

Medieval World Cultures

HUMN 2023/4023

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This interdisciplinary course will introduce students to the medieval cultures of the Islamic world, India, Asia, Africa, North and South America, and Europe. During the medieval period (c. 400-1400 CE), these cultures were highly religious; we will therefore emphasize religious beliefs and practices, and we will also go back in time to study the origins of the major world religions. We will also look at other aspects of culture, including history, art, literature, philosophy, and music. Students will thus acquire an understanding of major world cultures during this time period, encounter different ways of viewing the world, analyze, interpret, and think critically about diverse works of art, literature, and music, and learn to take an interdisciplinary approach to the humanities by contextualizing major works, both in class and in regular short writing assignments. Through class participation and in these writing assignments, students will improve their oral and written communication skills. As they come to understand the complexity of these parts of the world, students will develop increased respect for other cultures and peoples. Hopefully, they will be inspired to learn more about cultures other than our own.

Aug. 25 Introduction

Chapter 6: Islamic Civilization

28 Islamic Civilization; Religion; Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe; The Quran

Reading: 216-20; 232-33

Writing: Response to the Quran

Sept. 1 Islamic Art and Architecture

Reading: 221-27; 233-35

Writing: Response to *The Thousand and One Nights*

4 Philosophy; Math, Science, and Scholarship; Scholarly Cross Fertilization

Reading: 220-21

4023 Presentation Proposal Due

8 Literature

Reading: 235-38

Writing: Response to Rumi

11 Literature; Music

Reading: 227-30; 238-39

Writing: Response to Any of the Remaining Readings at the End of the Chapter

Chapter 7: Indian Civilization

15 Vedic Period; Hinduism; Literature: The Hindu Classics

Reading: 242-46; 258-61

Writing: Response to *The Bhagavad Gita*

18 Maurya Period; Buddhism; Maurya Art; Mauryan to Bactrian to Kushan; Gupta Era; Gupta Art

Reading: 246-51; 255; 261-63; 265-66

Writing: Response to Buddhist Sermons or Hindu Lyric Poetry

22 Hindu Dynasties; Hindu Temples; Sculpture; Music

Reading: 251-55; 263-65

Writing: Response to *The Ramayana* or *The Pancatantra*

25 Indian Drama; Music

Reading: 255-57; 266-71

Writing: Response to Kalidasa

Chapter 8: Early Chinese Civilization

29 Shang and Zhou Dynasties; Empire: Qin and Han Dynasties; The Six Dynasties

Reading: 274-75; 278-80; 288-89

Writing: Response to *The Book of Songs*

Oct. 2 Confucianism

Reading: 275-77; 289-90

Writing: Response to Confucius (including additional excerpts posted on D2L)

6 Taoism

Reading: 277-78; 290-92

Writing: Response to *The Tao Te Ching*, *The Book of Liezi*, or Zhuangzi

9 The Tang Dynasty; The Song Dynasty; Chinese Literature

Reading: 280-86; 292-95

Writing: Response to Any of the Remaining Readings at the End of the Chapter

Chapter 9: Early Japanese Civilization

13 Prehistoric Japan; Religion; Courtly Japan: Asuka and Nara Periods; Courtly Japan: Heian Period; Literature

Reading: 298-303; 310-11

Writing: Response to Japanese Poetry

16 Warrior Japan; Later Warrior Japan; Landscape Painting; Temple of the Golden Pavilion; Japanese Gardens; Literature

Reading: 303-9; 311-17

Writing: Response to Any of the Remaining Readings at the End of the Chapter

Chapter 10: Early Civilizations of the Americas and Africa

20 Mesoamerica; Olmecs; Teotihuacán; Mayan Culture

Reading: 320-25

23 Toltecs and Aztecs

Reading: 325-28; 344-45

Writing: Response to Mesoamerican Poems

27 Cultures of Peru; The Moche; The Inca; North America

Reading: 328-36; 346-50

- Writing:** Response to Popol Vuh or Neruda
30 North America; Africa
Reading: 333-39; 350-53
Nov. 3 Africa; African Epics
Reading: 339-42; 350-53
Writing: Response to African Epics

