Death in the Middle Ages

"Such as I was you are, and such as I am you will be. Wealth, honor and power are of no value at the hour of your death."

Baudoin de Condé

Introduction
The aim of this course is twofold: (1) to provide a topical examination of some contemporary issues in medieval historiography and (2) to do so by exploring medieval ideas about death and the afterlife. Using saints, relics, magic, miracles, ghosts, visions, possessions, etc. as a point of departure, we will examine the role of the divine, demonic, and supernatural in the religious beliefs and daily life of people in the Middle Ages. We will discuss various practices of commemoration, mourning, and burial as well the doctrine of resurrection, visions of heaven and hell, ghostly apparitions, and the invention of Purgatory. Most importantly, we will attempt to understand what these beliefs reveal about the medieval world and the social context that gave them meaning.

Course Material
Each week students will read both primary and secondary sources. Some of the primary sources are directly referenced by the secondary sources. During class meetings, students will be asked (1) to contextualize, analyze, and evaluate the assigned primary sources, (2) to examine how the authors of the secondary sources make use of primary sources to advance an argument, and (3) to reflect critically and creatively on the differences and similarities between the institutions that we are studying and those of the contemporary western world. Since this is a process-based learning course, students will be expected to make serious efforts to learn to think historically and communicate their ideas in writing.

Note: This course is designed to introduce students to historical methods and practices. Students are not expected to have prior knowledge of medieval history. Relevant historical background will be provided by the instructor each week.

Objectives
• To advance students’ understanding of and experience with the practice of history and the historical method.
• To provide an overview of major cultural and intellectual currents of the Middle Ages.
• To develop analytical and critical reading skills necessary for analyzing primary and secondary sources.
• To familiarize students with current trends and methodologies in contemporary medieval scholarship.
• To develop skills essential to the research and writing of history. Students will learn how to choose a research topic, select appropriate sources, construct an annotated bibliography, and write a substantial research paper.

Course Requirement

Participation (15%): Class meetings function as a seminar, providing students an opportunity for active learning and a forum to present ideas. Students are expected to have read the entire assignment carefully each week before the class meeting and be prepared to discuss it critically and creatively.

Weekly Reading Responses (20%): Each week students are expected to submit a 250 word reaction paper based upon that week's assigned secondary readings. This is a NOT a summary. The reaction paper should provide a brief analysis of a primary sources within the appropriate historical context.

Presentation (10%): Individually, or with a partner, each student will be responsible for leading one group discussion on an assigned primary source. The format of this discussion will be modeled by the instructor in Week 2. Students will choose between weeks 3-9.

Final Paper (50%): Each student is required to submit a 12-15 page final paper on a topic of their choosing. The paper should present an analysis of one or more primary sources that we did not discuss in class as well as a substantial literature review. Students are encouraged to consult the bibliography at the end of the syllabus as a starting point. This will be an ongoing 10-week project and will require the following:
  • Week 4: By this time students are expected to have chosen a paper topic and received instructor approval.
  • Week 6: Submission of annotated bibliography.
  • Week 8: Due: formal outline (min. 8 pages) or rough draft and bibliography. Students will receive instructor feedback no later than Week 10.
  • Finals week: Submission of final draft, complete with footnotes and bibliography.

All assignments are due in hard copy. Please use Chicago-Style Format. http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html

Academic Integrity
The punishments are severe, so don’t do it! For further information on Academic Integrity please visit http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/integrity.html.

Requires Texts
Primary sources readings are available online through the course website. Secondary source readings are available on reserve.

**Course Outline**

**Week 1: Introduction**

What does a historian do and how do they do it?
What are the “Middle Ages?”

**Week 2: The Foundations of Medieval Culture**

Medieval culture grew out of the world of late antiquity. To understand medieval attitudes towards death and the afterlife, it is necessary to consider the development of early Christianity within the context of the late Roman Empire. What kind of place was the world of late antiquity? What was the pre-Christian view of death? What was the early Christian view of death? Early Christianity could be characterized as a religion of collective ritual. How might this have affected the spread of Christian beliefs and practices? What changed after the adoption of Christianity as the official state religion in Rome? What happened after the fall of the Roman Empire?

**Required Readings**

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<td>The Martyrdom of Polycarp [link]</td>
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<td>Augustine of Hippo, <em>City of God</em>, Book VIII, Chapter 27 [link]</td>
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**Week 3: Negotiating with the “very special dead”**

The ideal of holiness has taken many forms in the course of the Middle Ages, including martyrdom, monasticism, mysticism, pious living, and social activism. How is holiness defined? What is the role of the Cult of the Saints? What is a saint? What are relics? What is the significance and role of relics? What does the treatment of relics tell us about medieval attitudes towards the dead?
Required Readings

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| Bede, *The Life and Miracles of St. Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindesfarne*, Ch. XLI-XLV  
  - “Exchange and Interaction between the Living and the Dead,” pp. 77-94  
  - “Humiliation of Saints,” pp. 95-115  
  - “Coercion of Saints in Medieval Religious Practice,” pp. 116-124  
  - “The Ninth-Century Relic Trade,” pp. 177-193  
| Einhard, “Translation of the Relics of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter,” ed. Thomas Head |                                                                 |
| Stephen de Bourbon: *De Supersticione: On St Guinefort*  
  http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/guinefort.asp |                                                                 |

Week 4: The value of the dead

[DUE: PAPER TOPIC + LIST OF SOURCES]

*Continue discussion from Week 3:*
“*What we are really examining is the cultural and social context that gave the relic its symbolic function after the theft, and in particular we are examining the mentality within that context which accorded importance to the theft narrative as a ‘history’ of the transition form old community to new.*” (Geary, p. 8).

