Hist 6820: Writing and Reckoning in the Middle Ages

Spring 2007
HIS 6820-100 (#12602)       Prof. Robert Berkhofer
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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course examines the impact of literacy and numeracy on ideas and behavior in the high Middle Ages. It will consider broad changes in record-keeping, the use of written instruments, and the creation of archives and also examine particular types of documents and explore their uses by medieval people and modern historians in a series of case studies. Some treatment given to related subjects such as memory, orality, law, and fiscality.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: This course will teach MA and PhD students to read different types of medieval documents and understand their use and value as historical evidence. This course will also help prepare history students for field exams by familiarizing them with some current trends in historical research. For those interested in medieval studies, this course will provide a theoretical perspective on source problems common to all medievalists.

REQUIRED BOOKS (for purchase in bookstore):

REQUIRED BOOKS (on RESERVE, for purchase if possible):
[Paper out of print, but widely available; hardback in print]

REQUIRED ARTICLES (on E-RESERVE):

RECOMMENDED BOOKS (on RESERVE):
Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); ISBN: 0801485606, and see additional readings below.

COURSE FORMAT: The course will be conducted in weekly seminars, which will include extensive discussion, translation, and student presentations, as well as some instructor presentations. Various written assignments will culminate in research paper on a group of primary documents, chosen by the student in consultation with the instructor. Discussions will focus on assigned readings and sources for each week.

GRADE COMPONENTS: Class participation 30%; final paper 40%; book précis 10%; peer review 10%; codex analysis 10%. You must complete all elements of the course to receive a passing grade. All late submissions will be penalized, in fairness to students who complete the assignments in a timely fashion. The grade scale is as follows: 93-100 = A, 87-92 = BA, 83-86 = B, 77-82 = CB, 73-76 = C, 67-72 = DC, 60-67 = D, and less than 60 = E.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION: The majority of your grade will be determined by your efforts in our weekly meetings. Mere attendance during class hours will not receive credit towards participation, which should instead be indicated through vocal outbursts giving evidence of cognition; in other words, you must talk about your ideas, your reflections on the readings, and the comments of others in class. To be an effective participant, you will need to complete all readings and translations prior to class. A class that only meets once per week cannot be skipped, if you wish to receive a satisfactory grade. Attendance is mandatory, absences must be documented and excused (preferably in advance, see contact information above). More than one absence could result in a lower course grade.
RESEARCH PAPER: In consultation with the instructor, students will select a group of primary sources, ideally a series of documentary records. Students must have met with Prof. Berkhofer and selected those sources before the end of Unit I (Feb 5th), when a two paragraph explanation of the topic with attached bibliography is due. Students will submit a complete draft of the paper on Apr 2nd and will conduct in class peer review of each others’ papers on Apr 9th. The total length of the final paper should be approximately 20 pages plus bibliography as needed, and it is due on the last day of class, Apr 16th. This paper will count for 40% of the final grade. You are also responsible for providing an electronic copy of your final paper in addition to submitting a hard copy (due when you hand it in). This electronic copy must be readable in MSWord.

BOOK PRÉCIS: In unit I, the students will write a short (2-3 page) analytic book précis on one of the books assigned. See schedule below for books and due dates. See attached directions on how to write the précis. This précis will count for 10% of the final grade.

CODEX ANALYSIS: Students will analyze a cartulary edition from a list of choices. Students will create a dossier describing the contents of the cartulary, including both analytic tables and a narrative. I will hand out guidelines later. The analysis is due Feb 26th in class and counts for 10% of the final grade.

CLASS PRESENTATIONS: During Unit II, each student will choose a week to take the lead in translating the source document(s) and explaining how they relate to the common weekly reading. During Unit I or II, students will also choose a week to read one of the “additional readings” and report on its content and argument in class. These presentations will be part of the class participation grade.

READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

**Introduction: Writing and Reckoning** (Jan 8)
Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text* (entire)
Howell and Prevenier, *A Guide to Historical Sources*, ch. 1-2 (Review if read for Hist 6350, otherwise read carefully)


Jan 15: No Class, MLK Day. Work on developing a paper topic: consult *Typologie des sources du Moyen Age* in Waldo Special Collections, find edition of sources in stacks, etc.

