



ARTH-HIST-REL 380 - Saints & Sinners

Course Syllabus

Fall Semester 2022

Instructor: Jennifer S. Griffiths, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Office Hours: by appointment after a class or via Zoom (see Moodle site)

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Description

This course focuses on the stories and afterlives of female saints, focusing on those from Central Italy, who were active in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, a period rife with social change and innovation. New powerful religious orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans were founded and adopted into the Catholic Church. The papacy temporarily relocated from Rome to Avignon, France, giving rise to what is called the Western schism, a crisis of Catholic leadership. New images, artistic formats, and strategies of communication developed in this era to satisfy the spiritual and/or political aims of patrons.

In this context, arose complex female figures of sainthood such as Clare of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Angela of Foligno, and Margaret of Cortona, who were sainted after their deaths in the following centuries. Saint Clare was the spiritual partner of Saint Francis and canonized in 1255. Saint Margaret was the mistress of a wealthy man and had a son out of wedlock before renouncing worldliness and dedicating herself to an ascetic life of charitable work. Angela was a highly influential medieval mystic who became a saint in 1308. Saint Catherine was born into the age of the black death and played a big role in medieval politics. She was canonized in 1461 and became one of the two patron saints of Italy, along with Saint Francis of Assisi.

We will explore Medieval and Renaissance attitudes about sex and gender through the mystical writings, legendary stories, and iconographical representations of these historical figures. We will also ask what their stories mean to us today. How did the Catholic Church view women five hundred years ago and have these views changed? How did Medieval and Renaissance women navigate and overcome barriers? How has female holiness and mysticism been represented in art through the ages? What are the contemporary lessons here?

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Below are the course's learning outcomes, followed by the methods that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *Identify* major religious movements and their contributions to the art of their time as well as iconographies of the saints. (quizzes, exams, and writing assignments)

- *Summarize* the various functions of Medieval and Renaissance religious images and icons. (quizzes, exams, writing assignments)
- *Analyze* how iconographic methods respond to social and cultural circumstances in literary and visual representations of women and women saints. (Discussion, group activities, writing assignments)
- *Analyze* historical ideas and images in relation to contemporary experience (Discussion, group activities, writing assignments).

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Reading Quizzes	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	30%
Writing Portfolio	30%

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an important part of this course. You have two "sick days," per Institute policy. As long as you are

at all the other meetings, you will receive the full 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Reading Quizzes (10%)

Each week there will be a short online quiz with *content questions* about the weekly reading assignment to help students zoom in on the most important ideas.

Exam 1: Midterm (20%)

The exam will consist of 10 image identifications, 10 short answer questions, and 1 essay question that will require the student to reference readings and images from the course. See Moodle for a full prompt.

Exam 2: Final (30%)

Each exam will consist of 10 image identifications, 10 short answer questions, and 1 essay question that will require the student to reference readings and images from the course. See Moodle for a full prompt.

Writing Portfolio (30%)

Students will be asked to buy a **separate notebook** at the start of the semester, which will be used as a journal apart from notes. It will contain weekly writing assignments (reading questions, descriptions of art, reflection questions). It will be graded twice throughout the semester, i.e. before the mid-semester break (Week 7) and at the end of the course (Week 12). Each of these checks is worth 15% of your grade, for a total of 30%. See the full prompt on Moodle for more information.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero. As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance & Lateness Policy

Class attendance (in person) is mandatory. Students are allowed two “sick days,” which do not need to be justified. However, it is considered common courtesy to inform the instructor of your absence when possible. It is the students’ responsibility to keep them in case of real necessity (sickness or any other unforeseen inconvenience that may prevent students from being in class). Each additional absence—even for another illness—will lower the students’ grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B). Missing a co-curricular field trip also lowers a student’s final grade by half a letter grade. It is the policy of the Institute that any student who has eight or more absences automatically fails the class.

