

History 203 / 693
Introduction to Medieval Europe
Spring 2006

Instructor: Stephen McCluskey
Office Hours: TW 11:00-12:00
202-D Woodburn
Also by appointment 293-2421 x 5225
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TTh 1:00 - 2:15
G-16 Woodburn

Required Text:

C. Warren Hollister and Judith M. Bennett. *Medieval Europe: A Short History* (10th. ed.).

Supplementary Texts (**three* required**):

Patrick J. Geary. *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*.

C. S. Lewis. *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*.

Richard Hodges. *Towns and Trade in the Age of Charlemagne*.

Friedrich Ganshof. *Feudalism*.

Barbara A. Hanawalt. *The Ties that Bind: Peasant Families in Medieval England*.

Richard Kieckhefer. *Magic in the Middle Ages*.

Christopher Allmand. *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War c.1300-c.1450*.

- * Please do not purchase the supplementary texts until they are assigned. You will be assigned books to buy early in the second week of class based on your preferences. Be sure to **buy all your books before the fourth week of class; the bookstores return unsold books to publishers about that time**. Although I have put the library's only copies of these books on reserve, don't count on using the library copy or borrowing one from a friend. Everyone will need the same books at the same time and you will need to have your own copy in class on the day of the panel discussion.

History deals with people who are both like us, and very different from us. They are like us in that they have the same physical and emotional needs and the same physical and mental abilities that we do. They are different from us in that they live in a very different cultural environment and take for granted many things that we consider unbelievable and would consider many of the attitudes that we accept as natural to be absurd. We are often tempted to assume that their ideas and values must naturally be the same as ours – or even worse – to dismiss their ideas and values as irrational because they aren't the same as ours. For those reasons newcomers to the Middle Ages often have great difficulty understanding medieval people, but if we are to really understand them, we have to take them seriously. My favorite writer (whose father was an anthropologist and whose husband is a historian) Ursula Le Guin wrote:

To learn a belief without belief is to sing a song without the tune.

A yielding, an obedience, a willingness to accept these notes as the right notes, this pattern as the true pattern, is the essential gesture of performance, translation, and understanding. The gesture need not be permanent, a lasting posture of the mind or heart; yet it is not false. It is more than the suspension of disbelief needed to watch a play, yet less than a conversion. It is a position, a posture in the dance.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Telling*, pp. 97-98

That willingness to accept, at least provisionally, another people's beliefs and attitudes and practices as valid – and even a willingness to try them on to see how they fit your own mind – is crucial if we are to understand the people of another time or place. This doesn't mean an uncritical acceptance, but neither does it mean an unreasonable dismissal. **It means trying to stretch your mind to take an unfamiliar mental posture.**

My recent research has concerned the understanding and uses of astronomy in medieval Europe from about AD 500-1200. I've increasingly come to be interested in the relations between ideas and society (especially how scientific and religious ideas interact and are put into practice). In my work I've increasingly come to appreciate the value of archaeological evidence. It follows fairly naturally that this course will focus on ideas and society in the medieval period.

But many of you, no doubt, came to this course hoping to find out about other aspects of the Middle Ages. The supplementary readings are a way I use to get discussions going about these other aspects. Everyone will express their preferences for the seven books above, and I will assign everyone three of their favorite books to review. (I can't guarantee everyone their first three choices, but peoples' tastes vary enough that I've seldom had to assign anyone their fifth choice).

The course grade will be based on three book reviews, two panel discussions based on the books reviewed, a mid-term and final Exam. (Note: there are a few graduate students sitting in this class for graduate credit. They will review all seven books and participate in three panels each)

The course grade will be computed as follows:

	Undergrads	Grad Students
Attendance	50	50
Mid-Term Exam	100	100
Final Exam	175	175
Book reviews @ 60	180	420
Panel discussions @ 30	60	90
TOTAL POINTS	565	835

BOOK REVIEWS: The book reviews should be 600 to 800 words each (that comes to 3 to 4 double spaced typewritten pages). **You will need four complete copies**, including the review itself, the author's thesis quotation, the summary of the book's main points, and your question. One copy is your file copy, the other **three are handed in at the beginning of class** on the class **before** the date of the panel discussion for me and for the two students who will write short critiques of your review. This means that you will also be required to read and annotate two reviews by other students which you will return to me on the day of the panel. Late reviews will be docked a full letter grade. This isn't just a silly formality; I have to pass out copies of the reviews to be graded and it doesn't really help when someone walks in with a handful of papers just as the class is walking out the door.

