

Hist 304
Western Europe in the Middle Ages, c. 300-1400
Spring 2016
MW 3-4:15, Krug Hall 204

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Description and goals

This course considers the main developments in western European history roughly between the conversion of Constantine (312) and the first phases of the Hundred Years' War (to c. 1400). Topics to be addressed include: the failure of the Roman Empire in the fifth century and the rise of its successor states; the lasting impact of the Carolingian empire; Vikings and other forms of political implosion in the tenth century; investiture controversy and reform; the idea and practice of the First Crusade; expansion of high medieval kingships and economies; high medieval intellectual and political culture; the Black Death and the 'autumn' of the Middle Ages. We will concentrate our efforts on close readings of a series of significant primary sources, and use these readings to expose and develop a sense of significant moments and themes in the history of the period.

By the end of the course students will be familiar with the main lines of development and significant events in western medieval history; and, more importantly, students will have developed a familiarity with the main types of literary, documentary, and material sources of that history, and will have begun to confront the difficulties of interpretation this source-base presents.

Students with disabilities

If you are a student with a disability for which you need academic accommodation, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703.993.2474, ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS.

Honor code

- George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited.
- All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.
- See <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/masons-honor-code/> for more detailed information.

Blackboard

For better or for worse blackboard plays an important role in this course as a repository for many of our readings and all of our graded assignments. Please ensure that you have access to our blackboard page: mymason.gmu.edu

Email

Please ensure that you have access to your GMU email account. I will occasionally communicate with the class via email, and the course email lists depend on your GMU mail account. Reminder: in order to comply with student privacy laws, faculty and students must use their GMU email accounts when corresponding with each other.

Winter weather

In the event of snow (or, since this is greater Washington, the very faintest hint of snow) classes may be cancelled. In such events we will follow whatever amended opening and closing times the university sets. These are always announced on the main webpage: gmu.edu and sent out by text alert for those of you signed up for this service. Those nostalgic for obsolete technology may call the switchboard: (703) 993-1000.

Student services

I want to remind you that George Mason University has put in place a number of academic support services and other resources to facilitate student success. You have already paid for these; they are your tuition dollars at work; take full advantage of them. In particular:

The Writing Center: writingcenter.gmu.edu
Counseling and Psychological Services:
caps.gmu.edu
University Career Service: careers.gmu.edu

Important dates

- Martin Luther King Day M 1/18: no class
- Last day to add: Tu 1/26
- Last day to drop (33% tuition penalty): Tu 2/2
- Final drop deadline (67% tuition penalty): F 2/19
- Selective withdrawal period (see: <https://registrar.gmu.edu/topics/selective-withdrawal> for details): M 2/22-F 3/25
- Spring break: M 3/7-Su 3/13
- Last day of classes: M 5/2

Required books

- Beowulf, trans. Heaney (Norton, ISBN 9780393320978)
- Song of Roland, trans. Burgess (Penguin, ISBN 9780140445329)
- Chronicles of the First Crusade, trans. Tyerman (Penguin, ISBN 9780241955222)
- Miller, Power and the Holy in the Age of the Investiture Crisis (MacMillan, ISBN 9780312404680)
- Froissart, Chronicles, trans. Brereton (Penguin, ISBN 9780140442007)

Textbook (not required)

There is no textbook for this class. For those students who would find it helpful to follow along with the lectures in a narrative history of the period I can recommend several good options. All of these should more than adequately fill in and flesh out the topics covered in class. None are required. All (each) will improve your experience of the class.

- Norman Cantor, Civilization of the Middle Ages (Harper, 1994). It may be getting long in the tooth, but Cantor's medieval overview remains a bracing read, opinionated and delightful. Can be had for very little money.
- Warren Hollister and Judith Bennett, Medieval Europe: A Short History (10th ed.(!), McGraw-Hill, 2005). Long the standard textbook for this type of course for good reason. Clear, well organized, and to the point, this is a very useful narrative of the period. Rather dull, but dull in all the best ways. No need to spring for the most current edition as any one of the older (and thus cheaper) editions will serve you just fine.
- R.W. Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages (1953 and often reprinted). A stone-cold classic of historical writing in English, and one of the finest works on the period in any language. This is a beautiful and sophisticated thinking through of what bound medieval civilization into a coherent period, how that civilization came to be, and where we might most profitably see it in the surviving evidence. It is hard to imagine that you will read a finer book during your time here at the university



SCRIPTORIUM MONK AT WORK. (From *Lacroix*.)



Assignments

There are three components to student grades in the course.

First: daily participation in class discussion of the primary sources is required.

Second: Ten source assignments. These are short writing assignments, generally 1-2 pages at most, keyed to readings under discussion by the class. The specifics vary from assignment to assignment, but in general these are short essays designed to help you focus your reading of the primary sources. All can be found in the "source assignments" folder on blackboard.

Third: three essays. These writing assignments (5-7 pages) ask you to think comparatively across two or more sources we have read together as a class. NB: 1) There are five assigned essays, but you must complete only three. 2) **All students must write the first essay**, and thereafter you may pick and choose which essays you write as your tastes and schedule allow, so long as you finish the course having written three. 3) If you write more than three essays I will only count your top three grades. 4) Please note that all essays have a strict late policy as described in the instructions for each essay. Further information about these assignments may be found in the "essays" folder on our blackboard page.

Due dates for the essays

- Essay 1: W 2/10 in class
- Essay 2: F 3/4 by noon by email
- Essay 3: F 4/1 by noon by email
- Essay 4: F 4/22 by noon by email
- Essay 5: M 5/9 by noon by email

Extra credit

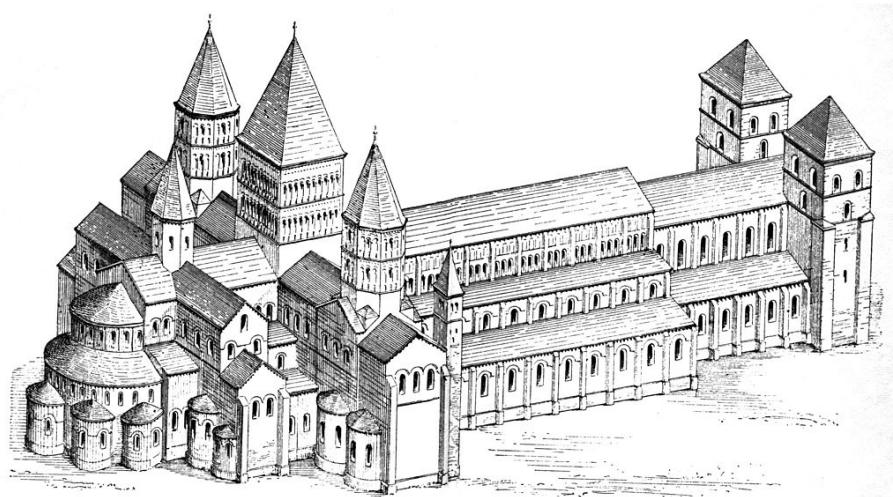
The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore has excellent medieval holdings. For those students willing to make the trip, there is a short extra credit assignment keyed to the medieval collection at the Walters. Available on blackboard.

Grading

- Ten source assignments: 2.5 points each
- Three essays: 25 points each
- Extra credit: 5 points

The following conversion of numerical grades to university letter grades will be used:

A = 93-100	A- = 90-92	B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86	B- = 80-82	C+ = 77-79
C = 73-76	C- = 70-72	D = 60-69
F = all grades 59 and lower		



2. CLUNY (NO).