If a student misses a class, it is ultimately their responsibility to find out what has been missed. Ideally, they should find out what they missed from a classmate. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Except in the case of medical emergencies with a doctor’s certificate and approved by the Director, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Consistent lateness (or leaving class early) is a sign of disorganization and lack of respect both for your instructor and for your fellow students. Umbra instructors are empowered to count three late arrivals as the equivalent of an absence.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices cannot be used during class lectures and discussions for anything other than note-taking, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1 SEPT 12-16

Medieval Italy in Context

Meeting 1 Evolving ideas about women from Antiquity to the Middle Ages

Meeting 2 The ancestors of Eve?: Pandora, Penelope, Lucretia

Discussion: What lessons does Mary Beard offer us from antiquity?

Readings for the week:

Christia Mercer, "Philosophical Roots of Western Misogyny," *Philosophical Topics* 46, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 183-208.

Writing Portfolio Entry #1:

Summarize the main point of Christia Mercer's article in three sentences or less. In class we will discuss the experiences of Mary Beard. Think about current debates or recount a personal life experience where you think you hear or have heard echoes of the ideas she discusses.

WEEK 2 SEPT 19-23

Medieval Italy in Context

Meeting 1 The origins and authority of the Church

Meeting 2 Christian Doctrines and Iconographies

Discussion: How did the Church shape medieval society, politics, and the lives of women?

Readings for the week:

Keith Christiansen, "Duccio and the Origins of Western Painting," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 66, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 1-19 only.

Writing Portfolio Entry #2:

What functional purpose did Duccio's image of the Maestà serve in the civic and religious life of Sienese citizens in 1311? Look closely at the central panel of the Maestà (the Madonna enthroned with saints) and write a detailed description of this image.

WEEK 3 SEPT 26-30

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 Mary Mother of God and Mary Magdalene

Meeting 2 On ideal womanhood

Discussion: What is **ekphrasis**? By looking closely and describing religious images of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene we can better understand medieval iconographic conventions?

Readings for the week:

Katherine Jansen, "Like a Virgin: The Meaning of the Magdalen for Female Penitents of Later Medieval Italy," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 45 (2000): 131-152.

Writing Portfolio Entry #3:

How did medieval theologians and female mystics understand or interpret Mary Magdalene's purity or virginity according

to Katherine Jansen? What meaning, value, or stigma does virginity have for men and women in contemporary American society? Is it different for men and women?

WEEK 4 OCT 3-7

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 The Virgin Martyrs

Meeting 2 On martyrdom in early Christianity

Discussion: The phenomenon of martyrdom is over two thousand years old, but it still has contemporary appeal. How and why did martyrdom become crucial to the Christian narrative?

Readings for the week:

Martha Easton, "Saint Agatha and the Sanctification of Sexual Violence," *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994): 83-118. Read first half to page 99.

Writing Portfolio Entry #4:

Begin by writing an *ekphrasis* on Sebastiano del Piombo's *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha* (1520). How does Easton believe the common medieval viewer experienced or interpreted such imagery of Agatha's torture? Do you agree or disagree with her argument?

WEEK 5 OCT 10-14

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 Francis and Clare of Assisi

Meeting 2 The Christian meaning of wealth and poverty

Discussion: Ours is a society obsessed with wealth and the power that it brings. What power did Francis and Clare find in their utter devotion to poverty?

Readings for the week:

Joan Mueller, "Introduction and start of Chapter 1," *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 1-10.

Writing Portfolio Entry #5:

What historic misconceptions about Franciscan women, and Clare of Assisi in particular, does Joan Mueller say she is attempting to challenge? What is the value of friendship in your life (emotional, intellectual, spiritual, economic)?

FIELD TRIP TO ASSISI

Writing Portfolio Entry #6:

Write an *ekphrasis* on one scene from Giotto's *Life of Saint Francis* in the Upper church frescoes in the basilica of San Francesco (the scene that touches you most).

WEEK 6 OCT 17-21

Midterm

Meeting 1 Group activity and portfolio reviews.

Meeting 2 Midterm Exams

Readings for the week:

No new readings. Review readings and images from Weeks 1-5 for exam.

Semester Break

WEEK 7 OCT 31-Nov 4

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 Margaret of Cortona

Meeting 2 On Relics and Reliquaries

Discussion: How and why did the early Christian church begin to promote relics? What spiritual and economic value was placed on the relic in medieval society? How should the dead be honored and remembered?

