THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN

HIST 327
Fall Semester, 2019 (3 credits)
Thursday 4:00–6:45 in HSS 155

Professor Fred Astren

The meaning of the word “Mediterranean” from its Latin roots means “middle of the earth,” thereby suggesting a particular worldview that only partially reveals the many dimensions of history in and of the Mediterranean. In fact, many worldviews (imperial, religious, economic, intellectual, etc.) offer a wide range of conceptualization of the sea and its surrounding areas. The physical Mediterranean is characterized by a great deal of variety in terms of regionality and geographical compartmentalization—even micro-regions—and by interconnectivity. In it, endemic dearth is countered by redistribution, and distance can be measured less by propinquity than by accessibility. Interconnectivity sometimes brings sites connected by the Mediterranean into closer proximity than inland locales that are geographically nearby.

In terms of culture, this means that the medieval Mediterranean is not to be thought of so much as a place of cultural influence, but rather as one where societies and people were often bi-cultural or multi-cultural. Instead of thinking about contact between cultures, it may be more useful to consider cultural interdependency and overlap among cultural groups. And, where space—large and small—is shared, people could have changing situationally-based identities that created a social environment with common features recognizable to inhabitants.

The meaning of the word “medieval” comes from a three-part historical periodization that reflects an emerging European historical self-consciousness of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Such thinking identifies a difficult-to-define “middle” between antiquity and modernity. Through examination of the history of the Mediterranean, notions of what constitutes the Middle Ages will be interrogated and refined. Significantly, we will notice different beginnings and ends to the medieval period depending how we approach its history.

Prerequisite: Successful completion of GE Areas A1, A2, A3, B4, and E; or consent of the instructor.

GE: UD-C: Arts and/or Humanities; Environmental Sustainability; Global Perspectives.
Required reading:
Readings are available on iLearn, along with occasional handouts, plus:

Course Schedule

I. INTRODUCTION

1. (8/29) Thinking About the Mediterranean
Course requirements, basic terminology, etc. First thoughts.

2. (9/5) What is the Mediterranean?
• How does the Mediterranean work?

• The Mediterranean of Rome

3. (9/12) After Rome
• Old and New Faiths, AD 1–450 / Dis-integration, 400–600

• “After” Rome: Material Culture and Society

II. THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN

4. (9/19) Rome After Rome: The Byzantine Empire
• The Emperor Justinian’s Roman Empire

• The Medieval Byzantine Empire in the Tenth Century

 Architectural section of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople
5. (9/26) The Early Middle Ages

- Mediterranean Troughs, 600–900 / Crossing the Boundaries Between Christendom and Islam, 900–1050

- Economic Recovery in the Early Middle Ages

(10/3) No class — study day

6. (10/10) Ships and Travel

- Ships

- Jewish Merchants of the Cairo Geniza
  Some translated documents from the Cairo Geniza.

7. (10/17) The Middle of the Middle Ages

- The Great Sea-Change, 1000–1100 / ‘The Profit that God Shall Give,’ 1100–1200

- Ways across the Sea, 1160–1185 / The Fall and Rise of Empires, 1130–1260

8. (10/24) The Late Middle Ages

- Merchants, Mercenaries and Missionaries, 1220–1300 / *Serrata* – Closing, 1291–1350

9. (10/31) Responses to the Black Death

- The Second World Pandemic

- Imagining the Mediterranean

Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem (photo 1925)
10. (11/7) The End of the Middle Ages

- Would-be Emperors, 1350–1480 / Transformations in the West, 1391–1500

11. (11/14) Two Views of the Mediterranean

- Recapitulating the Medieval Mediterranean: Sardinia

- Naval Warfare Concludes the Medieval Mediterranean

![Artist's reconstruction of the Serçe Limani ship (11th c.)](image1)

![Merchants' notes on goods loaded onto a ship (June 10, 1393)](image2)

III. CONCLUSION: FROM THE MEDIEVAL TO THE EARLY MODERN

12. (11/21) Eating in a Connected World: Spices and Trade 1


(11/28) No class — Fall Break

13. (12/5) Eating in a Connected World: Spices and Trade 2


14. (12/12) From the Mediterranean to the Ocean Sea


- Guest lecture: Prof. Sarah Crabtree, History Department, SFSU

(12/19, Thursday) 1:00–3:15 — final exam scheduled
Method of Instruction

Required readings are from electronic files available on iLearn, with the exception of Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, and Freedman, *Out of the East*, which are available online on the SF State Library website. Assignments deserve close reading and thoughtful analysis on the part of the students.

The scheduled course times will consist of both lectures and discussion. The lectures are intended to supplement assigned reading. The discussions have a two-fold purpose: (1) to clarify and expand the materials in the readings; and (2) to focus on major issues in medieval Mediterranean history. Each student is responsible for the material covered in class. Students will be expected to bring the appropriate book or other assigned reading to every class session, and to be prepared to comment upon the assigned readings.

Since every topic cannot be covered to each individual’s satisfaction in class discussion, it is advantageous for students to utilize office hours. They permit students to discuss reading assignments, writing, or anything else that pertains to the course. The office hours create space for exploration of subjects that were not covered in class. If you cannot make the designated times, please arrange for an appointment or phone call. Professor Astren will try to accommodate.

A note on writing assignments: All submitted written material must be word processed. You are responsible to keep an extra copy of all written work (on disk or hard copy) in the event that your assignment is lost or misplaced. Assignments that are late or are less than the assigned length will be marked down accordingly. Avoid plagiarism! Plagiarism means the appropriation of another person’s work and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of it in one’s own work. It is doubly unethical, since it deprives the true author of his/her rightful credit and then gives that credit to someone to whom it is not due.

The assigned readings and course schedule may change as the instructor deems fit. That is, the syllabus does not represent a rigid schedule, but a general guide to the progression of this course. However, this syllabus constitutes a contract between each student and the professor. By registering for this class and accepting this syllabus you are agreeing to be responsible for all the content of readings, handouts, and assignments.

Grading and Assignments:

How your grade will be computed:

1) Occasional writing assignments and/or quizzes 15%
2) Analytical or research papers
   (2 analytical at 30% or 1 research at 60%) 60%
3) Final exam 10%
4) Preparation and participation 15%

Small writing assignments or quizzes will be assigned occasionally as deemed necessary by the instructor.

Lack of attendance will result in a lower grade—if you miss more than 3 class sessions, you will get an F for the course. Exceptions granted only in case of an emergency.

Class participation and preparation will raise your final grade.

Work handed in late will be marked down a full grade (for example, a B+ becomes C+). Exceptions granted only in case of an emergency.

All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade.

Dinar of Fāṭimid caliph al-Āmir, 1101–30

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The Tabula Rogeriana, drawn by al-Idrisi for Roger II of Sicily in 1154

Note: SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students.

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:
- The SAFE Place, 415-338-2208, http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/
- Counseling and Psychological Services Center, 415-338-2208, http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/

For more information on your rights and available resources:
http://titleix.sfsu.edu

Note: Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Services Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email: dprc@sfsu.edu.

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