

HIEU 144:

Pagan Europe & its Christian Aftermath

Professor Nancy Caciola

Course Description

The Middle Ages is sometimes characterized as an “Age of Faith,” a time of Christian unity and consensus. Yet, the expansion of the Christian Church from its eastern Mediterranean roots throughout Western Europe was a centuries-long process that continued well into the medieval period. Earlier pagan forms of worship and belief, which were the indigenous religious forms of Europe, were only slowly replaced by the imported faith of Christianity. This class explores the interplay between different forms of European paganism and the Christian Church in the period from about 100-1300. Through close readings of original texts (primary sources), we will explore the conversion strategies of the Church in different regions and time periods. We will read the hagiographies and letters of missionaries; consider voluntary adoptions of the new faith as well as compulsory conversions and evidence for pagan resistance; and evaluate what may reliably be known about the “lost religions of northern Europe.” The last part of the class will explore some of the syncretistic religious forms that resulted from the accretion of pagan and Christian traditions.

Schedule of Readings

1A: Introduction

1B: Classical Mediterranean Paganisms

- Hymns and Religious Experiences [\[PDF\]](#)
- Accounts of Roman religious rites [\[link\]](#)
- Selections from the Greek Magical Papyri [\[link\]](#)

2A: Roman Ethnographies of the Germanic Tribes

- Julius Caesar, *The Germans* [\[link\]](#)
- Tacitus, *Germania* [\[link\]](#)

2B: The Lost Religions of Northern Europe

- Late, post-conversion descriptions of Germanic pagan beliefs and customs [\[PDF\]](#)

3A: Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

3B: Christianity between Jews and Gentiles (i.e., Pagans)

- *The Acts of the Apostles*: Please use the Revised Standard Version translation so that everyone reads the same version of the text. Some of you may own a Bible in this translation (such as the Oxford Bible); if not, use this [link](#).

4A: Roman Perceptions of the New Religion

- Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, Chapters 1-13 [\[link\]](#)
- Letters of Pliny the Younger and Emperor Trajan; extract from Lucian [\[PDF\]](#)
- Certificate of Having Sacrificed to the Gods [\[link\]](#)

4B: Christians Redefine the Pagan Gods

- Augustine, *On the Divination of Demons* [\[PDF\]](#)
- Martin of Braga, *Reforming the Rustics* [\[PDF\]](#)
- The Theodosian Code on religions [\[link\]](#) or [\[link\]](#)

5A: The Cross Moves North: Christianity and the Pagans of Gaul

- Sulpitius Severus, *The Life of Saint Martin* [\[link\]](#)
- Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, II: 12, 25-31 [\[PDF\]](#)

5B: Pope Gregory the Great and the Mission to the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms

- Bede, *History of the English Church and People*, I: 23-30. [\[link\]](#)
- Lay of the Nine Herbs, Lay of the Nine Twigs of Woden, Elf-Charms [\[link\]](#)

6A: Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Saxony and Frisia

- *The Life of Saint Willibrord* [\[PDF\]](#)
- Selections from the correspondence of St. Boniface [\[PDF\]](#)

6B: The Saxon Gospel: Jesus the Epic Hero

- *Heliand*, “The Saxon Gospel” [Purchase [here](#)]
- Compare with *The Gospel of Mark* [\[link\]](#)

7A: Veterans’ Day Holiday

7B: Charlemagne’s Religious Requirements in Saxony

- Finish *Heliand*, “The Saxon Gospel” [Purchase [here](#)] if you have not already.
- Charlemagne’s Saxon Capitularies [\[link\]](#)

8A: Slavic Paganism and the Resistance Movements Across the Elbe

- Merseburg Charms [\[link\]](#)
- Theitmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, selections from Books I and VI [\[PDF\]](#)

8B: The Persistence of Traditional Beliefs and Practices

- Burchard of Worms, *Corrector* [\[PDF\]](#)
- Agobard of Lyons, *On Hail and Thunder* [\[link\]](#)

9A-B: From Paganism to Popular Culture: Uncanny Encounters

- Hellequin’s Hunt, from Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History* [\[PDF\]](#)
- The Pygmy King Herla, from Walter Map’s *Courtier’s Trifles* [\[PDF\]](#)
- King Arthur and the Butterfly Bishop, from the *Chronicle of Lanercost* [\[PDF\]](#)

10A: A Local Syncretic Saints’ Cult

- Etienne de Bourbon, *On the Worship of the dog Guinefort* [\[PDF\]](#)

10B: Final Thoughts: What is Conversion?

Paper 2 due during Finals’ Week.

Assignments and Policies

In accordance with university policy, students must complete all formal course requirements and consistently attend class meetings, in order to receive course credit.

University policy also requires me to report all cases of suspected plagiarism to the Office of Academic Integrity. You are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism, and for avoiding it: “I didn’t know...” is not an acceptable excuse. If you are unsure how plagiarism is defined, please check the pages of the Office of Academic Integrity, [here](#), for further guidance.

The assignments for this class are as follows:

>Two 1600-word papers @ 35 & 45% . One will be due in the middle of term; the other during finals’ week.

YOU WILL DESIGN your own paper questions and topics. I encourage you to come to office hours in order to discuss prospective topics with me. Papers will be graded in part on how illuminating your topic or question is, as well as on how well you address it. You should strive to formulate an inquiry that allows you to integrate together the readings from class, in order to compose an historical argument with a clear thesis, reliant on primary-source evidence. I will discuss general guidelines and expectations — e.g., how many sources to use, from which readings — further in class.

All papers must be submitted via turnitin.com; I will not accept papers in any other format.

>An indeterminate number of pop quizzes testing your reading comprehension, @ 20% cumulatively. DO NOT EMAIL ME ASKING IF THERE WILL BE A QUIZ, BECAUSE I WILL NOT TELL YOU.

>A note on class attendance. Class only meets 18 times and since there is no textbook, the information processed in our classroom discussions is an integral part of the course. Starting with the second class, I will be taking attendance every day. While this is not a direct factor in your final grade, I will take account of your attendance record if you end up with a borderline final grade calculation at the end of the term. Regular attendance will inspire me to bump you up; frequent absences will make me less inclined to be generous. Also, since there will be a few surprise quizzes, it is in your interests to attend regularly.

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What should we expect of one another?

What I will do: I will try to establish a class atmosphere that is open and informal; at the same time, however, I will try to challenge you intellectually. When I am lecturing, I will strive to craft informative presentations that build upon one another, are reasonably entertaining, and are well-organized. I will listen carefully when you have questions and comments about the material, and I will offer appropriate answers or feedback. I will assist you in formulating paper topics for this class, encouraging you to formulate topics that are challenging, yet appropriate for the page limits imposed. I will return your graded work in a timely manner, with feedback and comments. In keeping with basic principles of equity and fairness, I will apply the same rules and standards to everyone enrolled in this class.

I expect that you will act with integrity and take responsibility for your own education. I expect you to follow directions, whether written down or explained verbally. I expect that you will complete all the reading listed on the schedule, attend class, and be on time. I expect you to be attentive during lectures,

sometimes to respond to questions when I ask them, and to come to office hours if you would like to discuss the class material further. I strongly encourage you to speak up during class meetings, but I expect that you will formulate your comments in direct response to our common class materials (e.g., in a way that everyone can follow and that adds to the general conversation). I expect you to submit your assignments on time unless you have experienced an unexpected crisis of some significance. I expect that you will treat me, and your fellow-students, with courtesy and honesty.