

# Saints and Society in the Middle Ages

Ellen Arnold  
Hist 294-02/Reli 294-02, MWF 1:10-2:10  
Old Main 111

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 301): M and W, 2:15-3:00, R 10:30-11:30 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    | No grade         | 21 September                       |
| Paper Prep 2—Source Introduction     | 5                | 2 October                          |
| Paper Prep 3— Source Overview        | 10               | 2 November                         |
| Paper Prep 4— Annotated Bibliography | 10               | 16 November                        |
| Paper Prep 5—Interpretive Essay      | 10               | 30 November                        |
| Final Paper                          | 20               | 14 December                        |
| Test 1                               | 10               | 9 October                          |
| Test 2                               | 15               | 18 December<br>10:30 am - 12:30 pm |

## Grades

**A=** Exceptionally strong, thoughtful, and effective work. Written work or participation that stands out and shows that you have a strong understanding of the course materials and topics.

**B=** Work that exceeds basic expectations, and that shows independent thought and analysis.

Written work is clear, effective, and structured. Participation is consistent, steady, and engaged.

**C=** Work that meets basic expectations; satisfies all assignment requirements and demonstrates a basic understanding of course materials. Participation is occasional, but could be improved.

**D=** Work that fails to meet basic expectations yet still demonstrates some degree of understanding of course materials and shows an effort to tackle materials/assignment effectively. Participation is minimal or disconnected from class discussions/activities.

**F=** Work that fails to meet expectations, fails to understand or effectively engage with course materials, or that engages with materials but does not address task at hand.

Grading Scheme for tests:

A 100-95; A- 94-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-83; B- 83-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-73; C- 73-70; D 69-65; 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 your participation in discussion and any other in-class activities.

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

You can miss three class sessions before your attendance grade will be affected. This means you are not penalized for taking a day off occasionally. (In particular, if you feel like you're getting a cold or the flu, please rest and get better!) 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 five **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 that will be posted on moodle.

1) 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.

2) 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, 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.

3) 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.

#### 4) Annotated Bibliography:

Prepare an annotated bibliography of **five** scholarly secondary works (books, articles, chapters or essays in books, etc.) related to your topic. You can use one source from the syllabus. You will provide both full bibliographic information and 2-paragraph explanations (or annotations) for each work. The annotations should focus on 1) an explanation of what the author(s) argue and 2) how this work helps you understand your saint, the historical context for the saint or the source, or the hagiographical genre of the source.

5) 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.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### Unit One: Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

|           |  |                         |
|-----------|--|-------------------------|
| W 9 Sept  | Context: The Development of Early Christianity   |                         |
| F 11 Sept | Context: Late Antiquity  |                         |
| M 14 Sept | Religion and Society<br>Brown, <i>The Cult of the Saints</i> , ch. 1 and 2   |                         |
| W 16 Sept | Who were the Earliest Saints? Martyrs and the Desert Fathers<br>Head ch. 1, Life of St. Anthony  |                         |
| F 18 Sept | Origins of the Saints Cults<br>Brown, <i>The Cult of the Saints</i> , ch. 3-4  |                         |
| M 21 Sept | <i>In Praise of the Saints</i><br>Brown, <i>The Cult of the Saints</i> , ch. 5-6<br>Head ch. 2, Victricius of Rouen                          |                         |
| W 23 Sept | Introduction to Hagiography<br>Head, "Introduction"  |                         |
| F 25 Sept | Holy Women in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages <b>Paper Prep 1 Due</b><br>Head ch. 4, Constantine and Helena<br>Head ch. 5, Samthamm |                         |
| M 28 Sept | Context: Monasticism and the Early Middle Ages<br>Head ch. 6, Jonas of Bobbio  |                         |
| W 30 Sept | Royal Saints and the Politics of Sanctity<br>Aelric's "Life of St. Edmund, King and Martyr" (Moodle)   |                         |
| F 2 Oct   | Miracle Collections<br>Sainte Foy readings (Moodle)  |                         |
| M 5 Oct   | Interacting with Saints in the Early Middle Ages<br>Head ch. 8, Bede Martyrology; me<br>Head ch. 9, Translation of Marcellinus and Just      |                         |
| W 7 Oct   | Pilgrimage in the Early Middle Ages<br>van Dam, "Pilgrimages and Miracle Stories"  |                         |
| F 9 Oct   | Saints and Art—Iconoclasm in Byzantium   | <b>Paper Prep 2 due</b> |

