

Prospectus or Typology?

In choosing the form of your final assignment for History 6350 (prospectus or typology?), you should consider the strengths and weaknesses of the research project you intend to undertake. Read the description of each format carefully before deciding. In addition to formal considerations, you should consider the following general principles:

- 1) If you have a **strong research focus**, that is, you know not just the topic but also the research questions you wish to consider and have some ideas about solving them, then you should write a **prospectus**. In the long run, this exercise will be more useful to you in honing your ideas, writing a master's or PhD thesis, or applying for grants. Even if you eventually discard the chosen project after the class is over, eliminating unworkable topics is an important stage in your graduate education.
- 2) If you have a **strong source focus**, that is, you know the kind of documents you wish to work on or have identified a group of records that you intend to use, then you should write a **typology**. In the short term, this exercise will provide a clear focus for the final project in this class and rapid exposure to specific archive and research guides. Even if the source type chosen is not one that is ultimately used, the typology provides a good mechanism for understanding the traditional methods of source criticism in medieval history.
- 3) Ideally, every research project will eventually have both a strong research focus and a strong source focus. The advantage of the prospectus is that it helps you answer the big historical "so what?" question and allows you to range over sources broadly. The advantage of the typology is that it makes it simpler to apply analytic methodologies and to know the limits of your sources. The disadvantage of the prospectus is that you will have to spend a lot of time searching for sources to solve your chosen problems (searching for "source focus"). The disadvantage of the typology is that any prospective reader or granting organization will ask: "why should I care?" and you may have to spend more time justifying the project (searching for "research focus"). So, in playing to your strength, you should also be attentive to the need to address the weakness of your project.
- 4) If you are a second-year MA student (or beyond) taking this class and, thus, have had the benefit of History coursework, you will produce the final project in the form of a prospectus, even if you are a master's student doing the "no thesis" option. Pedagogically, the prospectus demonstrates true historical thinking and superior mastery of course material. If you are a first-year MA student (or this is your first History class), the typology may be easier because you may not have had enough coursework to formulate a historical research question for a prospectus. Although I believe the prospectus provides the better opportunity for learning and long-term intellectual growth, for grading purposes only, I will consider the two to be equivalent in this class. Nevertheless, I will expect you to provide sound reasons for doing a typology instead, no matter who you are.