

Syllabus

Monasticism beyond the monastery: religious life and society in the medieval West (RLBcB547)

Lecturer and Course Co-ordinator: Dr Robert L.J. Shaw – robert.shaw@mail.muni.cz

Consultation hours: by appointment – just email to arrange whenever required

Time and Place: Thu 10:00--11:40, room B2.23 (See Class Timetable on p.3 for exact class dates and reading weeks)

Course background:

Medieval monasticism in the Latin West encompassed a wide variety of forms of life which called on men and women to renounce their worldly lives in favour of spiritual ones. For example, there were hermits living in apparent isolation, communities dwelling in enclosed religious houses, and friars who belonged to a community but roamed more freely.

Across all these forms, however, the monastic retreat from the life of the world rarely appears complete. Monks and nuns could hardly survive without outside help: they required tolerance, interest and promotion from a wide variety of outsiders in order to survive.

In turn, monasticism had an enormous influence on surrounding society. Monks and nuns provided prayers, charitable services, and religious example and instruction for outsiders. They also helped to shape the society, the economy, and the political and intellectual culture of the medieval West. On the other hand, the charge of monastic 'hypocrisy' - a failure to live up to their otherworldly image - played its part in the story of the Reformation.

Objectives:

This course will explore the development of Christian monasticism within the context of the evolving society of the Latin West. The objective will be to gain an understanding of monks and nuns themselves, but also of the world around them, how it shaped them, and how it was shaped by them across the Middle Ages.

This course will also allow students to ***read and discuss selected historical sources in depth***. Through this, they will develop their own interpretations of medieval monastic life and what it meant to wider society. Through group reading and discussion within the classes, students will also gain confidence in presenting their views.

After completing the course, the student will be able to:

1. identify and accurately describe the major forms of monastic life that emerged in the medieval West, showing a knowledge of the most important religious trends and institutional practices, as well as the terminology used to describe them
2. display a broad understanding and cite relevant examples of the ways in which medieval monasticism interacted with social, cultural, economic, and political contexts
3. analyse and interpret original sources connected to the history of Western medieval monasticism and wider society

Assessment and Expectations

In the exam period, students will be required to give **a short oral/visual presentation in English (c. 10-15 mins) on two historical sources** that tell us something about the relationship between monasticism and medieval society. The presentation will be followed by a short (c. 10 minute) period for questions.

Students will pick these sources from a selection provided in English translation by the lecturer - these sources will all be very closely connected to the topics and sources studied in class.

The document containing the sources that students can choose from for the presentation will be provided **after the 9th class (23rd April – i.e. prior to 2 Reading Weeks)**

Marks will be awarded for:

- 1) showing a good understanding of the context of the sources (for instance: who were the authors, when and where did they live, which monastic groups they were affiliated with, what was the broader historical context in which they lived)
- 2) accurately explaining the content of the sources, showing good understanding of medieval concepts and terminology
- 3) analysing what these sources tell us about the interactions between monasticism and medieval society
- 4) comparing and contrasting the two sources and what they tell us about the relationship between monasticism and medieval society

N.B. Attendance of classes is very important since they are participatory and provide essential preparation for the final presentation - a maximum of 2 unexcused absences is permissible.

Recommended Reading

The following provide useful overviews of both the development of Western monasticism and its relationship with society: the first in some detail (and available in Czech translation in the library!), the second as a very short summary (just 10 pages!).

- Hugh Lawrence, *Medieval monasticism, forms of religious life Western Europe in the middle ages* (3rd edition, Routledge: London and New York, 2000) // CZ translation: Hugh Lawrence, *Dějiny středověkého mnišství* (Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury: Vyšehrad, 2001)
- Lester K. Little, "Monasticism in Western Society: From Marginality to the Establishment and Back", *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 47 (2002), pp. 83-94
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4238793>

These are just two, relatively traditional perspectives, however: there is significant room for debate.

- The class Lectures/PowerPoints will allow you gain some other perspectives.
- I will also share some useful articles throughout the course, that will allow you to expand on topics of interest and provide useful background for whatever presentation you chose to do.
- ***Most importantly, the historical sources we read and discuss will allow you to take your own view.***
- I will share all of these (PowerPoints, sources discussed in class, useful expansion reading) on the IS as we proceed through the course.

Class Timetable and Topics

Class 1 – 20th February 2020: **Hermits, the First Monasteries and Late Antique Society (c.300-500 AD)**

Class 2 – 27th February 2020: **Monastic Missionaries: the spread of monasticism and the expansion of Christendom (c.500-900 AD)**

Class 3 – 5th March: **Regulation, Learning, and Political Engagement: envisioning the perfect Christian community (c. 500-900 AD)**

Class 4 – 12th March: **High Medieval Monastic Reform and Society I: powerhouses of prayer and living examples (c. 900-1050 AD)**

Class 5 – 19th March: **High Medieval Monastic Reform and Society II: Church reform and crusades, monastic economies, and twelfth century spirituality (c. 1050-1200 AD)**

READING WEEK – 26th March

Class 6 – 2nd April: **Female Monasticism in the Early and High Middle Ages: nuns and society (up to c. 1200)**

Class 7 – 9th April: **Poverty and Mobility: new religious movements and urban society (c. 1200-1400 AD)**

Class 8 – 16th April: **Monasticism, Universities and Vernacular Spirituality: the evolution of monastic learning and teaching, and their place within late medieval culture (c. 1200-1500 AD)**

Class 9 – 23rd April: **Observant Reform and the Challenge of Martin Luther: were religious vows still relevant in late medieval society? (c. 1400-1520 AD)**

READING WEEK – 30th April

READING WEEK – 7th May

Class 10 – 14th May: **The End of Medieval Monasticism?: Protestant suppressions, Catholic reforms, monks in the New World.(c. 1520-1600 AD)**

Class 11 – 21st May: **Medieval Monasticism Today: what is the legacy of medieval monasticism for today's society?**