

HIST 232

Medieval Europe, 400-1400

Grinnell College, Fall 2018

MW @ 1:00-2:20 p.m., BCA 269

Syllabus subject to change

Professor Catherine Chou (choucath@grinnell.edu)

Office Hours: MW 2:30-4:00 p.m., or by appointment, Mears Cottage 211

Course Description

As one of the oldest fields of professional history, Medieval Europe presents both great challenges and great joys to the modern-day historian. Among the challenges: a limited corpus of texts and little possibility of turning up many new ones, as well as a historiography so dense it can be difficult to know which interpretations to side with. Among the joys: the opportunity to become familiar with much of the available primary source material and to contribute to the evolution of a spirited, long-lived scholarly conversation. Forced to innovate in ways other than finding new stores of documents, medieval historians have also become skilled practitioners of interdisciplinary research, moving outside the bounds of traditional history to apply insights from anthropology, archaeology, art history, and sociology.

This course is organized around seven long-standing debates in medieval history, each unit opening with a seminal primary source (or two) before moving on to examine multiple arguments on a given topic, all related to the question of why Western Europe ended up becoming religiously united (under the Roman Catholic Church) but politically divided (into individual kingdoms with divergent 'ethnic' and group identities) during the period from 400 to 1400. Students will develop a variety of methodological skills for approaching pre-modern primary sources (such as chronicles, holy books, devotional works, vernacular poetry, and codes of law) and for weighing the comparative merits of different narratives offered by both foundational and revisionist secondary sources. To study medieval Europe in the twenty-first century is to understand why this period has so often been looked to as the origin point of a coherent, powerful European identity and the stakes this partly-imagined, wholly-reconstructed image has for our own contemporary religious, political, and social debates.

Assigned Books and Readings

Textbooks (available at Pioneer Bookstore; also on reserve at Burling)

1. Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe* (Yale University Press, 2016 or 2017)
2. Judith Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History* (McGraw Hill, tenth or eleventh edition)

Course packet readings available online via P-web; **print the week's readings and bring to class**

A note on the readings

We will not discuss the Wickham or Bennett textbooks in class; they are intended as background to our lectures and discussions. You may also draw on them for your papers, exams, and projects. **All of the other primary and secondary sources are uploaded to P-web in the form of a course reader; bringing the correct readings to class is part of your participation grade.**

Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Participation (including occasional class assignments): 20%

Reading Responses: 15% **Three total, one before week 4, two before week 8**

Midterm 1: 20% **Due Monday, October 8th by 11:59 p.m.**

Midterm 2: 20% **Due Monday, November 12th by 11:59 p.m.**

Final Project: 25% **Due Wednesday, December 19th by 11:59 p.m.**

(plus two 'scaffolding' due dates, Nov. 19th and Dec. 5th)

Scale for individual assignments:

A: 97% B: 85% C: 75%

A-: 91% B-: 81% D: 62%

B+: 88% C+: 78% F: 50%

Scale for final grades:

A: 95%+ B: 84-86% C: 70%-76%

A-: 90-94% B-: 80-83% D: 60-69%

B+: 87-90% C+: 77-80% F: Below 60%

Attendance and Participation: 20%

Your success in (and enjoyment of!) this course will depend on your willingness to engage thoughtfully with the material and each other, in both your conversation and your note-taking. We will learn a great deal from one another if we come to class prepared, with open minds, ready to contribute and to take intellectual risks. Together, we will practice developing incisive questions, identifying significant passages, tracing common themes, providing evidentiary support for scholarly arguments, and responding productively to disagreements and critiques. **You are entitled to two absences without penalty over the course of the semester as long as you email me before class. Every subsequent absence without excuse (from a chaplain, athletic coach, doctor, etc.) will count against your entire grade (2% off for a third absence, 4% for a fourth, and so on). Repeated late arrivals will also be noted as absences.**

For every class please come prepared with:

For primary sources, one of the following in hard copy:

- a. A 500-word reading response (see below)
- b. A completed 'reading guide' (to be handed out the class prior)
- c. Your own 'short reaction', analyzing in about 250-300 words one or two passages you consider especially significant, plus at least one discussion question of your own about the reading