There are at least two ways to go wrong on a book review. One is to try to summarize the book; you can't hope to summarize in a few hundred words what took the author two hundred or more pages. The other is to attack the author for not taking your approach — for not writing the book you would like to write about the topic. Instead you should identify the book's central theme and/or the author's distinctive approach to the topic, and discuss how well the author carried out this intent, using about three pertinent examples from the book to illustrate your discussion. In citing these examples you should refer in parentheses, e.g., (pp. 35-42), to the specific pages on which they occur. You are concerned with the clarity of presentation, logic of argument, and adequacy of evidence which the author uses in the examples you discuss. Your review should close with a brief discussion of how well these examples, and the others which you don't have space to present, support the book's central thesis or approach.

As part of all reviews you should also submit (typed on an attached sheet of paper) a quotation from the book presenting the author's thesis, a list of the main points (at least three, no more than eight) that the author makes to support that thesis, and a question on the book that will stimulate the discussion of your colleagues on the panel and that you feel would be a fair question for an essay exam. Some of these questions may turn up on an exam, so don't pick something about little nit-picking details but try to get at the big issues that the author raises. I will toss some of these questions to the panel, which will help provide the class as a whole with a view of the content of the book.

In evaluating your colleagues' reviews you should comment on the review and also on whether the selected quotation really gets at the author's thesis, whether the reviewer has listed the book's main points, and whether the question is a good one.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS: The panel discussions are not just for people who have read the book. Panelists will sit at the front of the class and will have to present the general theme of the book to the whole class. Remember that you — and your fellow panelists — are the teachers for this class. You have to communicate the main points of the book to your classmates who haven't read it. You have to present the author's approach, evidence, conclusions, and the kind of questions that the book answers — or leaves unanswered. In addition, if you've had any problems with any of the reviews you've read, you should question your fellow panelists on those points. I will act as moderator and ask specific panelists to discuss specific issues raised in the book, so read the book carefully. Since your fellow panelists and a good portion of the rest of the class will have read the book, you can't bluff all of us. If you disagree with one of your colleagues on the panel, speak up.

Weekly Schedule of Topics

- Jan 10-12 Introduction: The Ancient Background to the Middle Ages
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 1-14
- Jan 17-19 Augustine and Early Christian Thought
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 14-29
- Jan 24-26 The late Classical Tradition
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 43-48
- Jan 26 Panel: Lewis, *The Discarded Image***
- Jan 31 - Feb 2 The Barbarian World
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 30-43, 56-58
- Feb 2 Panel: Geary, *The Myth of Nations***
- Feb 7-9 Origins of Western monasticism
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 58-63
- Feb 14-16 The Rebirth of Learning
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 64-66, 97-118
- Feb 16 Panel: Ganshof, *Feudalism***
- Feb 21-23 Renewed Invasions and Feudalism
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 119-147, 180-184
- Feb 21 Mid-term Exam Tuesday**
- Feb 28 - Mar 2 The Economic Revival of Western Europe
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 149-167
- Mar 2 Panel: Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bound***
- Mar 7-9 The Islamic World
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 81-95, 215-238
- Mar 11-19 Spring Break**
- Mar 21-23 The Rise of the Towns
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 167-179
- Mar 23 Panel: Hodges, *Towns and Trade***
- Mar 28-30 New Religious Movements
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 186-213

Apr 4-6 The Twelfth-century "Renaissance" and the origins of Scholasticism
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 300-319

Apr 6 Panel: Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*.

Apr 11-13 The Later Middle Ages
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 321-336, 366-383

Apr 18-20 Church and Empire
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 240-264, 336-344

Apr 20 Panel: Allmand, *The Hundred Years War*

Apr 25-28 The Rise of Centralized States
Hollister & Bennett, pp. 266-288, 346-365

Tue. May 2 Final Exam (3:00 - 5:00 PM)