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Postgraduate MA Medieval History optional modules

You will study 60 credits worth of optional modules across two semesters, choosing from a range of 10 credit and 20 credit modules.

10 credit modules

Open all sections

Old English 1A and 1B

These are linked modules, where you study one half each semester: 1A runs in autumn; 1B runs in spring

These modules offer the opportunity to begin the study of literature written in Old English, the variety of English used in the British Isles by Anglo-Saxons until shortly after 1066. Students read a selection of texts in the original language and investigate their literary, cultural, historical and artistic contexts.

Old English 2A and 2B: Words, Wisdom and Woman's Voice

These are linked modules, where you study one half each semester: 2A runs in autumn; 2B runs in spring

These modules allow you to improve a reading knowledge of Old English and to explore the nature, meanings and uses of Old English poetic language in Old English elegiac poetry and related texts.

Old English 3A and 3B: Reading Beowulf

These are linked modules, where you study one half each semester: 3A runs in autumn; 3B runs in spring

These modules focus on a detailed study of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem Beowulf and its textual and cultural contexts. You will improve a reading knowledge of Old English to a level at which you can read widely in the original language and pursue an extended project on Old English Writing.

20 credit modules

You may choose to study one of the core modules from the other pathways as one of your options.

Other 20-credit modules available include:

Graduate Linguistic Skills (Beginner) 1 and 2: Latin or Greek

1 runs in autumn; 2 runs in spring

These modules are an intensive introduction to either Greek or Latin. They aim to provide you with the basic linguistic skills needed to acquire a reading knowledge of Greek/Latin for the purposes of research.

Graduate Linguistic Skills (Advanced) 1 and 2: Latin or Greek

1 runs in autumn; 2 runs in spring

These modules consolidate linguistic skills to enable you to work independently on Latin/Greek texts in the original language, building upon existing knowledge. They develop analytical and critical skills by means of advanced grammar and reading classes focusing in detail on a text or texts.

Byzantine Literature and History 1 and 2

Content will differ in autumn and spring semesters, so you may take this module in one or both terms

We have neat categories: history/literature. We think of the first as providing ‘facts’ about the past and the second as a form of entertainment. Byzantine writers, who composed their works in Greek, were strongly aware of differences in genre – history, tragedy, satire, epic – but they were writers first and foremost and did not specialise. Thus we find literary elements in historical narratives and historical elements in fictional works. This module is about the overlap and what we can learn from it.

Late Roman and Byzantine Archaeology and Material Culture I

This module is based on the largest source of fresh evidence for the Late Roman-to- early medieval Eastern Mediterranean world – namely, archaeology. It is designed to accustom interested students to using archaeological materials in the discussion of historians’ ideas about economic, social, cultural, and even political changes. A background in archaeology is not essential.

Late Roman and Byzantine Archaeology and Material Culture II

This module is based on the burgeoning archaeology of the medieval eastern Mediterranean and SE Europe and has the same general aims and themes as Late Roman and Byzantine Archaeology 1. However, taking account of the rise and spread of Islam, the Slavs, and eventually the Crusades, and the divisions which these brought to the geographical space concerned, the course concentrates on the Christian world in the Balkans, Greece, Cyprus and Anatolia.

Byzantine Art and Architecture I

This course ensures a thorough grounding in the monuments of Byzantium, and an understanding of the methodological issues and problems confronting modern scholars. Lectures provide a chronological survey of the monuments from the foundation of Constantinople in 324 until Iconoclasm (730-843), with an emphasis on the interpretation of the monuments in their historical context.

Byzantine Art and Architecture II

Following on from Byzantine Art and Architecture 1, lectures provide a chronological survey of the monuments from Iconoclasm (730-843) until the end of the Byzantine empire (1453).

People and Places in the West Midlands, c.1000-1500

This module offers the opportunity to study various aspects of medieval society, culture and the economy with a particular focus in the West Midlands from c. 1000 to 1500. It will introduce you to a variety of topics in medieval local history and broaden your understanding of the development of the region across the period.

