

History 492H: Witchcraft, magic, and science

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Spring Semester 2003

Tues. & Thurs., 1-2:15, Herter 114 (class #18228)

Course website: <<http://people.umass.edu/ogilvie/492H/>>

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Office hours: Tues. 2:30-5, Thurs. 8-11, and by appointment. Please note: I will sometimes have to schedule meetings during my office hours. If that is the case, I will try to post a notice on my web page:

<<http://people.umass.edu/ogilvie/contact.html>>

Brief description of course

The foundations of modern science and scientific method were laid in the Scientific Revolution of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. This period would be seen as a golden age by the philosophes of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the founders of the history of science in the twentieth century. Yet the period from 1550 to 1650 also saw widespread interest in occult powers and natural magic, and it was the height of the “witch craze” in Europe, a period in which about fifty thousand Europeans, most of them women, were tried and executed for the crime of diabolical witchcraft.

Are these trends contradictory or complementary? Historians have disagreed vehemently about whether the Scientific Revolution, a triumph of rational thought, was opposed to the Renaissance interest in the occult, demonology, natural magic, and witchcraft, or whether these aspects were part and parcel of the intense study of the natural world that characterized early modern science. For example, Isaac Newton was both the founder of modern physics and a dedicated alchemical adept. Were these aspects of his life compatible? Or did they coexist in an uneasy tension, reflected in the fact that Newton never published his alchemical writings?

This course will address these questions on the basis of intensive study of the primary sources and selected readings from modern historians of science, European culture, and occult knowledge. Though our focus will be on early modern Europe, we will look to the High Middle Ages for the origins of many European concepts of demonic and occult powers and the origins of modern notions of scientific explanation. On the most fundamental level, this course is about the history of reason and rationality: what did it mean to approach a problem reasonably, and what—if anything—did modern science add to the ways in which human beings justify their claims to know something?

Honors. Prerequisites: History 100-101, or History 140, or History 304, or History 305, or History 291H, or consent of instructor.

* I will try to respond to e-mail within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on weekends and holidays. If you need a quicker response, use the telephone! Please identify yourself in your e-mail; I won't respond to “hotguy359@yahoo.com” unless I know who he (or she) is.

Course goals

This course has several different goals. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Summarize and explain the intellectual, cultural, legal, and social aspects of witchcraft belief and persecution in medieval and early modern Europe.
- Summarize and explain the meaning and use of magic in medieval and early modern Europe.
- Summarize and explain the ideas and practices of “science” in medieval and early modern Europe.
- Use library resources (print and electronic) to track down primary and secondary sources on a specific historical topic.
- Assess the value of primary and secondary sources for understanding a specific historical topic.
- Analyze and criticize the argument of a secondary source.
- Interpret primary sources and use them as evidence for historical arguments.
- Write a substantial research paper on a specific historical topic.
- Present your ideas in class discussion, and explain your reasons for holding them.
- As part of a group, organize and lead a class discussion on a specific historical topic.

Your goals for the course

You have just read my goals for the course. You should now take the time to reflect on those goals and think about any others you might have. In the space below, you can write the reasons *you* are in this course and any goals on which you wish to concentrate during it.

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Books for the course (in order they will be used)

The books are available at Atticus Books (8 Main Street, Amherst, tel. 256-1547). They are also on reserve in the DuBois Library. I have given ISBNs in case you want to order them yourself; I encourage you to support local businesses. Please let me know if prices differ significantly from those I have listed. Because this course is a seminar, it is important that you do *all* the reading carefully. If you cannot afford to buy all the books, you might want to find a partner or two in the course to share with. I think these are all books you will want to keep.

R. I. Moore, *The formation of a persecuting society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). ISBN 0-631-17145-2. \$38. (Note: the bookstore has been able to find only ten copies of this book. Plan to share—it's expensive, anyway!)

Norman Cohn, *Europe's inner demons: The demonization of Christians in medieval Christendom*, Revised ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). ISBN 0-226-11307-8. \$16.

Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, eds., *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A documentary history* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). ISBN 0-8122-1751-9. \$22.50.

Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). ISBN 0-521-78576-6. \$17.

Edward Grant, *The foundations of modern science in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). ISBN 0-521-56762-9. \$21.

Robin Briggs, *Witches and neighbors: The social and cultural context of European witchcraft* (New York: Penguin, 1997). ISBN 0-14-014438-2. \$16.

D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and demonic magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000; originally published 1958). ISBN 0-271-02045-8. \$20.

Peter Dear, *Revolutionizing the sciences: European knowledge and its ambitions, 1500-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). ISBN 0-691-08860-8. \$19.

Walter Stephens, *Demon lovers: Witchcraft, sex, and the crisis of belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). ISBN 0-226-77261-6. \$35.

Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the order of nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998). ISBN 0-942299-91-4. \$25.

Recommended: Gordon Harvey, *Writing with sources: A guide for students* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998). ISBN 0-87220-434-0. \$5. (This book is also available online from the course home page, but many students find the print version much easier to read and use. You will be required to read it either way.)

