NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
Department of History

First-Year Seminar  
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION IN THE MIDDLE AGES  
Spring 2020

Tuesday, 2.00PM-4.30PM  
Location: TBA  
FYSEM-UA 545-001

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By Appointment  
NYU Classes, Chat Room

Medieval circumstances presented multiple challenges to media, mobility, and communication. Cultivators were bound to the land and monks to their monasteries; pilgrims traveled to holy places, crusaders and warriors invaded and then settled foreign lands, and rulers and nobles were frequently itinerant. Literacy was largely limited to reading and writing Latin, and writing was mostly done by specialists—monastic scribes, notaries, and clerics. The transmission of ideas therefore occurred mainly through the spoken vernacular word, and by means of gestures, images, and the manipulation of symbolic objects (thus, for instance, the relics of saints were carried to distant lands to collect alms, to recover possessions appropriated by nobles, or to aid in battle).

While seas, rivers, ports, ferries, bridges, and networks of roads provided with rest houses were generally available, the routes and means of transportation differed markedly according to the traveler’s status and the journey’s purpose. Christianity stimulated pilgrimages, missions to convert the heathen, and crusades. Marriage took brides to foreign courts where they served as cultural ambassadors. Medieval kings and great nobles were continually on the road, changing their abode every two or three days. Ambassadors, lesser officials and messengers traveled on government business. Knights sought out tournaments and distant wars to advance their fortunes and reputations. Merchants transported goods to regional fairs, and engaged in international trade. Minstrels, jongleurs, and troubadours traveled to gain patronage and to extend their repertoire, spreading news and influencing the reputations of warriors, heroes, and kings. Students too journeyed extensively from place to place in order to sit at the feet of famous masters; some wandering scholars came to be known as Goliards. Artists were invited to various loci to decorate manuscripts and architects to erect buildings.

The pursuit of favorable opinion was an essential feature in the process of state-building during the Middle Ages. Those who challenged traditional norms also came to rely on the efficiency of communication systems to expand their ranks with adherents. In disseminating
propaganda, medieval society experimented with such forms and methods of communication as heraldry, emblems, stereotypes, and slogans, thus elaborating modes of interaction which, though modified, are still in use today.

Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

Every week, all students must come prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that week. They will have read all assigned books, chapters or articles and taken written notes about their contents and arguments.

In the course of the semester, each student will be required to make one oral presentation. Every week, one or two students will present an oral report on one of the week's readings of their choice. In preparing their oral reports, students will focus on two different tasks.

I. They will clearly distinguish between primary and secondary sources. In discussing medieval texts, that is, primary sources, students should offer an analysis of content (what does the text say?), while assessing genres, narrative formats, authorial voices, tropes, metaphors (how does the text says what it says?).

II. With respect to modern studies, that is, secondary sources, students will give a precis of the book or article, seek to identify the issues raised by the authors, define the nature of the authors’ sources, assess their methodology and approaches, evaluate the clarity and organization of the study, and consider the validity of the theses and conclusions presented. Diverse interpretations have come to shape our understanding of the medieval past, which makes a critical approach to the reading of all secondary materials obligatory.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

A chief purpose of this seminar is to provide freshman students with an opportunity to utilize the tools and practice the methodologies of historical discipline. Focusing their attention upon medieval texts, images, and objects, and on modern scholarship dealing with the subject of “Media and Communication,” students will write a research paper (10 pages including footnotes and bibliography of authors and titles), due in final form TBA (NYU Classes, Assignments), on a topic relating to the theme of the seminar. You may select a topic from among the ones suggested below, or devise your own after consultation with the instructor.