Readings for the week:

#1 Caroline Walker Bynum and Paula Gerson, "Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages" *Gesta* 36:1 (1997): 3-7.

#2 Daniel Bornstein, "The Uses of the Body: The Church and the Cult of Santa Margherita da Cortona" *Church History* 62, no. 2 (1993): 163-177.

Writing Portfolio Entry #7:

What religious and economic value did Margaret's body acquire after her death, according to Bornstein? Are there contemporary objects that operate like relics for us today?

WEEK 8

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 On the Mysteries of Mysticism

Meeting 2 Angela of Foligno (and Teresa of Avila)

Discussion: In our secular society, what conclusions do we usually make about people who see visions or hear voices? Are there other ways of seeing such people? Can we learn anything by studying the medieval perspective on such phenomena?

Readings for the week:

Elizabeth Petroff, "Medieval Women Visionaries: Seven Stages to Power," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 3:1 (Spring 1978), 34-45.

Writing Portfolio Entry #8:

What are the seven steps that Petroff identifies as being common to female medieval mystics? Have you had a mystical experience or know know a story about a friend or family member who did (e.g. a dream that came true or an odd premonition)? Is there a stigma attached to sharing these stories?

WEEK 9

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 On the meaning of food and fasting

Meeting 2 Catherine of Siena

We will compare and contrast various representations of Catherine.

Discussion: What kind of relationships between the body and the soul were elaborated by female saints through physical and metaphorical relationships to food and the language of nourishment?

Readings for the week:

Rebecca Lester, "Embodied Voices: Women's Food Asceticism and the Negotiation of Identity," *Ethos* 23, no. 2 (June 1995): 187-216.

Writing Portfolio Entry #9:

What are the respective problems that Rebecca Lester outlines with the research approaches taken by Caroline Walker Bynum and Rudolph Bell. What does she say is a common motivation for medieval women ascetics like Catherine and contemporary women with anorexia? What does it mean to have a healthy relationship to food? Do you think American society has a healthy relationship to food?

WEEK 10

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 On the Burning of Witches and Heretics

Meeting 2 From Margaret Porete and Joan of Arc to Savonarola and Giordano Bruno

Discussion: What is heresy and why did it matter to the Church in medieval society? What is the purpose of a public execution? What are the moral dilemmas "at stake?"

Readings for the week:

Tamar Herzig, "Witches, Saints, and Heretics: Heinrich Kramer's Ties with Italian Women Mystics." *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 24-55.

Writing Portfolio Entry #10:

What was the Malleus Maleficarum? What is the revised view of Heinrich Kramer that Tamar Herzig presents? What did Kramer think about women? Why do you think women mystics risked death to make their claims?

WEEK 11

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 On Creativity and Agency

Meeting 2 Artist abbesses and prioresses: Hildegard of Bingen, Caterina Vigri, and Plautilla Nelli

Discussion: What was the meaning and importance of creativity within medieval religious society and for medieval religious women? What is the relationship between creative expression and agency?

Readings for the week:

Marian Bleeke, "Considering Female Agency: Hildegard of Bingen and Francesca Woodman," *Woman's Art Journal* 31, no. 2 (2010): 39-46.

Writing Portfolio Entry #11:

How does Bleeke explain the difference between medieval ideas of agency and contemporary ideas of agency? In what ways do you possess agency over your life today? Are there areas where you lack agency in your family, community, or society?

VISIT TO GALLERIA NAZIONALE

WEEK 12

The Meaning of History in the Present

Meeting 1 Building a City of Ladies: from Christine de Pizan to Judy Chicago

Meeting 2 Group Activity and Portfolio Review

We will compare and contrast images from medieval and contemporary art.

Discussion: What is the value of learning about women's history today?

Readings for the week:

bell hooks, "Feminist Spirituality" in *Feminism is for Everybody* (Pluto Press, 2000), 105-109.

Writing Portfolio Entry #12:

In this final portfolio entry, consider what you have learned in this class about medieval women: What article did you most enjoy reading? What historic personality explored most touched or surprised you? What lessons have you learned by thinking about our present time through the lens of the past?

WEEK 13

Final Exams and Special Academic Events Week