BODY MATTERS: LIFE, DEATH, AND THE BODY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

HIST 187B | Historiography Proseminar
Wednesday 9am–12pm | Bunche 1221A

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Office Hours: M-TH by appointment

Course Overview

The human body has fascinated and perplexed cultures throughout time. The body and its condition as a source of pleasure and pain, health and disease, birth and death, success and failure, reward and punishment is the subject of imagination, literature, scientific inquiry, philosophy, and religion. This courses examines perceptions of the human body, its purpose, and uses in the context of medieval intellectual cultural. We will explore the importance of the body in the conception of self, attitudes toward the appearance of the body, medical practice, ideas about gender and sexuality, the handling of corpses and religious relics, reasons for grisly torture and punishment, cannibalism, and contact with the "bodiless" (i.e., ghosts).

Student Learning Outcomes

The main objective of this course is to familiarize students with the skills of deconstructive historical analysis through critical reading and examination of secondary literature. Each week, students will read selections from contemporary scholarship that examine major issues in the history of the body. Students will then be asked to (1) reflect critically and creatively on current historiographical trends and debates, (2) evaluate the structure of authors' arguments and approach to historical problems such as bias, narrative style, source material, methodology, etc. and (3) take a stance and craft a persuasive written argument.

Accommodations

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu.

Course Materials

All course readings are available on the course website under the "Readings" tab. The readings are arranged in alphabetic order. Students should use the syllabus to determine which readings that should be completing for the week. Students are required complete all the week's assigned readings prior to the class meeting.

During class meetings, students will be expected to discuss the readings critically and creatively. Students must have the **readings on hand in class** (printed or via electronic device). If you do not have the readings available, I reserve the right to dismiss you from class.

Course Requirements

Please visit the course website for guidelines on these assignments.

10%	Active Participation	Determined by your preparation for class and participation in discussion. *Please note, if you have great ideas but do not feel comfortable sharing them in class, you can always come to my office hours to discuss readings and earn participation credit.*
15%	Weekly Response Posts	See "Weekly Response Forum" for details. Your post should be ~250 words.
10%	Class Discussion Lead	You will lead one discussion section with a partner.
10%	Book Review #1	Due **Sunday, October 28 @ midnight** via Turnitin.com
20%	Book Review #2	Due **Sunday, December 2 @ midnight** via Turnitin.com
20%	Book Review #3	Due **Sunday, December 16 @ midnight** via Turnitin.com
15%	Cultural Comparison Project	**Finals Week Presentations** with partner

Late Assignments

If you intend to be absent (*you are allowed 1 absence*), you must e-mail me before class and submit all assignments.

Late assignments will NOT be accepted without medical or other valid documentation.

Week 1 (Oct 4): Introduction
Before we can begin to examine historiographical approaches to medieval ideas of the human body and its uses, we must understand why this topic is historiographically significant and what we mean by "body."

Caroline Walker Bynum, "Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995): 1–33.

In class, we will be reading the following sources. You may want to get a head start by skimming the material.

- excerpts from Augustine of Hippo on the body and soul (PDF)
- excerpts from Thomas Aquinas on the body and soul (PDF)

Recommended: Caroline Walker Bynum "Soul and Body," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, *Supplement*, ed. William C. Jordan with Joel Kaye and Lynn Staley (2004), 588-94.

Week 2 (Oct. 11): The Seen Body: Beauty, Age, and Disability
In the Middle Ages (and sometimes even today), people were judged by their physical appearance. It was believed that people's facial features, expression, and skin condition were indicative of their character and the predisposition of their soul. Doctors and scholars engaged in physiognomy or the assessment of character and personality based on a person's outer appearance. What observations have historians made about medieval beliefs in the connection between physical appearance and character? What conclusions about medieval society have historians come to on the basis of their observations?

Monica Green, "Bodily Essences: Bodies as Categories of Difference," in *Cultural History of the Human Body in the Middle Ages,* ed. Linda Kalof (2010), 149–172.

Shulamith Shahar, "The Old Body in Medieval Culture," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 160–186.

Irina Metzer, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment in the High Middle Ages, c.1100–c.1400 (Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture)* (2006), 38–64.

Jospeh Ziegler, "Skin and Character in Medieval and Early Renaissance Physiognomy," *Micrologus* 13 (2005): 511–535.

Recommended:: Montserrate Cabré, "Beautiful Bodies," in *Cultural History of the Human Body in the Middle Ages,* ed. Linda Kalof (2010), 127–148.

Week 3 (October 18): The Unseen Body: Medicine
Medieval medical ideas and practices were influenced by the ancient works of Greek physicians such as Hippocrates (460 - 370 BCE) and Galen (129 – 216 CE). Their ideas set out a theory of the human body related to the balance of four bodily humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile). It was believed that health could be maintained or restored by balancing the humours, and by regulating air, diet, exercise, sleep, evacuation and emotion. The misbalance of humors would cause disease to set in or catastrophe to occur (e.g. begetting a female child rather than a male). What arguments have modern historians made about the nature of medieval medical theories and practices?

Ann G. Carmichael, "Health, Disease, and the Medieval Body" in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Medieval Age,* ed. Linda Kalof (2012), 43–62.