Suggested Paper Topics

1. Letter-writing during the Twelfth Century

2. Food-trade, Markets, and Gastronomy in Thirteenth-Century France
3. Hybrid Communication: Text and Image in Medieval Manuscripts

4. A Comparison of Jewish and Christian Attitudes Toward Literacy and Education during the Central Middle Ages

5. Medieval Travels to the Middle East in the Middle Ages: Means and Purposes

6. Knowledge of the Far East in the Middle Ages

7. Fashions and Fashionistas in Fourteenth-Century Urban Culture

8. Trade Routes of the Medieval Globe

9. Communicating with God: the Faithful and the Mystic

10. Archeology of Medieval Communication: Hostels, Bridges, Transportation, Traveling Gear

The final paper will be prepared through several stages: students will thus:
- select and discuss their paper topics on TBA;
- compose a bibliographical essay (3 pages), due TBA on NYU Classes, Assignments;
- prepare a proposal for the paper that will include a paper title, a statement of purpose, and an outline (4 pages), due TBA on NYU Classes, Assignments;
- write an early draft focusing on footnotes (6 pages), due TBA on NYU Classes, FORUMS
- The paper (10 pages including footnotes and bibliography) is due in final form on TBA on NYU Classes, Assignments. When writing notes, and citing books, articles, and websites, students should conform to the latest edition of The Chicago Manual of Style (Bobst, e-book).

GRADING
The final grade will be calculated as follows:
- 10%: class participation
- 20%: oral report and lecture
- 20 %: bibliographical graphical essay
- 20%: Proposal and Outline
- 30%: Paper (Draft, Final Version)

Papers submitted late will receive a lesser grade

Attendance, which is mandatory, will be taken every week at 11.00AM.
Three absences or late arrivals will result in the final grade being modified as follows: A, will become A-; A-, will become B+ etc
Six absences or late arrivals will result in the final grade being modified as follows: A, will become B; B, will become C etc

READING
All readings are available in the following fashion: Books only available in print have been put on Reserve at the Bobst Library, where they can be read; books and articles available on line have been put on Electronic Reserve and can be accessed via NYU Classes, NYU Libraries; scanned articles and book chapters can be accessed via NYU Classes, Course Resources.

The following books are also available for purchase from the University Bookstore:
Kathleen Ashley, *Being a Pilgrim: Art and Ritual on the Medieval Routes to Santiago* (Burlington, 2009)
Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, 2000)

1. **Introduction: How did People Circulate and Communicate in the Middle Ages** –

Discussion of the syllabus and of the seminar’s requirements

PowerPoint Presentation and discussion of some means of medieval communication

**PRIMARY SOURCES TO BE READ AND ANALYZED IN CLASS:**
Bridge repairs and maintenance in Norwich (England), 13th-14th centuries, *Florilegium Urbanum* (NYU Classes, Course Resources)

Customs charged on imports to and exports from London, 1260s. *Florilegium Urbanum* (NYU Classes, Course Resources)

2. **A World of Global Connections** –

**READ BEFORE CLASS**


Reporter: ___________________________
**Primary Sources to be Read and Analyzed in Class:**
Powerpoint: The Tang shipwreck
TBA (NYU Classes, Course Resources)

3. **A World of Oral Communication?** –

Read **Before** Class
M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, chapters 6-8, pp. 226-294 (NYU Classes, Course Resources)

Reporter: ________________________

**Primary Sources to be Read and Analyzed in Class:**
Powerpoint Presentation

**Assignment. Research Paper: Topic I**
- Students should begin to think about paper topics.

4. **The Growth of Written Communication** –

Read **Before** Class
M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, chapter 2, 7-8 (NYU Classes, Course Resources)

**Primary Sources to be Read and Analyzed in Class:**

5. **Sending, Receiving, and Collecting Letters** –

Read **Before** Class:


Reporter: ________________________

**Primary Sources to be Read and Analyzed in Class:**
Letter of Anselm of Bec to Ermengard, a Married Lady, 1079-1092; please see letter at [http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/385.html](http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/385.html) or in NYU Classes, Course Resources
Assignment. Research Paper: Topic II and Bibliographical Essay I

- Students will come to class prepared to discuss the topics they are considering for their research papers.
- Students will be encouraged to begin their research for their papers. We will review in class the resources and methods for creating a bibliography.

