

SAMPLE MATERIALS FOR HISTORY 1300 & 1400

(Please note that there are other syllabi for H1300 and H1400, as well as many other History courses, available for present and past semesters on the History Department's website – feel free to use these!)

HISTORY 1300: WESTERN TRADITIONS BEFORE 1500

This course is an overview of some of the major developments of western civilization from Antiquity to A.D. 1500. Our broad objective is to consider our indebtedness to the achievements of people of the past, and our place on the historical continuum. We will often discuss the types of evidence that have survived from the ancient and medieval period, and the challenges that historians face in interpreting these materials. Students will have a chance to analyze primary texts in discussion. In lecture we will also consider some of the most famous myths and legends of the western tradition, stories that were elaborated by popular imagination and inventiveness, and that can be rich stores of historical information, if handled carefully. The student is encouraged to become a "historically-minded" person, one who is aware of the complexity of studying the past, who can critique historical interpretation, and who wishes to understand the past rather than condemn or praise it: in short, someone who can read history intelligently. Please note that a complete set of lecture outlines for the entire course will be made available shortly, and that additional discussion and study questions on specific texts will be provided during the semester.

Required Texts

Noble, Strauss, et al., *Western Civilization: The Continuing Experiment*. Vol. A (to 1500)
(5th ed.)

Wiesner, Ruff, Wheeler, *Discovering the Western Past: A Look at the Evidence*. Vol. 1 (to 1789)
(6th ed.)

D.H. Farmer (trans. & ed.), *The Age of Bede*

Frances & Joseph Gies, *Life in a Medieval Village*

Course Requirements

Two hourly exams: each worth 20%

One (comprehensive) final exam: 30%

Discussion: 30%.

Lecture: a word of advice: please note that the reading load varies greatly – this is unavoidable. If you are (like me) a slow reader, try to get a head start on the full-length texts we will be reading. Lectures are drawn up based on the assumption that students will come to class prepared.

Exams: a set of essay questions, from which the exam will be drawn up, will be made available to students one week before each exam, including the final; short answer items will be taken from the lecture outlines and from the "Terms to Know" section at the beginning of each chapter in Noble, Strauss, et al., *Western Civilization*.

Discussion: students are asked to write a two-page response paper (typed, double-spaced, standard typeface and margins) on the readings for each discussion session that uses the Wiesner volume of sources, based on the "Questions to Consider" section in that text. These papers are to be handed in at the end of class that day – late papers will not be accepted. The grade for the

discussion portion of the course will be based on papers and participation—thus, attendance at discussion is required.

Students who are uncertain about what constitutes cheating and plagiarism are referred to the discussion of academic misconduct in Section VI of the Student Code.

Lecture & Discussion Topics and Reading Assignments (40 sessions)

I. THE ANCIENT WORLD (prehistory to A.D. 300)

Session #:

- 1) Introduction to the course; definition of some key terms; why study History?
- 2) The Agricultural Revolution; the cradles of early civilization. **Noble**, pp. xvii-xx, 3-13
- 3) **Wiesner**, Chapter 1. The Need for Water in Ancient Societies. (Each chapter, hence each topic, in this volume has a “Questions to Consider” section which will help you analyze the source and write your two-page response paper. Also note that at the end of “The Problem” section in each chapter the editor provides a clear statement of a basic question that will also help orient your reading. In Chapter 1, this is the last paragraph on p. 4).
- 4) Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Levant. **Noble**, 13-57
- 5) **Wiesner**, Chapter 2. Polytheism and Monotheism in the Fertile Crescent
- 6) The Eastern Mediterranean: Minoans & Mycenaeans. **Noble**, 57-85
- 7) The Polis in the Periclean Age. **Noble**, 85-103
- 8) **Wiesner**, Chapter 3. The Ideal and the Reality of Classical Athens
- 9) The Peloponnesian War; Myths of Alexander the Great. **Noble**, 105-135
- 10) The Rise of Rome; the Early Republic. **Noble**, 137-157
- 11) The Time of Troubles. **Noble**, 157-171
- 12) The Augustan Settlement. **Noble**, 173-182
- 13) **Wiesner**, Chapter 4. The Achievements of Augustus
- 14) The "Golden Age" of Empire (including everybody?). **Noble**, 182-188
- 15) The "Terrible" Third Century. **Noble**, 188-190; 203-207

II. THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES (300-13000)

- 16) The Conversion of Constantine; Historical periodization. **Noble**, 208-211
- 17) Early Christianity. **Noble**, 191-201, 211-217, 229-235
- 18) Background to the Age of Invasions. **Noble**, 217-223
- 19) **Wiesner**, Chapter Five. Slave Law in Roman and Germanic Society
- 20) *The Age of Bede*, introduction, pp. 9-39; *Life of St Cuthbert*, pp. 43-104
- 21) *The Age of Bede*, *Life of Wilfrid*, pp. 107-184
- 22) The Western Kingdoms. **Noble**, 253-257
- 23) Other Heirs of Antiquity: Byzantium & Islam. **Noble**, 223-228, 236-237, 239-253
- 24) Charlemagne & the Carolingian Empire. **Noble**, 257-262
- 25) The First European Renaissance. **Noble**, 262-264, 272-273
- 26) Invasions of the late Eighth through Tenth Centuries. **Noble**, 264-271
- 27) The Era of Recovery. **Noble**, 275-283

