

# Saints and Society in the Middle Ages

Dr. Ellen Arnold  
Hist 294-05, MWF 9:40-10:40 AM; Main 010

You have filled the whole world with tombs and sepulchres.  
--Julian the Apostate

Saint and Martyr rule from the tomb.  
--T.S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*

In the Middle Ages, religious practices and beliefs were deeply integrated into the social, political, and economic fabric of society. In this class, we will look at medieval saints in order to discuss the character and nature of medieval society. Medieval people interacted with saints (both living and dead) in fascinating and unique ways. We will discuss the earliest desert saints who shaped ideas of Christian holiness, crusading-era ideas about the power of saintly intervention in worldly conflict, and medieval ideas about miracles, death, and redemption. We will survey the full span of the Middle Ages, from the waning of the Roman Empire to the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation.

Over the course of the semester, we will read, discuss, and write about medieval biographies of saints. These sources are diverse and detailed ways of exploring and understanding medieval society and religion. To better understand the sources and the saints they describe, we will also read and discuss books and articles by historians who use those biographies to understand medieval culture and society.

## Contacting me:

Office Hours (Old Main 308): T 10:00-11:00, W 11:00-1:00 and by appointment  
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## Course Grade:

Component	% of Final Grade	Due Date
Attendance and Participation	20	Weekly
Paper Prep 1—Saint Identification	5	19 September
Paper Prep 2—Source Introduction	10	28 September
Paper Prep 3—Source Overview	10	29 October
Paper Prep 4— Interpretive Essay	10	12 November
Final Paper	15	12 December
Test 1	15	26 October
Test 2	15	14 December

### **Grades:**

A	100-93	C+	79-77
A-	92-90	C	76-73
B+	89-87	C-	73-70
B	86-83	D	69-65
B-	83-80	NC	65 and below

### **Attendance and Participation:**

Because much of this course will rely on your participation in class discussion and activities, and your evaluation of the readings, you must come to each class prepared. Your attendance and participation in class activities is required, and will compose 20 percent of your final grade. This grade will be based on a combination of your attendance record and in your participation in discussion and any other in-class activities.

### **Late Work and Absences:**

You can miss two class sessions before your grade will be adversely affected. Absences due to university-sponsored events, hospitalization, death in the family, or other emergencies must be documented. In such cases, I will allow late work. If you have a planned excused absence, papers are still due on time—plan your time accordingly! Otherwise, you will be penalized a letter-grade degree for every day your paper is late. For example, if a paper earns a B, and it is a day late, it will receive a B-.

### **Required Texts (Available at Macalester Bookstore):**

Thomas Head, ed. *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* Routledge (2001).

Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*; University Of Chicago Press (1982).

Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein, eds. *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society* Cornell University Press (2000).

Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*; Princeton University Press (1991).

Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*; University Of Chicago Press (1986).

## Formal Writing and Final Paper:

The **final project** for this course will be a 10-12 page paper that analyzes a saint's life or another type of hagiographical writing (such as a miracle collection or a translation account). You will produce a formal, structured paper that makes an argument about medieval society or the individual saint based on critical analysis of the primary source. Your argument will be based on your own interpretation of the source, but will also be grounded in an awareness of the author of the work and the region and period that the work is from. Over the course of the semester, smaller assignments will introduce the analytical tools you need to succeed with this paper.

### “Paper Prep” Assignments:

There are four **preparatory assignments** due throughout the semester that will build to the final paper. Each of these is mandatory. These assignments are intended to help you build a successful paper and to receive feedback and guidance at several key stages. The failure to turn in any of these assignments will result in failure for the course. Specific details for each of these assignments can be found on the assignment sheets.

Saint Identification: Select one of the hagiographical works from the anthology that we will not be reading in class. This will be the basis of your paper. Do background research about the saint (go beyond the anthology, but use no more than two appropriate sources!). In no more than two paragraphs, explain to a general audience who the saint was, when he or she lived, and any relevant biographical or historical information. This is an exercise in concision and clarity.

Source Introduction: Using the texts' introductions as a starting point, and basic introductory works on the Middle Ages (see library reserves), prepare a formal, structured, and well-written introduction to your primary source in 2-3 pages. This introduction should explore when the source was written, who may have written it, and its historical context (what was happening at the time, etc.), and any other information about the document that will help both you and your reader understand and interpret it.