For secondary sources:

- a. Identify and paraphrase 1) the questions being addressed, 2) the author's main arguments, 3) the other scholarship he/she is responding to, 4) the evidentiary support provided, and 5) one way you can challenge the author's conclusions
- b. At least one analytical question of your own about the reading

Additional pointers for class:

1. Initial meeting with Instructor – Please sign up here (<https://doodle.com/poll/z5626vs6znsy3efr>) for a meeting with me in the first two weeks of the semester. This is so I can get to better know you and your goals for the class!
2. No laptops/phones (except for designated days) – this is a discussion-based course, and as such, it is important that you stay focused on listening to and interacting with your classmates. Respect them and respect yourself by making the most of your class time.
3. Check the class Google Doc: I will post pointers for the reading and questions to consider on a Google Doc before every class here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VY17oH1zFi_JF9QLZOcqy3h5Sew7nTYE6lKZeEbfOp4/edit?usp=sharing

Reading Responses – 15%

To keep you on track (and make class discussion lively), **you will be asked to write a 500-word analysis of three of the assigned *primary sources***. Responses to a particular reading are due the day we discuss it in class, in ***hard copy***. **One response must be submitted by the end of week three, two by week seven, and you can only write a maximum of one response per week.** Each response is worth 5% of your overall grade.

These responses are your chance to show me your thought processes concerning the source at hand. One strategy for making your responses coherent and organized is to start with a central question and then develop (and support) an argument in response. Cite specific quotes or details from the source, as well as from the lectures and additional readings. Avoid the temptation to go online for answers or to become fixated on finding one ‘right’ interpretation. These sources can be fruitfully read in a number of ways and I am far more interested in what you think than in what outside critics say. Questions and topics you may consider addressing include:

1. What do you consider to be the central arguments of this piece and why? What is the author or artist’s intention for producing it? (Include evidentiary support and passages from the text!)
2. How should historians approach pre-modern texts that pose challenges in terms of authenticity, reliability, sourcing, authorship, and representativeness?
3. How can you put these sources in meaningful conversation with each other and the secondary readings and lectures?

All the writing you produce for this class should be footnoted in Chicago-style format. For more information on footnoting, see: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/03/>

Two take-home midterm essays (20% each), Due October 8th and November 12th

There are two timed take-home midterm essays. They will cover, respectively, the questions and debates from the first third and the second third of the class. The exams are open book, so take notes in class and as

you read! You may not, however, consult with one another once the essay prompts are handed out or use online resources.

Final Project – Design a ‘short course’ on medieval history (25%), Due December 19th

In a survey course covering a thousand years in fifteen weeks, many worthwhile and understudied topics have been left out. For your final project, you will have the chance to design your own four-week ‘short course’ on an aspect of medieval European history that we did not discuss in detail together. The mini-syllabus will consist of a precis of the course, your driving questions and conclusions, plus an annotated bibliography exploring key historiographical debates and useful methodologies for approaching specific pre-modern texts.

Late Assignment Policy

Every student is entitled to two 24-hour grace periods to use on the midterms or final. You must notify me if you plan to take the extension. Once you have used your grace period, late assignments will be docked by 1/3 of a grade each day.

Honor Code

Please familiarize yourself with the Grinnell Student Handbook honesty policies and abide by them.

Accommodations

If you have any documented needs that require accommodation, please do not hesitate to let me know. More details can be found at: <https://www.grinnell.edu/about/offices-services/accessibility-disability/disability-services>

Readings and Topics

Monday, September 3rd – Introduction (Week Two)

❖ **How did Christianity develop from a Middle Eastern cult into the dominant religion of the post-classical Mediterranean world?**

Wednesday, September 5th (Week Two)

- Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New City Press, 2007)
- Tertullian, *Apology*, ed. Robert D. Sider (Catholic University Press, 2001)

Monday, September 10th (Week Three)

- Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton University Press, 1996)

Wednesday, September 12th (Week Three)

- Richard Lim, ‘Christianization, Secularization, and the Transformation of Public Life’, in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau (Blackwell, 2009)

❖ **(Why) did the Roman Empire fall? What is the significance of claiming that it was reorganized or slowly dissolved instead?**