Joan Cadden, *The Meaning of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (1993), 169–208.

Vern L. Bullough, "Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women," *Viator* 4 (1973): 485–501.

Week 4 (October 25): "Dirty" Bodies

If sex was intended by God only for purposes of procreation, is the sexualization of the body a sin? What about menstruation? What conclusions have historians come to about medieval attitudes toward sex and the body?

Ruth Mazo Karras and Jaqueline Murray, "The Sexual Body," in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Medieval Age,* ed. Linda Kalof (2012), 63–80.

Edward Muir, "Carnival and the Lower Body" in *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (2005), 89–92, 125–154.

Charles T. Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought" *Speculum* 56: 4 (1981): 710–727.

Willis Johnson, "The Myth of Jewish Male Menses," *Journal of Medieval History* 24:3 (1998): 273–295.

Week 5 (November 1): Pain: Torture and Punishment

In the Middle Ages, the image and memory of Christ's bleeding and tortured body hanging in pain from the cross served as a constant reminder of Christ's love for mankind. Belief and devotional practices were often centered on contemplation of the grisly details of the Passion. Physical suffering could enhance the religious experience bringing the believer closer to Christ. True pain was therefore thought of as an experience reserved for only a select few whose love for Christ was so great that they would bodies would experience Christ's pain. Yet, pain was also a form of punishment and torture for criminals, blasphemers, heretics, and other miscreants. How do historians reconcile this seeming contradiction in medieval attitudes toward pain?

Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (2010), 1–10, 25–51.

Ellen Ross, "She Wept and Cried Right Loud for Sorrow and for Pain': Suffering, the Spiritual Journey, and Women's Experience in Late Medieval Mysticism," in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*(1993), 45–59.

Edward Peters, "Destruction of the Flesh – Salvation of the Spirit: The Paradoxes of Torture in Medieval Christian Society," in *The Devil, Heresy, and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russel,* ed. Alberto Gerreiro (1998), 131–148.

Book Review #1: Due Sunday, October 28 @ midnight

Week 6 (November 8): Dead Bodies

The body dies. With high levels of infant mortality, diseases, famine and warfare, medieval society lived in expectation of the body's death. To prepare for a "good death," it was necessary to live a "good life"—avoid sin, perform good works, complete all sacraments, and adhere to the teachings of the church. While medieval people believed in the eternity of the soul, questions arose about the body. What have historians determined about medieval beliefs in the connection between the body and soul, and the fate of the body after death? Why, how, and where did medieval people bury their dead?

Recommended background: Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Rituals and Representation* (1996), 29–69

Caroline Walker Bynum, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Medieval and Modern Contexts," *History of Religions* 3, no. 1 (1990): 51–85.

Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Death and the Human Body in the Later Middle Ages: The Legislation of Boniface VIII on the Division of the Corpse," *Viator* 12 (1981): 221–270.

Week 7 (November 15): Special Dead Bodies: Saints and Relics

Some dead, more specifically saints or people who had been recognized as having a special degree of holiness when they were alive, continued to play an active role in community life after death. Their body parts were held in reliquaries for the community to venerate, they were called upon in times of crisis, and it was believed that they could heal the sick. Why does the treatment of saints and reliquaries continue to be a "hot topic"? What insights does the study of saints and relics provide into medieval society?

Patrick Geary, "Exchange and Interaction between the Living and the Dead," in *Living with the Dead in et Middle Ages* (1994), 77–94.

Patrick Geary, "The Humiliation of Saints," in *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (1994), 95–115.

Caroline Walker Bynum and Paula Gerson. "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages," *Gesta* 36:1 (1997): 3–7.

Week 8 (November 22): No class! Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 9 (November 29): The Bodiless

Medieval culture vacillated between acceptance and rejection of ghosts. The question of ghosts was a question of movement between the realms of the living and the dead. By the end of the Middle Ages, it was generally accepted that the deceased could return and visit their living relatives and friends to ask for prayers that could help decrease their sentence in Purgatory or warn the living of the fate they could suffer unless that reform their sinful ways. What do studies of medieval ghost culture reveal about medieval ideas on the relationship between the living and the dead?

Jean Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society* (1998) 1-10, 195-228.

Nancy Caciola, "Spirits Seeking Bodies: Death, Possession, and Communal Memory in the Middle Ages" in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (2000), 66–86.

Robert N. Swanson, "Ghosts and Ghostbusters in the Middle Ages," *Studies in Church History* 45 (2009), 143–173.

Book Review #2: Due Sunday, December 2 @ midnight

Week 10 (December 6): Consumption of the Body

Cannibalism is a taboo in most cultures, yet the Eucharist involves the consumption of the body and blood of Christ. According to historians, why was the consumption of flesh so important to medieval religious identity and devotional practices?

Merrall L. Price, "The Man-Eating Body," in *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2003), 2–45.

Carolyn Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Religious Women," *Representations* 11 (1985): 1–25.

Merrall L. Price, "Corpus Christi: The Eucharist and Late Medieval Cultural Identity," in *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2003), 25–42.

Finals Week: In-class presentations: Cultural Comparison Project

Book Review #3: Due Sunday, December 16 @ midnight