

HIST5316 Topics in Medieval History

Fall 2015

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This is a readings seminar in which we survey a selection of recent and older scholarship in medieval history, with an emphasis on studies that link social and cultural history approaches. We may take as our guide Richard Darnton's observation, in *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984), that "individual expression takes place within a general idiom, that we learn to classify sensations and make sense of things by thinking within a framework provided by our culture," and that the historian can "discover the social dimension of thought" by relating evidence to the surrounding world of significance, "passing from text to context and back again."

In this class we will emphasize a close reading of the text, evaluating the evidence and methodology used, noting problems of bias (if any), identifying the precise questions being raised and answered (and whether this is done successfully or not), and generally making connections between the readings. At the end of each class meeting, we will together summarize what contribution our reading for that week has made to our understanding of medieval history and culture.

Requirements:

Participation (50% of final grade): Class participation is required! Attending a seminar is not a spectator sport! Plan on regularly contributing to discussion in every class meeting, and come with questions. Generally speaking, for class discussion you should be able to summarize the reading for each week as well as critique it, i.e., in a manner similar to a book review.

Historiography Paper (40% of final grade): You are asked to write a 20-25 page historiographical critique, on a topic of your own choosing, that relates in some way to the themes or questions raised in class. (A good place to start is the bibliographies of the seminar books themselves). Follow your interests when you choose your topic, but please discuss your ideas with me before you begin. All students will make a **formal presentation (10% of final grade)** of their findings to the class at our last two meetings in December. (We will discuss in class what a good presentation entails in terms of length, structure, and mode). The final version of your paper is due by the end of final exams week.

Plan to read something on the order of 8-10 books and articles (half and half) on a topic of interest that is fairly active at present, i.e., one upon which a significant amount of scholarship has been focused over the last 15 to 20 years or so. Depending on your topic you may need to read some work published earlier than that; and in any case, there is no correlation between quality of scholarship and publication date. (Good scholarship \neq recent scholarship).

The object of this assignment is for you to gain some mastery of the historiography concerning your chosen topic, and to evaluate that field of scholarship. For each study you read you will ask the same sorts of questions we raise in class, i.e., thesis, evidence, methodology, findings. Are the conclusions supported by the analysis, and are they meaningful? How do the studies connect with each other, i.e., do they form a body of findings? How active (or inactive) is the topic? Is it 'all the rage,' 'cutting-edge,' moribund? Why? In your view, how significant is the topic? What methodologies or interpretive approaches are being employed, e.g., is the scholarship

driven by a close reading of the primary sources? Does it rely on textual analysis, comparative analysis, is it informed by interdisciplinary interests? Is it heavily theoretical? a-theoretical? Is there or is there not a problem of bias? Is it good, careful, imaginative scholarship? Does it open up the field to new questions, as all good scholarship should do? What is the *status questionis* at present, and where do you see the field moving? Where would you like to see it move? What contributions are being made by historians working in your area of interest?

In short, you are being asked to evaluate a field of scholarship based upon a sampling of important recent work, in a mere 20-25 pages. This means that out of all the possible issues or problems you might isolate in the course of your reading, you will have to **select** what you believe is most significant to focus on in your discussion.

For the first class session, please read and be prepared to discuss (pdf already sent to you):
From Jerome Kroll & Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (Routledge, 2005): Chapter 3, “Mysticism and Altered States of Consciousness”

Week 2 (September 10):

M. Patricia Hogan, “The Labor of Their Days: Work in the Medieval Village,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, n.s. 8 (1986): 77-186.

Marc Bloch, “From the Royal Court to the Court of Rome: The Suit of the Serfs of Rosny-sous-Bois,” in *Change in Medieval Society: Europe North of the Alps, 1050-1500* (ed. Sylvia Thrupp, 1964): 3-13.

Peter Larson, “Peasant Opportunities in Rural Durham: Land, Vills and Mills, 1400-1500,” in *Commercial activity, markets and entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: essays in honour of Richard Britnell* (Boydell, 2011): 141-164.

(pdfs for all 3 articles will be provided)

Week 3 (September 17):

Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Martin Thom (Cambridge, 1983; digital ed. 2009)

Week 4 (September 24):

James France, *Separate But Equal: Cistercian Lay Brothers, 1120-1350* (Collegeville, MN, 2012)

Week 5 (October 1):

Emilia Jamroziak, *Rievaulx Abbey and its Social Context, 1132-1300: Memory, Locality, and Networks* (Brepols, 2005)

Week 6 (October 8):

Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307* (3rd ed.) (Oxford, 2013) (available online through UConn Library).

Week 7 (October 15):

Miranda Threlfall-Holmes, *Monks and Markets: Durham Cathedral Priory, 1460-1520* (Oxford, 2005) (available online through UConn Library)

Week 8 (October 22):

Richard K. Marshall, *The Local Merchants of Prato: Small Entrepreneurs in the Late Medieval Economy* (Johns Hopkins, 1999)

Week 9 (October 29):

Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987) (available online through UConn Library)

Week 10 (November 5):

Simon Teuscher, *Lords' Rights and Peasant Stories: Writing and the Formation of Tradition in the Later Middle Ages* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) (available online through UConn library)

Week 11 (November 12):

James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Harvard, 2007)

Week 12 (November 19): No class: individual meetings re: paper drafts

Weeks 13 & 14 (December 3 & 10):

Student Presentations