to1220/culturalcontexts2.htm [accessed: 27.03.2020].
[9] The best introduction to French in post-Conquest England is Short 2013: 17-44.
[10] See Busby 2017.

goes from Ireland in the West through England (with parts of Scotland and Wales), then through the northern two thirds of modern France (omitting Occitania?), into Wallonia, as far north as the southern Lowlands (perhaps even Utrecht?), across the Alps to northern Italy and down to Naples. The easternmost areas are Cyprus and the Crusader states of the Middle East, on which Laura Minervini (2010 and 2018) and Cyril Aslanov (2006a and 2006b) and others have done such excellent work, tying in with the art historical studies of Jaroslav Folda (1976 and 2005, for example) and others to paint a picture of Francophone culture on the edge. For details, I refer to the excellent website on the French of Outremer at Fordham University[11]. For the purposes of this talk, however, I will consider northern Italy as my eastern edge. It can be argued that the whole map either depends on colonisation of some kind, political expedient such as invasion of a neighbouring land or region or dynastic intermarriage as a means of accumulating territory and expanding dominion, or cultural aspirations. The linguistic and literary consequences of such acts are diverse and can be long-lasting or short-lived.

The Norman invasion of England, its immediate westward expansion into Wales, and secondary expansion into Ireland are clear stages of a classic colonisation, as I have suggested. The literature produced there bears all the hallmarks of such a process, particularly the acculturation of native and foreign cultures and mythologies, a means for the colonisers to exert power over the colonised, at the same time drawing themselves into the orbit of those they had conquered. The Normans realised that once their political domination over the English had been firmly established, integration, rather than suppression, was the key to success. On the Continent, shifting political structures rendered the map less stable, and it is worth reminding ourselves that language does not always correspond to political dominion, for the regions where the *langue d'oc* and Franco-Provençal/Franco-Occitan were the principal vernaculars always remained largely subject to the crowns of Francophone England and France. In regions of the Low Countries such as Flanders, Brabant, and Holland, the language of literature at any given time may have been determined by recent ducal and comital marriages; fluctuating multilingualism of French, Dutch, and German seems to have been the norm there[12]. The Francophonia of Outremer, be it Cyprus, the Levant, Constantinople, or the Morea, owes its existence to the persistence of the Crusading spirit in the West. These French-speaking settlements gave rise to their own literature as well as producing manuscripts of already existing texts. It should be underlined that,

[11] Cf. https://frenchofoutremer.ace.fordham.edu [accessed: 27.03.2020]. See also Morreale – Paul 2018.

[12] Many issues relating to multilingualism in the Low Countries are treated in Sleiderink 2003.

as in England with English and the Celtic languages, Francophones were in a minority alongside speakers of Arabic, Greek, Armenian, Coptic, and so on. I underline again here the importance of linguistic and philological training. If Anglo-Norman is challenging, we might take a chastening look at the work of Laura Minervini and Cyril Aslanov mentioned above. The southern and eastern borders of medieval Francophonia on the Continent are generally marked by the Pyrenees and the Rhine respectively. The question of why French literature crossed the Rhine with relative ease and was adapted freely into Middle High German whereas the Pyrenees apparently proved insurmountable except for Arthurian prose romance deserves more attention than I can give it, particularly in the context of the renewed interest in the notions of borders and boundaries, topographical, linguistic, and cultural. And in the context of borders and boundaries, a re-examination of the role played by the Alpine regions of Piedmont and Savoy as facilitators of the transmission of Francophone literature to other parts of Italy might prove fruitful.