Course requirements and grading

This course is an upper-division honors history course. History, as a scholarly discipline, requires a lot of reading, careful attention to detail, and grasping difficult concepts. You should be prepared to spend six to eight hours per week outside of class reading, researching, and reflecting on the course material, and completing assignments.

The major requirements are as follows (you will receive more specific instructions for #2-6 in separate handouts):

1. Attendance and participation (ungraded but poor attendance is penalized)

This is a seminar. It will not work unless you come to class prepared to talk about the assigned readings. Each day someone will be assigned responsibility for leading discussion, but everyone must take part if the discussions are to be fruitful. If you miss more than three classes, your grade will suffer (see the course policies, below, for details). If you miss class on a day when your group is scheduled to present, you will get no credit for the oral component of the presentation (see below).

2. Group research and presentations—40% of final grade

The class will be divided into four groups of five. Each group will be responsible, as a group, for (a) coming up with short annotated bibliographies on two of the sets of readings/themes for the course, (b) preparing this material to hand out to the class, and (c) leading a discussion on the readings.

3. Weekly response e-mail—10% of final grade

At the end of each week (starting the second week, and with some exceptions noted in the course schedule), you will write a short (1-2 paragraph) e-mail letter with your reactions to the course material and activities for that week.

4. Midterm self-assessment (due Thurs., March 13)—5% of final grade

Midway through the semester, you should write an e-mail to me assessing your performance in the course so far.

5. Final self-assessment (due Tues., May 20)—5% of final grade

At the end of the semester, you should write an e-mail to me assessing what you learned in the course.

6. Term paper (several deadlines)—40% of final grade

Over the course of the semester you will work on a term paper based on substantial research. The final version will be due on **Tues., May 20**. Other parts are due as follows: topic and preliminary bibliography on **Tues., March 11**; narrative outline and revised bibliography on **Tues., April 15**; first draft on **Thurs., May 1**.

Course schedule

1. Tues. 1/28. Introduction to the course

2. Thurs. 1/30. Introduction to library resources

3. Tues. 2/4. The mechanism of persecution I

Read: Moore, *The formation of a persecuting society*.

4. Thurs. 2/6. The mechanism of persecution II

Read: Handouts from class 2/4.

5. Tues. 2/11. Library work

Groups presenting on medieval witchcraft and magic should begin preparing their presentations. Others should use this day for reading and thinking about term papers.

6. Thurs. 2/13. Medieval witchcraft I

Read: Cohn, *Europe's inner demons*.

Tues. 2/18. NO CLASS (Monday class schedule in effect)

7. Thurs. 2/20. Medieval witchcraft II

Read: Kors & Peters (selections to be announced).

8. Tues. 2/25. Medieval witchcraft III

Read: Kors & Peters (selections to be announced).

9. Thurs. 2/27. Medieval magic I

Read: Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*.

10. Tues. 3/4. Medieval magic II

Read: (to be announced).

11. Thurs. 3/6. Library work

Groups presenting on medieval science and early modern witchcraft should begin preparing their presentations. Others should use this day for reading and thinking about term papers.

12. Tues. 3/11. Medieval science I

Read: Grant, *Foundations of modern science*.

Reminder: your topic and preliminary bibliography for the term paper are due today by 5 PM in Herter 624.

13. Thurs. 3/13. Medieval science II

Read: (to be announced).

Reminder: your midterm self-assessment is due today by 5 PM (e-mail).

No response e-mail due this week.

14. Tues. 3/25. Early modern witchcraft I

Read: Briggs, *Witches and neighbors*, through the end of Chapter V.

Thurs. 3/27. Library work—Prof. Ogilvie is going to a conference.

Use this day to work on your term paper.

16. Tues. 4/1. Early modern witchcraft II

Read: Briggs, *Witches and neighbors* (finish the book).

17. Thurs. 4/3. Early modern witchcraft III

Read: Kors & Peters (selections to be announced).

18. Tues. 4/8. Library work

Groups presenting on early modern magic and early modern science should begin preparing their presentations. Others should use this day for reading and term papers.

18. Thurs. 4/10. Early modern magic I

Read: Walker, *Spiritual and demonic magic*.

19. Tues. 4/15. Early modern magic II

Read: (to be announced).

Reminder: your narrative outline and revised bibliography for the term paper are due today by 5 PM in Herter 624.

20. Thurs. 4/17. Early modern science I

Read: Dear, *Revolutionizing the sciences*.

21. Tues. 4/22. Early modern science II

Read: (to be announced).

22. Thurs. 4/24. Library work

Groups presenting on demonology and nature should begin preparing their presentations. Others should use this day for reading and term papers.

23. Tues. 4/29. Demonology I

Read: Stephens, *Demon lovers*.

24. Thurs. 5/1. Demonology II

Read: Kors & Peters (selections to be announced).

Reminder: The first draft of your term paper is due today **at the beginning of class** (note the change from the normal procedure).

No response e-mail due this week.