Source Overview: Read your chosen source thoroughly and closely. Familiarize yourself with the narrative and structure of the source. If there are any key concepts, people, or ideas that you do not recognize, do some basic research—don't skip over unclear sections! Finally, in 3-4 pages, summarize the source; assume that your audience has read your source introduction, and understands basic medieval religion and history. In other words, do not over-explain your genre; instead, focus on succinctly and clearly conveying the key aspects of this particular source.

Interpretive Essay: Finally, now that you are familiar with the source content and context, it is time to explore the source on your own. In 3-4 pages, make and support your own argument about your primary source. Since you have already prepared and presented an overview of the source, you do not need to worry about summary; this is your opportunity to dig deeper and look at themes, context, and detail. This argument will become the backbone of your final paper.



Unit Two: The Central Middle Ages

- M 8 Oct Context: The Year 1000 Question  
Farmer/Rosenwein (hereafter F/R) 1, Geary “Monastic Memory”
- W 10 Oct “To Be the Neighbor of St. Peter”—Saints and the Economy  
Barbara Abou-el-Hai, “The Audiences for Saints Cults” (online)
- F 12 Oct Charters and Curses  
F/R 6, Bitel “Saints and Angry Neighbors”  
Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, chapter 6 (online)
- M 15 Oct The Cult of Relics revisited  
Geary *Furta Sacra*, ch. 1 and 2
- W 17 Oct Context: The High Middle Ages
- F 19 Oct Medieval discussions of Relics  
Head ch. 13, Cult of Relics  
Head ch. 19, Guibert of Nogent
- M 22 Oct Stealing Saints: Who?  
Geary *Furta Sacra*, ch. 3, 4, 5
- W 24 Oct Stealing Saints: Why?  
Geary *Furta Sacra*, ch. 6, conclusion, source critiques
- F 26 Oct **Test One**
- (Fall Break)**
- M 29 Oct Context: Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages **Paper Prep 3 due**
- W 31 Oct Saints as Healers  
F/R 7 Farmer, “The Beggar’s Body”  
F/R 8 Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss”
- F 2 Nov Armed Pilgrims: The Spirituality of the Crusades
- M 4 Nov Crusade Relics and Jerusalem
- W 6 Nov Christians and Jews in the High Middle Ages  
Head ch. 24, William of Norwich  
Head ch. 25, Jewish Martyrs of Blois
- F 8 Nov WRITING RELEASE

### Unit Three: The Late Middle Ages

M 12 Nov Context: Late Medieval Society and Religion **Paper Prep 4 due**

W 14 Nov Who were saints? Revisiting the Question  
Weinstein and Bell, Part One

F 16 Nov Saints and Social/Familial Structure  
Weinstein and Bell, Part Two

M 19 Nov Holy Women in the Later Middle Ages  
F/R 5 Pellegrini, "Female Religious Experience"

W 21 Nov Female Saints and their Cults  
Head ch. 29, Cult of Mary Magdalen  
Head ch. 30, St. Margaret of Antioch

(Thanksgiving BREAK)

M 26 Nov The Cult of Mary  
Head ch. 28, Miracles of the Virgin Mary  
F/R 9 Remensnyder, "Colonization of Sacred Architecture"

W 28 Nov Preserving the Bodies of Saints: Medieval Reliquaries

F 30 Nov The Bodies of Saints and the Body of Christ: Late Medieval Spirituality  
Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh" (online)  
Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice" (online)

M 3 Dec Context: Heresy and the Established Church  
F/R 10 Head, "Saints, Heretics, and Fire"

W 5 Dec Communities and Individuals: Peter of Morrone  
F/R 4 Brentano, "Miracles of Peter of Morrone"  
Head, ch. Peter of the Morrone (Celestine V);

F 7 Dec Control of the Saints: Canonization  
Head ch. 35, Canonization Process of St. Vincent Ferrer

### Epilogue: The Stripping of the Altars

M 10 Dec Saints and the Reformation

W 12 Dec Saints in Modern Society **Final Paper Due**

F 14 Dec **Test Two**