**UNIT I: Literacy and Record-Keeping**

**Literacy and the Carolingians** (Jan 22)
Rosamund McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (entire)
Warren Brown, “Charters as Weapons”
Sources: Edict of Pitres (Possibly Plan of St. Gall)
*Précis due for group 1*

**Literacy in the 11th and 12th Centuries** (Jan 29)
Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (entire)
Sources: Greater Domesday Facsimile for Canterbury in Kent, case 1, fol. 3r-5v (in Waldo Special Collections, view on your own this week before class), Dialogue of Excheque excerpt

**Précis due for group 2**


**Numeracy and Reckoning in the 12th and 13th Centuries** (Feb 5)
Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (entire)
Richard Britnell, *Pragmatic Literacy, East and West, 1200-1330*, introduction, 3-24
Sources: 1st Budget of Philip Augustus


**Preliminary Topic Description and Short Bibliography of Sources due.**

**UNIT II: Selected Topics and Documents on Writing and Reckoning**

**Cursing and Conflict** (Feb 12)
Lester Little, *Benediction Maledictions* (entire)
Sources: *Clamores* in Little’s appendix.
NOTE: Possible Meeting in Waldo Special Collections to Look at Documentary Records


**Memory and Forgetting** (Feb 19)
Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, “Statim Invenire: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page”
Sources: Hugh of St. Victor, Didascalicon

Archival Memory (Feb 26)
Constance Bouchard, “Monastic Cartularies: Organizing Eternity”
Georges Declercq, “Originals and Cartularies: The Organization of Archival Memory,”
Sources: A Cartulary Prologue

Cartulary Analysis due today in class


Mar 5 No Class: SPRING BREAK

Charters and Territory (Mar 12)


Notaries and Publicity (Mar 19)
Sources: A commend


Forgery (Mar 26)
Marjorie Chibnall, “Forgery in Narrative Charters”
Giles Constable, “Forgery and Plagiarism in the Middle Ages”
Sources: Royal charter of Louis VI, Excerpts from Suger’s *Life of Louis VI* and *De administratione*

Complete Draft of final paper due, with copies for instructor and all students in your peer review group.

Peer Review (Apr 2)
Peer Review conducted in class today; written evaluation of peers’ papers and editorial remarks due. Bring two copies of each review (one for instructor, one for each of your peers)
Writing and Rewriting (Apr 9)
No Class: Revisions (Apr 9) Perfect your paper based on peer review responses.

Textuality, History, and the Past (Apr 16)

Elizabeth A. Clark, History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn (entire)

Final Paper due in class today
Writing a Précis of a Book

As a graduate student, you will read many books, and eventually, you may need to recall details about them many years later (when you are an instructor, during your research, or for comprehensive exams)—but short of re-reading the books themselves, the next best thing to help jog your memory is to construct a précis of each book’s content. It need be no more than 2-3 pages in length, but by focusing on specific parts of the book, it will ultimately help you get a better understanding of the text in detail. You can include quoted material and page references if you want to be very specific.

Your précis should contain the following elements describing the book:

About the book: Author’s name, full book title, publication information about the book so that you can construct notes and bibliography later.

Time/Date you read it: This can help you figure out (later on) how trustworthy your own notes are! You may insert here the class or the reason why you read the book.

About the author: Background information on the author’s training (where he/she studied, who he/she studied with), current location (still alive? teaching what and where?), other books or prominent articles written by him/her. You can often locate some of this information in the book’s forward/preface and by searching the web.

About the author’s intentions: What were the author’s goals when he/she wrote the book? What problem or problems were they attempting to address? Was the book written as part of a larger project, or to help prove/disprove a particular point?

Thesis: A summation of the book’s central argument. It isn’t always the same as the author’s intention: the thesis may be narrower, or only address a portion of the author’s goals. You ought to be able to state the thesis in a few lines.

Type of history that the book is: is this intellectual, social, cultural, military, political, economic...And how did you reach this conclusion?

Structure of the argument: How does the author go about proving the thesis? In outline form, how does he get from A to Z?

Evidence used: What types of sources did the author use? Did the author appear to use the best sorts of evidence to prove his thesis? Did his orientation to the problem cause him to miss a better type of evidence that could have been used?

Ideological orientation: Examine the author’s “spin”—is there a particular style or point of view being adopted (either implicitly or explicitly)? This could include many different styles: progressive, feminist, consensus, marxist, foucauldian, structuralist, post-structuralist or post-modern... And how did you reach the conclusion you did about the author’s orientation? And knowing this orientation, what can it tell you about the author’s argument or proof?
Your précis should also contain a basic evaluation of the book, separate from the description:

Strengths of the book: What are the major strengths of the book? What does it do well?

Weaknesses of the book: Where do you identify shortcomings? What makes this book flawed, in your opinion?

Contributions of the book: Not exactly like the book’s strengths, but more along the lines of why this book would be important to read? Why should scholars take note of it? (A book may have strengths and still make few contributions, or may have profound weaknesses, but still make important contributions)