Unit Two: The Central Middle Ages

|          |  |                         |
|----------|--|-------------------------|
| M 12 Oct | Context: The Year 1000 Question<br>Farmer/Rosenwein (hereafter F/R) 1, Geary “Monastic Memory”   |                         |
| W 14 Oct | “To Be the Neighbor of St. Peter”<br>Rosenwein, Head, and Farmer, “Monks and Their Enemies: A Comparative Approach” (Moodle)                   |                         |
| F 16 Oct | Charters and Curses<br>F/R 6, Bitel “Saints and Angry Neighbors”<br>Little, <i>Benedictine Maledictions</i> , Introduction and ch. 1, (Moodle) |                         |
| M 19 Oct | Saints Cults revisited<br>Geary <i>Furta Sacra</i> , ch. 1 and 2   |                         |
| W 21 Oct | Medieval discussions of Relics<br>Head ch. 13, Cult of Relics<br>Head ch. 19, Guibert of Nogent  |                         |
| F 23 Oct | Stealing Saints: Who?<br>Geary <i>Furta Sacra</i> , ch. 3, 4, 5  |                         |
| M 26 Oct | Stealing Saints: Why?<br>Geary <i>Furta Sacra</i> , ch. 6, conclusion  |                         |
| W 28 Oct | <b>Test One</b>  |                         |
| F 30 Oct | <b>(Fall Break)</b>  |                         |
| M 2 Nov  | Context: Pilgrimage in the Central Middle Ages   | <b>Paper Prep 3 due</b> |
| W 4 Nov  | Saints as Healers<br>F/R 7 Farmer, “The Beggar’s Body”<br>F/R 8 Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss”  |                         |
| F 6 Nov  | Armed Pilgrims: The Spirituality of the Crusades   |                         |
| M 9 Nov  | No class: LIBRARY RESEARCH TIME  |                         |
| W 11 Nov | Crusade Relics and Jerusalem   |                         |
| F 13 Nov | Christians and Jews in the High Middle Ages<br>Head ch. 24, William of Norwich<br>Head ch. 25, Jewish Martyrs of Blois                         |                         |

Unit Three: The Late Middle Ages

|                  |   |                         |
|------------------|---|-------------------------|
| M 16 Nov         | Context: Late Medieval Society and Religion<br>Weinstein and Bell, "Introduction," "Conclusion" Part One<br>Appendix to Part One, Appendix on Method  | <b>Paper Prep 4 due</b> |
| W 18 Nov         | Who were saints? Revisiting the Question<br>Weinstein and Bell, ch. 1, 2, 4   |                         |
| F 20 Nov         | Saints and Social/Familial Structure<br>Weinstein and Bell, ch. 5, 6, 7   |                         |
| M 23 Nov         | Holy Women in the Later Middle Ages<br>F/R 5 Pellegrini, "Female Religious Experience"<br>Weinstein and Bell, ch. 8   |                         |
| W 25 Nov         | Female Saints and their Cults<br>Head ch. 29, Cult of Mary Magdalen<br>Head ch. 30, St. Margaret of Antioch   |                         |
| F 27 Nov         | <b>Thanksgiving Break</b>   |                         |
| M 30 Nov         | The Cult of Mary<br>Head ch. 28, Miracles of the Virgin Mary<br>Rubin, "Mary's Miracles as Reward and Punishment" (Moodle)  | <b>Paper Prep 5 Due</b> |
| W 2 Dec          | The Body of Christ: Late Medieval Spirituality<br>Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh" (Moodle)<br>Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice" (Moodle)  |                         |
| F 4 Dec          | Preserving the Bodies of Saints: Medieval Reliquaries<br>Bynum and Gerson, "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages" (Moodle)<br>Moskowitz, "Donatello's Reliquary Bust of Saint Rossore" (Moodle)  |                         |
| M 7 Dec          | Constructing a Saint: St. Nicholas' Day   |                         |
| W 9 Dec          | Building Saints over Time: Plague Saints in the 7 <sup>th</sup> and 14 <sup>th</sup> centuries<br><br>Horden, "Disease, Dragons, and Saints: the Management of Epidemics in the Dark Ages."<br><br>Barker, "The Making of a Plague Saint: Saint Sebastian's Imagery and Cult before the Counter-Reformation." |                         |
| F 11 Dec         | Heresy, Saints and the Established Church<br>F/R 10 Head, "Saints, Heretics, and Fire"<br>Head ch. 35, Canonization Process of St. Vincent Ferrer   |                         |
| M 14 Dec         | Epilogue: The Stripping of the Altars   | <b>Final Paper Due</b>  |
| <b>Test Two:</b> | <u>Fri 12/18</u> 10:30 am - 12:30 pm  |                         |