

Part I, Paper 7

Medieval Welsh language and Literature

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This course provides, over two years, an introduction to Medieval Welsh language and literature. Among the Medieval Welsh literature studied in the course (in the original or in translation) there is a small quantity of prose tales (the 'Mabinogion'), and a varied range of poetry. The prose tales include the Four Branches of the Mabinogi (wondertales where the human dilemmas are examined in a magical setting), and 'How Culhwch won Olwen', the earliest surviving Arthurian tale. The poetry includes the heroic poetry attributed to Aneirin and Taliesin, possibly dating from as early as the sixth century; the 'saga poetry' which examines attitudes to war and other human emotions, within the setting of the world of nature; prophetic poetry attributed to Myrddin (the Merlin of Arthurian legend); and the personal poems of the fourteenth-century Dafydd ap Gwilym.

No previous knowledge of Welsh is required. The university teaching for the course consists of classes and lectures, and is normally supplemented by a series of eight supervisions spread over the two years provided by the college. The language classes consist, in the first year, of twenty classes (eight + eight + four, over the three terms), introducing students to the grammar of Middle Welsh and to the prose set texts. In the second year the classes study the poetic set texts (again eight + eight + four). The lectures consist of two series of twelve lectures, on medieval Welsh prose in one year and on verse in the other.

The course is examined in a Preliminary paper or a Preliminary Assessment Test (PAT) taken at the end of the first year, and a Part I Tripos paper at the end of the second. These papers normally contain about fourteen questions. The first two consist of passages from the set texts to be translated into English, with grammatical or other comments on a few forms in the passages; there is also one unseen passage for translation. The remainder of the examination consists of two essays (from a choice of about twelve) on literary or linguistic topics.