Please note: this is taught via four Saturday day classes

The Economies of the Late Roman, Byzantine and Frankish East

This module surveys the economic history of the post-Roman East (4th – 15th c.) Lectures first review critically a range of approaches to pre-modern economies and explore their value for historical enquiries. Subsequent topics include: the study of parameters of long- and short-term changes; key trajectories; evolving forms of land tenure and taxation; the state's involvement in the economy; the roles of the Church and the law; and the impact of the Italian mercantile republics.

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Literature and Culture of the Medieval West Midlands

This module introduces key topics in medieval literary and cultural analysis through focus on the rich heritage of literature and material culture associated with the English West Midlands. Topics discussed will vary according to the interests of the group.

Across the Divide: China and its Neighbours in Texts and Material Culture

This module is a case study of the Liao dynasty (907-1125) that dominated eastern Eurasia for at least a century, but which is little known and barely studied because its rulers were not Chinese and did not control the traditional heartlands of the Chinese empires. The chief scholarly question about 'conquest dynasties' like the Liao has been: to what extent were they influenced by China? But were the parties involved really so distinct? What else was going on apart from fighting? How can we best describe and analyse frontier systems? This module seeks answers to these questions through critical examination of texts (in translation) and of material remains.

The Parish in Late Medieval England

The parish was the basic component of the late medieval church. Although much analysed, it remains under-synthesised. This module will survey the assorted facets of parish life and range of perspectives through which it can be viewed (`the clerical parish', `the lay parish', `the contentious parish', etc) to develop that fuller synthesis, and establish a firm understanding and appreciation of the parish's place in both the ecclesiastical and the social and economic history of late medieval England.

Crusade, Jihad and Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Medieval Iberian Frontier, c.1031–c.1212

The period 1031–1212 was formative in medieval Iberian history. It saw the collapse of the caliphate of Cordoba and the subsequent fragmentation of political authority in al-Andalus, which was only to be re-established in the wake of successive invasions by the Almoravids and Almohads, Islamic fundamentalists from North Africa. The strength and confidence of the Christian kingdoms of Iberia also increased significantly during these years, as can be seen from the progression of territorial conquest and colonisation that culminated in the 'miraculous' victory at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212. In this module you will examine the political, cultural and social history of the Iberian peninsula from the middle of the eleventh through to the early thirteenth century, with a focus on the changing nature of cross-frontier relations between Christians and Muslims.

Subjects for consideration will include: the development and implementation of Christian ideas of 'reconquest'; the influence on cross-cultural encounters of ideologies of crusade and jihad; the problems associated with the creation of multi-faith frontier societies; and the evolution of peninsular Christian understandings of the past, both recent and more distant. Throughout the module you will approach the subject through close analysis of the range of Latin, vernacular and Arabic primary sources that are available in translation both in print and on the Internet; other forms of evidence (artistic, architectural, archaeological) will be incorporated where appropriate.

Beyond the Frontier: History and Culture in Late Medieval Iberia

This interdisciplinary module presents you with an exciting opportunity to study the history and culture of late medieval Iberia, through an exploration of the rich primary source evidence for relations between peninsular Christians, Muslims and Jews and engagement with a variety of methodological approaches to medieval Iberian studies. The module is divided into three thematic units, each of which is concerned with exploring a number of central concepts through examination of primary texts and modern scholarship: political culture (kingship, empire, frontier society); religious culture (reconquest, pilgrimage, *convivencia*); popular and literary culture (daily life, warfare, humour and sin).

Byzantine Society I

The module introduces you to historiographical issues of early and middle Byzantine history. Topics may include: the end of the ancient world and the rise of medieval Byzantium; the emergence of the Byzantine aristocracy; continuity and change in the Byzantine army; life in the countryside; political, doctrinal and ideological controversies; saints and sainthood; Byzantium's regulated economy. The readings consist of key modern studies discussed in seminar meetings. Select primary sources are introduced, which may include Byzantine Greek or medieval Latin texts.