Chapter 11: Early Middle Ages and the Romanesque

- 6** Early Medieval Culture; Merging of Christian and Celto-Germanic Traditions; Charlemagne and the Carolingian Era; Monasticism
Reading: 356-62
10 Literature
Reading: 374-76
Writing: Response to *Beowulf*
13 Literature; Romanesque Culture; The Feudal Monarchs; Romanesque Architecture
Reading: 362-66; 376-78
Writing: Response to *The Song of Roland*
17 Sculpture; Painting; Decorative Arts; The Chivalric Tradition; Music
Reading: 366-72; 378-81
Writing: Response to Any of the Poetry at the End of the Chapter

Chapter 12: Gothic and Late Middle Ages

- 20** Paris in the Later Middle Ages; Gothic Architecture; Gothic Architecture Outside France; Sculpture
Reading: 384-96
24 Literature: Dante's *Inferno*; Painting and Decorative Arts; Toward the Renaissance; Naturalism in Art
Reading: 396-404; 406-8; 415-21
Writing: Response to *Inferno*
27 Thanksgiving Break
Dec. 1 Literature: Boccaccio
Reading: 409-10; 421-23
Writing: Response to Boccaccio
4023 Paper Proposal Due
4 Literature; Music; Medieval Calamities; Secular Song; The Medieval Bestiary
Reading: 404-6; 410-12; 423-29
Writing: Response to Chaucer or Christine de Pizan
8 Final Essay Due
11 4023 Final Paper Due

Course Requirements:

1. Written Responses (2023, 25% total; 4023, 20% total). You will write short critical responses of about one double-spaced page (c. 250 words) to the primary readings in the textbook as indicated in the syllabus. Note: these are the readings at the back of each chapter in the textbook, as indicated by the last set of page numbers. Your response should 1) briefly demonstrate your understanding of the text; 2) offer an interpretation or commentary; 3) briefly situate it within the context we are studying and/or compare and contrast it with other primary texts. One way to situate the text within the context is to do the background reading on it in the textbook and at least say who the author is, what they were known for, or something similar. Another way to put the text in context is to compare it with texts or artworks we have already discussed, or even with works you have encountered in other classes or on your own. The quality of your writing (grammar, spelling, and organization) will also be counted for these assignments, which should be considered “mini-essays.” I have posted the rubric I use to grade these assignments in “Start Here!”

Please submit your daily assignment by 11 a.m. on the day it is due. You may click on the assignment on the course homepage calendar, access it through Content, or click on Assessments > Assignments. The Dropbox has already been prepared for all of your assignments, so you may work ahead if you choose to.

2. Discussion (2023, 25% total; 4023, 20% total). When discussing the primary readings for the day, you should first post what you think is most interesting from your response. You may copy and paste it from the response if you wish. Your second post may be a response to a classmate or your thoughts on one or more of the videos or other materials due that day (for example, you may post about something you found particularly significant, surprising, or interesting). Just to give you a general idea, a typical discussion board response should be about 4-8 sentences long. So in total, for each discussion, you should post at least two responses, but you should feel free to post more. Your participation in the discussions will be graded based on both quality and quantity. You should post on the discussion board by 10 p.m. on every Tuesday and Friday, starting Friday, Aug. 28.

In addition, you may post responses and/or questions to any videos I put up for the day, or any other comments or questions. These comments and questions may be of any length.

3. Quizzes (2023, 25%; 4023, 20%): For each quiz you will have three attempts, and the highest grade will be recorded in the Gradebook. Some quizzes will be on the assigned videos, and others will be chapter quizzes.