But what of Italy? Of the two regions which could be considered part of the map of medieval Francophonia, I will concentrate here on the North rather than the Angevin domains around Naples and the Regno. The latter, of course, is primarily political and dynastic in nature, while the former (including Milan, Genoa, Modena, and the Veneto) is more diverse socially and culturally, its contexts ranging from the great houses of Visconti-Sforza and Estensi to the wider ranks of the merchant-classes of the Veneto and the city republics. It is not necessary here to rehearse the basic distinctions between Franco-Italian/Franco-Veneto and the Italian idioms of the *langue d'oïl* nor those between texts composed in northern Italy and those from the other side of the Alps copied in Italy. Although the title of this talk refers to the last two decades of scholarship (in my arrogance, essentially since the publication of Busby 2002), it is worth looking briefly at some of the major, classic, studies which informed the writing of Chapters 5 and 6 of *Codex and Context*[13]. Most of these studies were written by Italian scholars (in alphabetical order): Adolfo Bartoli's study of the French manuscripts of the Marciana (1872), Giulio Bertoni on the Estense library (1903 and 1918), Willelmo Braghirolli, Paul Meyer and Gaston Paris on Francesco Gonzaga (1880), Adriano Cappelli on the Estense holdings (1889), Domenico Ciàmpoli's catalogue of the Marciana manuscripts (1897), Pia Girolla on Francesco Gonzaga (1923), Emilio Motta on the Sforza library (1884), Francesco Novati on the Gonzaga books (1890), the great Pio Rajna on the Estense books (1873), Antoine Thomas (a Frenchman) on the dukes of Milan (1911). There is one major contribution mis-

[13] The lists of studies mentioned below are intended to be representative and by no means exhaustive. The most complete bibliographies, general and on individual texts, can now be found on the websites «The French of Italy» and *RIALFrI* (see below).

sing from this list, and that is Paul Meyer's *De l'expansion de la langue française en Italie pendant le Moyen Âge* (1904) which deserves a special comment as it reflects a characteristically French imperial and imperious view from the early twentieth century that French was superior to all other languages, even in the Middle Ages…

These were the pioneering works which laid the foundations for the study of French in Italy and Franco-Veneto. That the majority of these early scholars were Italian is no surprise, of course; nor is the fact that they did not expressly talk in terms of medieval Francophonia. A good number of these contributions take advantage of the fortunate survival in Italy of the library holdings and booklists of the great families, although alone they provide only a partial picture of medieval Francophone literary culture in Italy, namely of the highest social echelons, some with close connections with French royal and aristocratic houses through diplomacy and marriage. I ask historians of Italy out of ignorance whether booklists of the merchant-classes in medieval Italy survive, or wills and post-mortem inventories which may contain mention of books. Going through the bibliography of *Codex and Context*, beyond what is essentially the first half-century of Romance Philology as a discipline (if one takes 1870 as a rough starting-date), we enter a second stage of scholarship on the topic and scholars whose activities are perhaps fresher in the memory: Marco Boni on the manuscripts of the *Chanson d'Aspremont* (1961, 1962 and 1965-1966, *inter alia*), Giorgio Ferrari on the Marciana epic manuscripts (1961), Élisabeth Pellegrin on the Visconti-Sforza manuscripts (1955), the great Aurelio Roncaglia on literature in Franco-Veneto (1965), Ruggiero Ruggieri on French influence on the romance and the epic (1969), and Antonio Viscardi's classic study of *Letteratura franco-italiana* (1941). In the last quarter of the twentieth century, I note Roberto Benedetti's magnificent work on the Museo Correr manuscript of the *Roman d'Alexandre* (1998, *inter alia*), Simonetta Cerrini on the Visconti-Sforza books (1991), Daniela Delcorno Branca on Arthurian romance in Italy (late 1960s onwards)[14], Fabrizio Cigni on similar topics (1993, *inter alia*), Gianfranco Folena on Venice (1990), Edoardo Fumagalli on the Visconti-Sforza library in Pavia (1990), the two volumes on the Italian illuminated manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Nationale by François Avril, Marie-Thérèse Gousset, and Yolanta Załuska (1984), Marie-José Heijkant on the prose *Tristan* (1989, 2018), Günter Holtus on the French language in Italy (1994, etc.), Henning Krauss on the *chanson de geste* (1980), Lorenzo Renzi on French in the Veneto (1976), and more besides. Mention should also be made of the fragments found and published by Monica Longobardi, Benedetti, and others in the 1980s and 1990s[15]. It is easy to dismiss such work, but it is crucial since a fragment, ho-

[14] Many contributions are reprinted in Delcorno Branca 1998.