6. Medieval Media: The Material Evidence in Historical Perspectives-

The class will be held at NYU Fales Library, located on the third floor of the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library. We will meet at 11.00AM on the first floor of Bobst, and proceed together to Fales Library, where Charlotte Priddle and Michael Stoller will present media of communication, from ancient Near Eastern cuneiform tablets to electronic books and digital databases.

Immediately following the visit, comment in writing and in some detail (2 pages) about the material you have had the opportunity to touch and see. This report is due on NYU Classes, Assignments, later today, October 10th.

7. Wandering Students and Masters: Arts of Teaching and Modes of Learning –

READ BEFORE CLASS:

Lynn Thorndike, “Elementary and Secondary Education in the Middle Ages,” Speculum 15, no. 4 (1940): 400-408. (NYU Classes, Course Resources)

Reporter: _____ __________________

TEXTS AND PRIMARY SOURCES TO BE READ AND ANALYZED IN CLASS:
Michael Howard, “Monks and Scholars,” in Transnationalism in Ancient and Medieval Societies: The Role of Cross-Border Trade and Travel, pp. 226-250 (NYU Classes, Course Resources)

Lynn Thorndike, University Records and Life in the Middle Ages (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975). Records no 59 (Pierre Dubois' Scheme of Education, 1309), 62 (Letter from a Physician of Valencia to His Two Sons Studying at Toulouse, 1315), 67 (Dominican Legislation against Alchemy, 1323), 76 (Hazing of Freshmen Forbidden, Paris, 1340) (NYU Classes, Course Resources)

Assignment: Bibliographical Essay II

- Students are expected to bring to class one or several books dealing with the topics they selected for their papers.
- Bibliography (3 pages) is due on NYU Classes, Assignments, on TBA
8. **Spring Break - ENJOY**

9. **Forms of Non-Verbal Communication: Images and Colors** –

READ BEFORE CLASS

Reporter: ________________________

MATERIAL TO BE READ AND ANALYZED IN CLASS:
PowerPoint Presentation

10. **Communication as Performance: Silence, Gestures, Rituals** –

READ BEFORE CLASS


Reporter: ________________________

**Assignment. Research Paper: Proposal and Outline**
. We will review ways to develop a topic into a proposal that contains the paper’s title, describes the paper’s purpose, scope, and significance, and outlines the information gathered for, and the argument made, in the paper.
. Proposals and outlines are due on NYU Classes, Assignments, on TBA

11. **Medieval Objects: Circulation and Communication** –

READ BEFORE CLASS
Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (e-book, Electronic Reserves, NYU Classes, NYU Libraries)


Reporter: ________________________
MATERIAL TO BE READ AND ANALYZED IN CLASS:
PowerPoint Presentation

12. **Dress Codes: Communicating Status and Identity** –

READ BEFORE CLASS
Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages* (Book Reserves)

Report: ____________________________

Assignment. Research Paper: Draft with Focus on Footnotes
.In preparation for writing your draft with footnotes, we will look at footnotes in the weekly readings, and analyze 1) the ways that they were put together by the authors, and 2) how they work for the readers.
.Drafts are due on NYU Classes, FORUMS, on TBA

13. **Pilgrimages** –

READ BEFORE CLASS
Kathleen Ashley, *Being a pilgrim: art and ritual on the medieval routes to Santiago* (Burlington, 2009) (Book Reserves)

Report: ____________________________

PRIMARY SOURCES TO BE READ AND ANALYZED IN CLASS:

14. **Travels: Spies and Exotic Places** –

READ BEFORE CLASS


Report: ____________________________

PRIMARY SOURCES TO BE READ AND ANALYZED IN CLASS:
Marco Polo: *The Glories Of Kinsay [Hangchow] (c. 1300)* (NYU Classes, Course Resources)
PowerPoint Presentation

15. Traders and Trade Routes of the Medieval Globe –


Reporter:_________________________

Assignment. Research Paper: Discussion of Drafts in Class

. students will have read in advance the drafts submitted by their classmates and prepare constructive criticisms to share in class; classmates will respond to the praises, criticisms, and suggestions received in class.

. Final versions of the paper are due TBA, on NYU Classes, Assignments.