4. Something Fun! (5%): Each of you will have a chance to contribute something you find interesting that is related to the content of the textbook but not treated in depth. This is your chance to be imaginative. You should choose one specific topic—a building, a cultural phenomenon, a work of art, etc.—research it, post a description of your topic that is more or less the equivalent of about one double-spaced page without a header, and provide at least one image. You may also post a short video if you wish. The topic should

be something you find cool, so be creative! Your topic should be within the time period covered by the course—that is, from the earliest times to about 1400 for cultures other than Europe, and the Romanesque and Gothic periods in Europe. As for geography, you are free to post places we have not covered in any region. This means that your post does not have to be about China or Japan; it can be about another country in Asia, such as Thailand or Indonesia. Also, our book covers Western Europe during the Romanesque and Gothic periods pretty well, but you might think—what was going on in Russia at the time, for example? Or you can think about the culture, history, geography, etc. of African countries we did not cover. Your post should be about something specific: for example, the Japanese tea ceremony, or a specific holiday or festival, the meaning of a specific African mask, or detailed information about a specific god—just to give you an idea of what I have in mind. For this assignment, most importantly you must be sure not to plagiarize! Consult at least two websites, take notes, and put everything in your own words, because deliberate, word-for-word plagiarism will get you an F in the course. You may quote from websites if you wish. Provide the URL of all the websites you consulted for the assignment.

At the beginning of the class, I will set up a discussion forum where each of you can request a geographical area for your presentation. I want to make sure the presentations are spread out and cover each region. Once I have approved your region (first come, first serve), please think of a topic and send it to me within one week so that I can approve it and make sure there is no overlap.

5. Final Essay (2023, 20%; 4023, 15%). The final exam will consist of a critical thinking essay that will allow you to demonstrate your understanding of the course material as a whole. It will be due on **Dec. 8**.

6. Research-Based Presentation (4023, 10%). Upper-level students must choose a topic for a presentation (if you were giving the presentation in class, it would be about 10 minutes long). The topic should complement the textbook, not repeat what it says. You will be expected to consult at least three scholarly sources, and give me an outline of the presentation and a bibliography in MLA or APA style on the day of your presentation. You may choose to do a video presentation or a PowerPoint presentation. If you choose the latter, you should write out a transcript, or at least an outline, of what you would say if you were presenting it in class. You should look through the textbook and submit a topic proposal to me by **Sept. 4**, and we will set a date for your presentation. Please send your presentation or a link to it to me by email, and I will post in online for the rest of the class to comment and ask questions.

7. Research Paper (4023, 10%). Upper-level students will write a 4-5 page research paper on a topic of their choice, but not on the same topic as their presentation. **The paper must be in MLA or APA format, including in-text citations.** Please submit a brief paper proposal by **Dec. 1**. The paper is due on **Dec. 11**. If it is late, your grade will be reduced by one-third of a letter grade (e.g., A > A-) per day, including weekends.

Course Policies:

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, including on the daily assignments. If you deliberately plagiarize on any assignments or papers (that is, copying or cutting and pasting), or engage in any other form of academic dishonesty as defined by the MSU Student Handbook, you will get an F in the course and disciplinary proceedings will be initiated.

Safe Zone Statement: This class is a “safe zone” in which all students will be treated and will treat one another equally, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Diversity of thought is encouraged.

Required Text (available at the College Bookstore or Amazon, and on reserve at the library):

Benton, Janetta and Robert DiYanni. *Arts and Culture: An Introduction to the Humanities*. Vol. 2. 4th ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2012.

Additional Assistance:

Office Hours: I will be on Commnincations > Chat every day from two to three, or you can send me an email at any time. We can also set up a Zoom meeting to discuss any questions you may have.

D2L Problems: If you are having trouble submitting an assignment, or if you are having any other technical, please also email me and let me know. It may be a glitch in D2L that I can easily fix, and I can inform other students of the problem as well as assisting you. You may also go to the D2L homepage and click on “Report a Problem.” Fill out the form and submit it. An alternative is to send an email to D2Lhelp@msutexas.edu describing your problem in detail and providing the full course number and title.

Tutoring and Academic Support Programs: TASP provides free drop-in tutoring for MSU students. Located on the first floor of Moffett Library, TASP's Learning Center provides tutoring support in a number of core courses and subject areas. Writing tutors are available Monday through Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Sunday 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Remember that you don't need an appointment to utilize these services.

Additional Tutoring: TASP has partnered with Thinkingstorm, an online tutoring company that provides you with high-quality, 24/7 tutoring support. Located at the top of your D2L course page, select More > Tutoring to book an appointment with a tutor.