[15] In the case of scholars such as Cigni, Longobardi, and Benedetti, whose publications on related

wever minuscule, is witness to the existence of a whole manuscript. A number of invaluable manuscript facsimiles and detailed studies of individual manuscripts have also been published (D'Aronco *et al.* 1990, Cigni – Bertolucci Pizzorusso 1994, Benedetti 1998, Gousset 2002).

This, then, was the state of affairs in 2002 when I wrote the sections on Italy in Chapters 5 and 6 of *Codex and Context*. It should be noted that, although the book was specifically concerned with verse literature, I did also consider prose works in regard to Italy. If I achieved anything, it was creating a synthesis, pulling together various strands from the work of others, and suggesting that it might be helpful to regard what had usually simply been called «Old French literature» as the literature of medieval Francophonia. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, scholarship on Italian Francophonia has blossomed as the long reach of the *langue d'oïl* outside of France has been properly acknowledged. In practice, this has led to a number of online resources which must now form the starting-point for anyone researching the field. I have already mentioned the French of England and French of Outremer websites, but Fordham University also hosts an equivalent site for the French of Italy[16]. Two major projects led Simon Gaunt at King's College, London are indispensable: «Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside of France», funded 2011-2015[17], and the more recent «The Values of French»[18], funded by the European Research Council 2015-2020 (I note in passing with sadness, frustration, and anger that Brexit may mean that such funding is no longer be available to scholars in the UK). The first of these projects followed the dissemination of French language texts of Alexander the Great, the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, the *Roman de Troie*, and romances of Arthur, Tristan, and Guiron le Courtois, while the second concentrates on the *Histoire ancienne*. While not solely devoted to Italy, a good deal of Italian material is dealt with in both. It is of some interest that many of Simon Gaunt's teams are Italian and not hard to understand why, for it is surely due to the kind of comparative philological training of which Italy remains a bastion. And last, but by no means least, there is the quite fabulous aforementioned *Repertorio Informatizzato Antica Letteratura Franco-Italiana*[19] and its associated journal, «Francigena».

topics are numerous, I refer for details to the standard bibliographies such as the *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society* or the *Bulletin bibliographique de la Société Rencesvals*. I have sometimes cited a representative example of their work. For publications on Italian Arthuriana before 1990, see Cigni 1992. The bibliographies on *RIALFrI* are full, up-to-date, and include text-editions which I have generally not covered here.

[16] Cf. https://frenchofitaly.ace.fordham.edu [accessed: 27.03.2020].

[17] See https://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk [accessed: 27.03.2020].

[18] Cf. https://tvof.ac.uk/ [accessed: 27.03.2020].

[19] *RIALFrI*.

I hardly need add here that *RIALFrI* is a much more ambitious undertaking and much wider in scope than the other sites and projects. Its coverage of non-literary manifestations of French in Italy (such as inscriptions, mottoes, and archival documents) is a distinguishing feature.

Although the Marciana and Visconti-Sforza books remain central, major studies have now appeared which expand the corpus of study to the less luxurious manuscripts, particularly of Arthurian prose romance, produced on an almost industrial scale. What do we know about their owners? Art historians in particular are beginning to look at where and for whom these manuscripts were made. Attention has also turned towards the texts themselves transmitted in Italian and Franco-Veneto manuscripts, mainly Arthurian romance and the *chanson de geste*, and questions are being asked why Italian readers are demanding some texts and not others. It is now clear that the popularity of the French Prose *Lancelot* did manifest itself in Italian, as is evident from the recent discovery of a large fragment of the *Lancellotto*, now in the Fondazione Ezio Francheschini in Florence (Cadioli 2016). I would add in parenthesis here that the absence of Italian copies of certain French texts does not mean they did not circulate in Italy. If the Riccardiana extract of *Cligès* is the only concrete proof of the circulation of a romance of Chrétien de Troyes, very specific allusions and verbatim quotations from the other romances in Italian poems and the work of some Italian troubadours suggests a much wider dissemination (Busby 2011a). But why copy prose and not verse romance? Was it simply a question of fashion? I note again the preponderance of Italian scholars (with a few exceptions) in what is to all appearances a matter of national cultural importance. The same could be said of the history of Anglo-Norman studies, whose specialists have principally been either English or from Anglophone countries (Canada in particular). Food for thought and a topic for discussion.