25. Tues. 5/6. Nature I

Read: Daston and Park, *Wonders and the order of nature*, through Chapter 5.

26. Thurs. 5/8. Nature II

Read: Daston and Park (finish the book).

27. Tues. 5/13. Final discussion, course evaluations

No response e-mail due this week.

Tues. 5/20: Term paper and final self-assessment due by 5 PM in Herter 624

Course policies (the fine print)

Policy on late assignments

1. If your weekly response e-mails are routinely late, I may reduce the grade.
2. If your self-assessments are late, I will reduce the grade by one-half letter grade for each day they are late (Saturdays count but not Sundays and holidays).
3. If your group has not prepared material to hand out when it is due, the written portion of the grade will be reduced by one letter grade. If it is not ready by the next class meeting, the grade will be further reduced by two letter grades (three total).
4. The *maximum* grade on the term paper will be reduced by one-half letter grade for each working day they are late after the deadline. For example, a paper that is three working days late can get at best a BC. Note that this is not a deduction from the grade but a reduction of the maximum: a C paper turned in four days late will still get a C, as will an A paper that is turned in four days late.

Policy on attendance

1. In accordance with university policy, I *expect* you to attend class. There is no separate attendance grade, but if you miss more than three classes, your final course grade will be reduced by one-half letter grade for the fourth and every subsequent absence (i.e. if you miss six classes, it will be reduced by one and a half grades, e.g. from AB to C). Exceptions will be made only for legitimate, University-approved reasons for being absent. If you are more than ten minutes late for class, that will count as half an absence.
2. If you are absent on a day your group is scheduled to present and lead discussion, you will get credit only for the written portion of the grade (one-half of the total grade). Exceptions will be made only for bona fide emergencies. Group assignments will be made to take into account days when you must be absent for approved reasons.

Policy on classroom conduct

Our classroom demeanor should facilitate the goals of this course. Please arrive on time, because it distracts everyone in a discussion if someone arrives late. Turn off your cell phone or beeper. If your phone rings, I get to answer it; if the call is really important I will let you take it in the hall. University rules prohibit eating and drinking in classrooms; if it becomes a problem, I will have to enforce the rule. If someone in the class does something that distracts or offends you, please talk to them or me and try to resolve it.

Policy on academic honesty

Plagiarism may result in failing the course. Plagiarism consists of either (a) copying the exact words of another work without both enclosing them in quotation marks and providing a reference, or (b) using information or ideas from another work without providing credit, in notes, to the source of the information or ideas. Submission of a paper copied from another work, or which contains fictitious or falsified notes, will result in automatic failure of the course. Please refer to the *Undergraduate Rights and Responsibilities* booklet for the University's full policy on academic honesty.

Tips for success

This is not an easy course, but if you keep a few simple points in mind, it will be a lot easier. Here are some tips for doing well in the course. They all are really aspects of one overarching principle: TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN EDUCATION!

- Read the syllabus carefully, and write down in your organizer the dates on which assignments are due. This will help you budget your time for the weeks when there is more work than normal.
- Plan to spend 4-6 hours every week, outside of class, working on the course. If you don't have that much time, you should not take this course.
- Plan group meetings well in advance, both on library days and outside of class, so that you have sufficient time to work collaboratively.
- Complete all the assigned readings every week in a timely fashion, preferably in one or two study sessions, and jot down important points in your notes after finishing the readings. This should take about four hours every week, or possibly more. As you read each assignment, think about how it relates to earlier readings and lectures, and jot down some of those thoughts in your notes. Don't use a highlighter for note-taking; it substitutes motion for thought.
- Use reference works if you encounter unfamiliar words or concepts.
- If your apartment or dorm room aren't quiet places to study, go to the library or somewhere else quiet. The main level of DuBois Library is a good place because it has lots of dictionaries and encyclopedias. If you need coffee while studying, try the Newman Center. Study a lot during the day; then you can relax in the evening without feeling stressed out or guilty.
- Ask questions about what you don't understand, but only after you have tried to answer them yourself. Part of your college education is learning to be self-reliant. Who should you ask? Me, of course; if your question is factual, you can also ask a reference librarian.
- Take advantage of my office hours if there are questions you did not have time to raise in class.
- Arrive for class on time, and pay attention to what everyone says. Take good notes. If you need guidance on note-taking, Learning Support Services (DuBois Library, 10th floor) offers a Note Taking Workshop several times each semester. They also offer workshops in time management and test-taking should you feel in need of help in those areas.
- Review your notes weekly. The more you are aware of the interconnections among the course material, the better you will remember and understand everything. Keeping a journal is also useful.
- Start work on each assignment as soon as your schedule allows. Complete a rough draft of each paper several days before it is due, and revise it at least once before you hand it in. Be sure to copyedit and proofread your papers carefully.
- Consider meeting with your group to study even when you aren't working on a group project—or form a study group with other members of the class. Research shows that students who study in groups learn more and have more fun.
- Talk to me if you feel overwhelmed or if you are falling behind in the course. My main goal is to help you learn.