Byzantine Society II

The module introduces you to historiographical issues of middle and late Byzantine history. Topics may include: the eleventh-century crisis; the Komnenian reform and the emergence of governance by privilege; the incorporation of the Byzantine economy into the Mediterranean trade system dominated by Italian merchants; church and society in Constantinople and the provinces; village life; ideology and identity. The readings consist of key modern studies discussed in seminar meetings. Select primary sources are introduced, which may include Byzantine Greek texts.

Any Modern Language

You can take undergraduate modules in modern languages needed for reading secondary sources as a Module Outside the Main Discipline (MOMD). These are available from beginner to advanced level in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and others. See **information on MOMD language modules (/facilities/cml/iwlp/momd/eligibility.aspx)** . Non-MOMD language modules will also be available from 2013-14.

Chaucer and his Sources

Chaucer's writings, continuing to offer readerly delight and enjoyment after six hundred years, also challenge the reader to reflect on modes and practices of reading. The concerns of post-modern literary theory have made newly visible Chaucer's own pre-modern engagement with issues of interpretation and the pleasures of the text. Texts discussed in seminars will cover a range of Chaucer's works and the sources to which he responded (read in translation). Learning will be by seminar and individual essay work; students will be required to contribute to learning by giving presentations on their reading and taking turns at making a written record of seminar discussion. The module will assume some previous or concurrent study of Middle English texts in the original language.

Conquest, Colonisation and Identity:

Conquest, Colonisation and Identity: Eurasian Frontiers in Texts and Material Culture

Conquest and colonisation are widely seen as modern (or at least post-medieval) phenomena, but both occurred frequently before 1500 and around the world. Historical texts are well known to have played a central role in the construction of national identities in modern East Asia and in Scandinavia. The purpose of this module is to critically examine the way textual evidence (in translation) can be used alongside archaeological evidence for understanding society and politics in two contrasting regions, northern China and Iceland, for the period c. 900 to c. 1200.

Mastering Middle English

This module supports your discovery and appreciation of Middle English texts that are every bit as worthy of reading as Chaucer but much less well known. It also facilitates confident engagement with the texts in their original Middle English language, awareness of the range and variety of English literature in the medieval period, and understanding of the cultural contexts in which that literature was originally produced, ‘published’ and read. We will read a number of texts that rank among the greatest achievements across all English literature, including the romance Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, but there will also be plenty of room for you to explore and to participate in planning the reading programme.

Old Norse

This module offers the opportunity to begin the study of literature written in Old Norse-Icelandic, the language used across Scandinavia, Iceland and some parts of the British Isles in the medieval period. You will read a selection of texts in the original language and investigate their literary, cultural, historical and artistic contexts. In semester one, you will read selections from an appropriate Saga of Icelanders such as Hrafnkel's saga or Gunnlaug's saga and, in semester two, you will read selections of Eddic poetry.

Reading French, German, Italian, Russian or Spanish for Researchers

You will only focus on one of these languages. You will be taught by a mixture of tutor-led and workshop sessions, typically alternating between the two. Tutor-led sessions give instruction on the grammatical and lexical features of the language, based on a progressive reading of the prescribed coursebook. In the workshop sessions, you will undertake language exercises, including translation of texts into English, under the guidance of your tutor.

Reading and Writing Scotland: Scottish Literature 1375-1513.

This module will introduce you to a diverse range of Older Scots works from c. 1375 to 1513. These will be studied in the context of developments in language, literary culture, and politics. You will also look at contemporary manuscript and print culture and interrogate the cross-cultural relationships between England and Scotland. Writers and texts studied will include: John Barbour, James I, Blind Hary, William Dunbar, as well as anonymous texts such as Golagros and Gawane and Lancelot of the Laik.