Monday, September 17th (Week Four)

- *Codex Theodosianus*, trans. Clyde Pharr (Princeton University Press, 1952)
- Salvian, *On the Government of God*, trans. Eva Matthews Sanford (Columbia University Press, 1930)

Wednesday, September 19th (Week Four)

- Walter Goffart, 'Rome's Final Conquest: The Barbarians', in *History Compass*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2008)

Monday, September 24th (Week Five)

- Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford University Press, 2014)

❖ **How was 'Western Europe' transformed in a post-imperial world? How were old and new peoples (re)constituted in the Early Middle Ages?**

Wednesday, September 26th (Week Five)

- Jordanes, *Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (Princeton University Press, 1915)
- Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* (Penguin, 1974)

Monday, October 1st (Week Six)

- Herwig Wolfram, 'Gothic History and Historical Ethnography', *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1981)
- Patrick J. Geary, *Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2003)

Wednesday, October 3rd (Week Six)

- Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Midterm #1 distributed, due Monday, October 8th at 11:59 p.m.

Monday, October 8th – Manuscripts or Special Collections Workshop (Week Seven)

❖ **How did the rise of the 'sibling cultures' of Byzantium and early Islam contribute to the formation of a distinctively 'Western' Europe?**

Wednesday, October 10th (Week Seven)

- Procopius, *Secret History*, ed. Peter Sarris (Penguin, 2007)

Monday, October 15th (Week Eight)

- Raymond van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople* (Baylor University Press, 2012)

Wednesday, October 17th (Week Eight)

- The Quran, ed. A.J. Droge (Equinox Publishing, 2013)

Fall Break, October 20th-28th

Monday, October 29th (Week Nine)

- Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton University Press, 2001)

❖ **How was 'Europe' created through a process of internal colonization, conquest, and expansion from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries?**

Wednesday, October 31st (Week Nine)

- Robert the Monk's *History of the First Crusade*, trans. Carol Sweetenham (Ashgate, 2006)
- *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the crusading period from al-Kamil i 'l-Ta'rikh* (Ashgate, 2010)

Monday, November 5th (Week Ten)

- Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (Princeton University Press, 1993)

Wednesday, November 7th (Week Ten)

- Daniel Konig, *Arab-Islamic Views of the Latin West: Tracing the Emergence of Medieval Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

Midterm #2 distributed, due Monday, November 12th at 11:59 p.m.

Monday, November 12th – Library session to prepare for final project (Week Eleven)

❖ **How has the concept of 'feudalism' both shaped and distorted historical understandings of the High Middle Ages? Beyond analyzing feudalism as an economic system, how can scholars access the voices of peasants who lived under it?**

Wednesday, November 14th (Week Eleven)

- Steven Bednarski, *Poisoned Past: The Life and Times of Margarida de Portu, a Fourteenth-Century Accused Poisoner* (University of Toronto Press, 2014)

Monday, November 19th (Week Twelve)

- Elizabeth A.R. Brown, 'The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe', in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 79, no. 4 (Oct. 1974)

'Scaffold' #1 for final project due by Monday, November 19th at 11:59 p.m.

Wednesday, November 21st (Week Twelve)

- Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford University Press, 1994)

Thanksgiving Break – November 22nd to 25th

❖ How did men and women live and love in the 'Two Cities' of High and Late Medieval Europe – the sacred one and the profane one, as well as the borderlands between the two?

Monday, November 26th (Week Thirteen)

- *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, eds. M. McLaughlin and B. Wheeler (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Wednesday, November 28th (Week Thirteen)

- Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (University of California Press, 1987)

Monday, December 3rd (Week Fourteen)

- John van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2008)

Wednesday, December 5th (Week Fourteen)

- Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, eds. V.A. Kolva and Glending Olson (W.W. Norton, 2018)

'Scaffold' #2 for final project due by Wednesday, December 5th at 11:59 p.m.

Monday, December 10th (Week Fifteen)

- *York Mystery Plays*, eds. Richard Beadle and Pamela King (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Wednesday, December 12th – Final Project Round Robins (Week Fifteen)

Final Project due by Wednesday, December 19th at 11:59 p.m.