We have now, I think, a much better understanding of French in medieval Italy and a much better vision of the way forward and the potential for collaborative research. In the last two decades, the projects discussed above and other scholarly activities in the area are characterised by four major developments: 1) more serious efforts to locate and describe all manuscripts of texts in Franco-Veneto and the French of Italy; 2) collaboration between philologists of different varieties, art-historians, and historians (capable of improvement if only we would step out of our comfort-zones); the latest issue of «Francigena» (2019) includes an excellent example of how an art-historian (Stones 2019) can localize the provenance of a manuscript (Venice, Museo Correr 1493 of the *Roman d'Alexandre*) and date it with some degree of precision; 3) internationalization of scholarship and the breaking-down of barriers; 4) the establishment of online resources and the prospect of new editions, traditional and digital (the bibliographies on *RIALFrI* are a time-saving godsend). I would particularly stress the importance of collaborating

with historians, for only they can help us as philologists establish historical contexts for the texts and manuscripts we study. From my own experience, I can say that the writing of *Codex and Context* turned me into something of a historian and less of a literary scholar; looking back some seventeen years later, I wish I had been a better historian and had taken more time to become one. I hope I learned the lesson during the writing of *French in Medieval Ireland* and have been gratified by the interest shown in my work by historians as well as the gracious manner in which they have offered me a second scholarly home late in my career.

This has been an imperfect and incomplete review, which has often stated the obvious. For example, I have barely touched upon the French of Angevin Naples or the matter of spoken French in Italy. And many here are at the very heart of the topics I have been raising. I would like to conclude by returning to the question of how we define and talk about medieval Francophonia. The title of a recent collection of essays, *Francofonie medievali* (Babbi – Concina 2016), Anna Maria Babbi's introduction (Babbi 2016), and the individual contribution of Claudio Galderisi (Galderisi 2016) together make a clear case for talking of «medieval Francophonias» in the plural rather than medieval Francophonia in the singular. By analogy in some contexts, when referring to the medieval *langue d'oïl*, we should talk of «Old Frenches» rather than «Old French». It slowly became clear to me, after the initial wave of enthusiasm which followed the 'birth' of medieval Francophonia, that its nature varied considerably from one region to another. If England and Ireland constituted a properly colonial Francophonia, albeit a minority language in the islands, and if the Francophonia of Outremer stemmed from a desire to capture and recapture territory and convert infidels to Christianity, how could Italian Francophonia be characterised? Its colonisation might be considered a cultural one in which the great families with links to French aristocracy north and west of the Alps, as well as the merchant classes of the northern city republics, mainly without such links, but with cultural aspirations which recognized the status of French. Beyond the attractions of Arthurian romance, Italian readers were keen to combine their French-language reading with texts (such as the Alexander romances, the *Roman de Troie*, or the *Histoire ancienne*) which confirmed Italy's role as the home of Roman culture and the conduit for the transmission of knowledge of classical antiquity. Original compositions in the French of Italy often dealt with local or regional foundation myths. The language in which they were written lent cities, peoples, and dynasties the kind of authority previously enjoyed by Latin.

RIALFrI has the answers to the question of where we go from here. Only after all textual witnesses have been made available, preferably online (and this implies replacing outdated and imperfect editions of many texts as well as editing some properly for the first time), will it be possible to assess fully the extent and significance of the practical and cultural role played by French and Franco-Italian

in medieval Italian society. If the interlingual babble of merchants, the pillow-talk of royal and aristocratic couples, and the performance of epics, romances, and other works are long lost to us, the manuscripts, inscriptions, and mural rubrics are there to remind us of the long reach of the *langue d'oïl*. «Verba volant, sed scripta manent».

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