



From Plato to Lancelot: A Preface to Chretien De Troyes (Medieval Studies)

Sarah-jane K. Murray

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Considered the most important figure in medieval French literature, Chretien de Troyes is credited with inventing the modern novel. The roots of his influential Arthurian romance narratives remain the subject of investigation and great debate among medieval scholars. In "From Plato to Lancelot", K. Sarah-Jane Murray makes a highly original and profoundly significant contribution to current scholarship by locating Chretien's work at the intersection of two important traditions: one derived from Greco-Roman antiquity, the other from the Celtic world of the Atlantic seaboard. Drawing on a broad range of sources, from Plato's "Timaeus" and Ovid's "Metamorphoses" to the anonymous Ovidian tales translated in the twelfth century and Marie de France's "Lais", Murray demonstrates that Chretien and his contemporaries learned the importance of translation from the Mediterranean-centered classical tradition. She then turns to the Celtic world, examining how Irish monastic scholarship, as demonstrated by the Voyage of St. Brendan and Celtic saints' lives, influenced the cultural identity of medieval Europe and paved the way for an interest in Celtic stories and legends. With penetrating insight and lucid prose, Murray locates Chretien's singular genius in his ability to look to the future and to lay the foundations for a thoroughly new, and French, tradition of vernacular storytelling.



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