III. THE HIGH AND LATER MIDDLE AGES (13000-1500)

- 28) European Rural Society: *Life in a Medieval Village*, pp. 1-105
- 29) *Life in a Medieval Village*, pp. 106-207
- 30) **Wiesner**, Chapter 10. Life in an English Village in the High Middle Ages
- 31) The Crusades. **Noble**, 306-315
- 32) **Wiesner**, Chapter 8. Infidels and Heretics: Crusades of the High Middle Ages
- 33) Political & Economic Development in the High Middle Ages. **Noble**, 283-306
- 34) **Wiesner**, Chapter 6. Development of the Medieval State
- 35) Church and Society. **Noble**, 317-333
- 36) Universities and the World of Thought. **Noble**, 333-352
- 37) **Wiesner**, Chapter 7. Life at a Medieval University
- 38) **Wiesner**, Chapter 9. Capitalism and Conflict in the Medieval Cloth Trade
- 39) Late Medieval Transitions: demographic disaster. **Noble**, 370-391
- 40) Transitions: ecclesiastical controversy and warfare. **Noble**, 355-370

What is “culture”? What is civilization?”

Edward Tylor provided an anthropological definition of **culture** in the late 19th century that was and continues to be widely influential (given here in a slightly revised version): “Culture, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, values, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [human beings] as members of society.”

Civilization is conventionally defined as a state of culture characterized by monumental architecture, cities, writing and complex forms of government which extend over wide areas. Note that each civilization is dependent upon an agrarian base and is informed by that agrarian base (an element in the definition of “civilization” that is often underemphasized).

Study & Discussion Questions for:

The Age of Bede

(Be sure to read the introduction, which is a bit technical but useful and well worth a bit of struggle. Also note maps at the back of the book).

Early medieval hagiography is a kind of literature that developed out of the efforts of the Church to convert the peasantry of Europe to Christianity. The most significant point to keep in mind while reading the saints’ lives in this text is that the main vehicle for the spread of Christianity and with it the intellectual culture of Late Antiquity in the centuries that followed was the monastery.

- 1) What are these texts, what is “hagiography” (also called “sacred biography”)? When written, for whom, with what intent? What were the circumstances of their composition? What were they meant to convey, and what else do convey, i.e. how can they be used by historians?
- 2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence, i.e. what questions can and cannot be answered by this type of evidence?
- 3) Read Bede’s *Prologue* carefully. What does it suggest regarding Bede’s purpose,

method, desires, how he worked (the actual writing process), his concern for historical accuracy? What does the *Prologue* reveal regarding communications and relations between monastic houses in seventh- and eighth-century northern England?

4) Conversion: what exactly can this word mean in early medieval Europe? Conversion of pagans of course, but what about heretics? Apostates? Well-meaning converts who get confused, or misunderstand a doctrine? Do saints' lives provide any evidence of these different types of conversion?

5) Is there a pattern to these biographies? What is it, why does it exist?

6) Analyze the miracles: do they follow a pattern, is there a common thread between the miracles of the different saints' lives? How do we read them as historians? How were they read in the early Middle Ages?

7) Is it correct for the historian to describe a saint's life as a form of *propaganda*? Why or why not? What are the connotations of that word?

Life in a Medieval Village

(note the glossary of terms, pp. 243-246)

- 1) How would you characterize this study? What evidence does it use? Why is it significant? What importance do the authors assign to European villagers in the shaping of medieval civilization?
- 2) Who is the lord of Elton? How would you characterize his relationship with the village? What exactly does "lordship" mean in this setting?
- 3) Explain the arrangement described on pp. 45-46 known as "farming the demesne." What does this mean, what are its implications?
- 4) What is the difference between "free" and "unfree" villagers (freemen vs villeins)? How significant was this distinction in everyday life?
- 5) How would you describe the structure of the village family, and relations within the family? How central is the family in village society? What evidence is there of relations between husbands and wives, parents and children?
- 6) What is the relationship between the parish church and the village community?
- 7) What is the hallmote? Whose court is it? What is the pledge system? What is the hue and cry? What is the "genius" of these institutions, i.e., their pervading spirit?
- 8) Who governed the village of Elton, the lord, the villagers, the king, all three, none of the above?
- 9) Do the people of Elton seem alien or familiar to you, and why?
- 10) Find the rather amusing typographical error on page 179!