Required Readings

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| Anonymous, *Translatio Sancti Nicolai*  
  http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4025.htm#6 |                                                                 |
| Claudius of Turin, “Apology: An Attack on Veneration of Relics,” ed. Thomas Head |                                                                 |
Week 5: Purgatory, Purification, and Punishment

What is Purgatory? What does Le Goff mean by the “birth” of Purgatory? What are the social, cultural, and intellectual changes that gave rise and popularity to the Doctrine of Purgatory in the late twelfth century? As you reflect upon the structure and significance of Le Goff’s argument, make sure to consider the following questions:
- Le Goff argues for a distinct shift in “mental ideological and religious structures”. He is concerned with the histoire des mentalités (history of mentalities) and social imagination. What does that mean?
- Le Goff maintains that the Doctrine of Purgatory developed from the intersection of three separate concepts in Christian tradition. What are they? Why did they finally “assemble” at the end of the twelfth century?
- What kinds of sources does Le Goff use in support of his argument?
- What is the difference between mortal and venial sin? What are indulgences? The Church taught that the fate of the dead can be affected by the actions of the living. What does this tell us about the relationship between the living and the dead?

Required Reading

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Week 6: The Mortal and Eternal Body

How would you characterize the medieval conception of the afterlife? What role does the physical body play? What is the relationship between the body and the soul? What happens at the moment of death? What is the Last Judgment? What do these beliefs tell us about medieval culture? What is eschatology?
Required Readings

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<td>Thomas Aquinas, <em>Summa Contra Gentiles</em>, Book Four: Salvation, Ch. 79-85</td>
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Week 7: Ghosts And Revenants

[DUE: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY]

What is a ghost? What was the function of ghosts in late medieval culture? Medieval ghosts possessed a degree of corporeality; they were not just spirits. What does this tell us about medieval culture? How did people deal with ghosts? What was the relationship between the ghost and his/her respective corpse? (In your reading response for this week, you may want to draw some connections between Schmitt’s analysis of ghosts and their place in medieval society and what you now know about the Doctrine of Purgatory and the treatment of the body.)

Required Readings

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<td><a href="http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/williamofnewburgh-five.asp#24">http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/williamofnewburgh-five.asp#24</a></td>
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Week 8: The Macabre

What is the meaning of the macabre? What is the Dance of Death? How does the structure
of the dance reflect what we have learned about judgment, death, and the afterlife? What happened in the late Middle Ages to trigger increased interest/fascination with the macabre? What historical explanation does Huizinga offer for the late medieval focus on death and corporeal decay? Do Binski and Camille agree or disagree with Huizinga? What alternative explanations do they offer?

**Recommended Background Reading:**

**Required Readings**

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**Recommended:**

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**Week 9: Angels and Demons**
What are the physical signs of possession? Where does the possessing spirit lodge itself? What is the process of discernment? Why were women believed to be more susceptible than men to possession? What does this tell us about gender relations at the end of the Middle Ages?

**Required Readings**

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**Week 10: Visions of the Afterlife, The World Of Dante**

T.S. Elliot called the *Divine Comedy* the most important poetical work in western tradition. How does the *Divine Comedy* reflect the changes that occurred at the end of Middle Ages? What does Dante tell us about western European culture around the year 1300? As you read, consider the following:
- the role and nature of Satan
- humanity’s relationship to God
- the nature of time, history, duty, causation, divine grace, divine wrath, sin, love
- impact of philosophy and art on late medieval thought
- Dante’s view of the political situation in Italy

**Required Readings**

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Please also check out http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/
Since 2008, Texas University at Austin has been working on a multimedia project combining images, textual commentary, and audio recording of the three realms of the Divine Comedy. The website provides a virtual walkthrough of the Divine Comedy. As you go through the circles of hell, purgatory, and heaven make sure to listen to the audio recordings of the original Italian verse.

Finals Week: PAPER DUE (exact due date to be determined)

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ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY (some texts you might consider for your research paper)

Primary Sources Collections
John Shinners, Medieval Popular Religion, 1000-1500: A Reader (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 1997)

For hagiographies see
• “Saints’ Lives” http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/sbook3.asp#ec1
• ORB “Hagiography” http://www.theorb.net/encyclo/religion/hagiography/hagindex.html

Primary Sources
Augustine of Hippo, “On the Care to be had for the Dead”

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement to the third part of the summa theological, Treaties on Resurrection (Questions 69-86) and Treaties on the Last Things (Questions 86-99)

*Book of Revelation* (Apocalypse of John) (*Vulgate*) [http://vulgate.org/nt/epistle/revelation_1.htm](http://vulgate.org/nt/epistle/revelation_1.htm)


*The Debate Between the Body and Soul* (The Vision of Fulbert), ed. F.J. Child (Cambridge, 1888) [http://archive.org/details/debateofbodysoul00chil](http://archive.org/details/debateofbodysoul00chil)

Dante, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*

*The Departing Soul’s Address to the Body*, trans. S.W. Sing (London, 1845) [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19937/19937-h/19937-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19937/19937-h/19937-h.htm)


*Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, ed. Shane Leslie (London, 1932) [http://archive.org/details/storystpatriarchs00leslgoog](http://archive.org/details/storystpatriarchs00leslgoog)


### Secondary Sources

John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 2001)


William Franke, *Dante’s Interpretive Journey* (Chicago, 1996).


Isabel Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). See especially “Purgatory in Bede and Boniface.”

Isabel Moreira and Margaret Merrill Toscano, eds. *Hell and Its Afterlife* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2010).


http://www.academia.edu/1259172/Of_Corpses_Constables_and_Kings._The_Danse_Macabre_in_Late_Medieval_and_Renaissance_Culture


Barbara Rosenwein, To be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny’s Property, 909-1049 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989)


Robert N. Swanson, Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-1515 (Cambridge, 1997).


