

COL 243: Junior Colloquium

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Memorial Chapel (CHPL) and Online M/W 1:00-2:20pm

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Making Sense of the World: The ‘Middle Ages’

Our theme is **Making Sense of the World**. Under this theme we will tackle intertwined philosophical, literary, and historical questions through works that defy easy generic or disciplinary categories. Together we will unpack different ways in which writers from the middle ages worked to make sense of worlds (whether personal or collective) that were deeply perplexing, unsettling, and tragic—all of which things our current world also is.

In addition to our semester-long theme, there are three operative ideas which tie together our readings. We will prepare you to **interrogate the idea of an era** – the fourth through fourteenth centuries – as **“middle.”** The idea of the Middle Era is attributed to the fourteenth-century poet Petrarch who called the Latin literature that was not classical, “middle” (i.e., in between the Classical and himself). Modern historians gradually inflated Petrarch’s idea about literature to an assertion about history. This is why we now characterize the political, economic, religious, and social practices of the peoples from the Euphrates to Ireland, and from North Africa to Scandinavia as “middle.” This idea supported (and still supports) the historical narrative of progress that is Modernity. We will interrogate this “modernist medieval” by working with *multiple* periodizations, chronologies, and historical narratives. Practically that means: starting *earlier* and *in the wrong place* for a “traditional” Middle Ages: in first-century A.D. North Africa. It also means an alternative geography: our attention is more firmly fixed upon the cultures of the Mediterranean, than on Europe. Furthermore, instead of dividing our semester into traditional medieval sub-periods, we have structured it in terms of *conversations* that follow ideas and projects across linguistic and geographic boundaries. These solutions come at a cost: entire regions, centuries, linguistic, and cultural traditions are skipped entirely. *We rely on you to remain constantly aware of the incompleteness of our course of study.*

We will equip you with a **habit of study attuned to** the one thing that *does* unite the regions and centuries of the traditional medieval: **the hand-copied codex**. You will train your selves and each other to begin interpretive readings aware of how – to the best of our knowledge – the texts you are reading were preserved, transmitted, received, circulated, and eventually printed and translated into contemporary English. Even in our own Digital Age, we remain wedded to the technology and practices of the book, or codex. This continuity in the technology of producing and transmitting ideas allows us to remain eerily in touch with our medieval cousins.

We will not shy away from **the question of ‘contemporary issues’**. The worlds created by & inflected in the texts we read are worlds with real questions and difficult answers. While insisting we must listen carefully, sensitively, and generously in our readings of these ancient, complex, and translated texts, we will not forget that morally bankrupt ideologies still look to a fantasized ‘medieval’ as a refuge, or as a source of political & rhetorical power. We seek to understand, but a persistent pursuit of understanding need not imply endorsement, nor preclude critique.

Texts to Acquire

Pre-ordered and available from R. J. Julia to Rent or Purchase:

- William Cook and Ronald Herzman, *The Medieval World View: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition (Oxford University Press, 2011) **ISBN-13:** 978-0195373684
- *Boethius: Consolation of Philosophy* trans. J. C. Relihan (Hackett: Indianapolis, 2001) **ISBN-13:** 978-0872205833
- *The Qur'an: English (interpretation) and Parallel Arabic Text* by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2010) **ISBN-13:** 978-0199570713
- *Anna Komnene : The Alexiad* trans. E. R. A. Sewter and P. Frankopan (Penguin: London, 2009) **ISBN-13:** 978-0140455274
- *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy ibn Yaqzan: a Philosophical Tale* trans. L. E. Goodman 2nd edition (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2009) **ISBN-13:** 978-0226303109
- *The Lais of Marie de France* trans. R. Hanning and J. Ferrante (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 1999) **ISBN-13:** 978-0801020315
- *The Book of John Mandeville with Related Texts* trans. I. M. Higgins (Hackett: Indianapolis, 2011) **ISBN-13:** 978-0872209350
- *The Travels of Ibn Battuta (selected)* translated and edited by T. Mackintosh-Smith (Picador: London, 2003) **ISBN-13:** 978-0330418799

Please Note:

The College of Letters is happy to provide micro-grant scholarships for these texts. If you do not have the budget to get all or some of the required texts, please simply email us.

Available for order from Cardinal Print and Copy (Instructions on Moodle):

- Course Reader / Packet: *The Alexander Romance* (Two Translations)

Other short readings will be distributed as PDFs via Moodle

MEETINGS, MAJOR READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS

Section 1: Late Antiquity (2nd c. – 7th c.)

Assignment Schedule: Two Essays of 3-pages (TNR 12pt, 1” margins, 2x spacing)

For two of the three primary readings below, by the last Friday on that reading (e.g., for *Alexander Romance*, Friday September 11) submit an essay on a topic of your choosing.

Reading Schedule:

Weeks of: August 31 and September 7

The Alexander Romance; Cook / Herzman [C & H] *Medieval Worldview* Ch 2 “Classical” (8/31)

Weeks of: September 14 and September 21

Consolation of Philosophy

C & H, *Medieval Worldview* Ch 1 “Bible”; Ch 3 “Early Christianity”

Weeks of: September 28 and October 5

Qur'an (selections) with *Genesis* (selection) and *Gospels* (selection)

C & H, *Medieval Worldview* Ch 6 “Islam”

Section 2: Central Middle Ages (12th c.)

Assignment Schedule: Two Essays of 3-pages (TNR 12pt, 1” margins, 2x spacing)

For two of the three primary readings below, by the last Friday on that reading (e.g., for *Alexander Romance*, Friday September 11) submit an essay on a topic of your choosing.

Reading Schedule:

Weeks of: October 12 and October 19

Anna Komnena, *Alexiad*

C & H, *Medieval Worldview* Ch 5: “Byzantium”

Weeks of: October 26 and November 2

Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*

C & H, *Medieval Worldview* Ch 11: “The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century”

Weeks of: November 9 and November 16

Marie de France, *Lais*

C & H, *Medieval Worldview* Ch 10: “Church, State, and Society”

~~November 23 Week (Thanksgiving)~~

Section 3: From “Late Middle Ages” (14th c.) into “Early Modern”

Weeks of: November 30 and December 7

The Book of John Mandeville and *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*

Assignment Schedule: One Essay of 6-8 pages (TNR 12pt, 1” margins, 2x spacing)

By Saturday December 12 submit a comparative essay on the two readings above.