The Fourth Crusade

This module will examine the background to, the course and aftermath of the Fourth Crusade which ended in the conquest of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine empire. Reasons for 1204 will be sought in East-West relations, political, ecclesiastical, economic, and in the history of crusading. The aftermath, 57 years of Latin rule in Constantinople and the foundation of three successor states in Anatolia and the Balkans, will be studied. Narratives of the event, both Latin and Greek, will be the basis of study, as will papal letters and Latin and Greek documents in translation.

Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium 1 and 2

This module examines approaches to Late Antique and Byzantine Gender in depth. Some of the topics covered include: Why study gender? Women, men, eunuchs: masculinities, femininities, and a third gender? Prokopios’s Secret History; gender and heresy: women, monks and iconoclasm; church, state and gender: a patriarch and an empress in conflict; gender and daily life: family, marriage and the law; the cult of the Virgin; and gender in relation to the linguistic turn, status and monastic experience.

Plays, Pageants and Spectacle: Drama before Shakespeare

Encompassing broad conceptions of dramatic performance, this module explores the diverse traditions of plays, pageants and spectacle in the late medieval and early modern period. Opening with the community urban drama of the York and Wakefield mystery cycles, we will explore how medieval playwrights exploited staging, visual

traditions, and comedy in their retelling of biblical history for contemporary audiences. As well as assessing the qualities of fifteenth-century morality plays like 'Mankind' we will consider some of the distinctive forms of pre-modern performance. Into the Tudor period we will examine the ways in which playwrights such as Thomas Heywood and John Bale responded to the momentous events of the Reformation, as well as assessing the importance of royal ceremony and spectacle. The last phase of the module explores the radical changes in dramatic performance in the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth, from the emergence of plays influenced by classical authors such as Seneca ('Gorboduc') and Plautus ('Gammer Gurton's Needle') and inflecting high Renaissance humanism to the works written for the first professional theatres by authors such as Marlowe and Kyd. Throughout the module we will examine closely the language of the plays, their stagecraft and textual and performance histories. We will challenge received ideas about the unsophisticated nature of pre-Shakespearean dramatic traditions and explore the ways in which drama and spectacle was central to the exploration of cultural, political, religious and social issues in this period.

Vikings in the North Atlantic

Traditionally the study of the Viking expansion has been shaped by an overdependence on textual evidence and tendency to be shaped by nationalist historiographies. Increased archaeological excavation, new technologies and scientific methods, and increased study of place-name evidence means that the colonisation of the North Atlantic is now much better understood. This module therefore requires students to critically engage with a diverse body of evidence and diverse methodologies for understanding the past. Students will be invited to consider how and why people from Scandinavia interacted with pre-existing populations in the northern British Isles, Greenland and North America, and how and why colonisation took place in uninhabited places such as Iceland. Issues covered will include the chronology of the colonisation, ethnicity and identities across the region, socio-economic structures, and aspects of religion and burial practice, material culture and settlement archaeology.

Popular Unrest in Later Medieval Europe

The module will examine the nature and contexts of popular unrest in later medieval Europe from c.1200 until c.1550, as well as their complex and lively historiographies. This will include a comparison of different types of medieval revolts and their specific socio-economic contexts. It has often been pointed out that there was a particularly high number of popular revolts after the first arrival of the Black Death, and one focus of the course will be the examination of the relevance of the changed economic social, and cultural climate in the post Black Death period to the nature of popular unrest. Were popular revolts a symptom of a crisis of feudalism? Was serfdom in decline and did revolts have anything to do with this? We will examine the revolts themselves more closely through a variety of primary sources and try to ascertain what the aims and motivations of the rebels were, and how contemporary commentators viewed them. Other areas covered include: the involvement of women in popular unrest; how popular revolts were organised; how distinctions can be drawn between revolts and protests or indeed a riot and rebellion; and how manifestations of popular discontent differ according to different contexts and in different countries.

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