



ARTH-HIST-REL 380 - Saints & Sinners

Course Syllabus Spring Semester 2023

Instructor: Jennifer S. Griffiths, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Class Meeting Days & Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30 pm

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

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: USD\$60

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 religious orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans were founded by reformers 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 the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance 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 was only sainted in 2013. 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 the antique origins of Medieval and Renaissance attitudes about sex and gender; we will study the mystical writings, legendary stories, and iconographical representations of these medieval holy women; and we will ask what these stories mean for us today. How did the development and evolution of the Catholic Church and Catholic doctrines influence the way large numbers of men and women understood themselves? How have such views changed or stayed the same? How have theologians and artists imagined and depicted female spiritual experience through the ages? What can medieval holy women teach us about the ways women have navigated cultural barriers? What are the contemporary lessons?

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 Excellent
A-	90% - 92%	
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 or through live connection) is mandatory. All students are allowed 2 “sick days” (i.e. unexcused absences), which do not need to be justified. It is the student’s responsibility to keep them in case of real necessity. i.e., sickness or any other unforeseen inconvenience that may prevent students from being in class. More than 2 absences will affect your final grade by 2% per absence. Excessive unexcused absences (8 or more) may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. Three late arrivals to or early departures from class will count as an unexcused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. 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.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will be considered the equivalent of two unexcused absences. As such, absence from the co-curricular field trip will lower students’ final grade in that course by 4% (the equivalent of two unexcused absences).

Additional absences relating to illness may be approved by the Director but only if a medical certification is provided. Except in the case of medical emergencies, 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.

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 JAN 24-26

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: In class we will read and discuss Mary Beard's *Women and Power: A Manifesto*. What lessons from antiquity does she offer?

Readings for the week:

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

Writing Portfolio Entry #1:

- a. Summarize the main point of Christia Mercer's article in three sentences or less.
- b. Mary Beard discusses her experience of misogyny on social media. Discuss a personal life experience in which you encountered sexism, misogyny, or racism.

WEEK 2 JAN 31-FEB 2

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:

- a. Summarize the functional purpose of Duccio's images as described by Keith Christiansen.
- b. Duccio's *Maestà* is a powerful Christian icon. Medieval people understood images of the Virgin and child as ritual objects with the power to heal and protect them. How is motherhood imagined and pictured in contemporary society (on television or in social media)? What does motherhood symbolize for you personally?

WEEK 3 FEB 7-9

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 Mary Mother of God and Mary Magdalene

Meeting 2 On ideal womanhood

Discussion: What is **ekphrasis**? What were the medieval iconographic conventions for depicting the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene? How did the meaning of Mary Magdalene change over time?

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:

- a. How did medieval theologians and female mystics understand or interpret Mary Magdalene's purity or virginity according to Katherine Jansen?
- b. 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 FEB 14-16

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:

- a. How according to Easton can we understand the common medieval viewer's reaction or interpretation of imagery like Sebastiano del Piombo's *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha* (1520)?
- b. Is it moral or immoral to photograph or videotape violence today? When we watch videos of abuse, torture, bullying, or killings on the news or on our social media feeds today are we voyeurs or witnesses? Is it possible to be both—to take some morally questionable pleasure from viewing even as we empathize with a victim? Does context matter?

WEEK 5 FEB 21-23

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 Francis and Clare of Assisi

Meeting 2 Field Trip to Assisi Friday February 17

Discussion: How and why did Francis and Clare find power in their utter devotion to poverty? What role did friendship play in the life of Saint Clare?

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:

- a. What historic misconceptions about Franciscan women, and Clare of Assisi in particular, does Joan Mueller say she is attempting to challenge?
- b. Our capitalistic society seems obsessed with material goods and wealth. What moral judgements do we make about wealth and poverty? Who is better—a homeless person or a billionaire? Who is happier—a homeless person or a billionaire? Who is freer—a homeless person or a billionaire?

FIELD TRIP TO ASSISI FEB 17

Writing Portfolio Entry #6:

Write an ekphrastic description about one of the works of art or architecture you saw in Assisi.

WEEK 6 FEB 28- MAR 2

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 March 6-12

WEEK 7 MAR 14-18

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 Angela of Foligno, Margaret of Città di Castello, (and Teresa of Avila)

Meeting 2 On the Mysteries of Mysticism

Discussion: How did the Church understand women's mystical experiences? What can we learn, if anything, by studying the medieval perspective on visions and mysticism?

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 #7:

- a. *What are the seven steps that Petroff identifies as being common to female medieval mystics?*
- b. *What conclusions would you draw if a friend said they were seeing visions or hearing voices? Have you ever had a personal mystical experience or know someone who did? Have you ever had a dream that came true or an odd premonition? Is there a stigma attached to sharing these stories?*

WEEK 8 MAR 21-23

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 Margaret of Cortona

Meeting 2 Field Trip to Cortona Friday March 24

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 #8:

- a. *What religious and economic value did Margaret's body acquire after her death, according to Bornstein?*
- b. *Do you think it is morally justifiable to disturb the dead? Did Francis want his body to be disturbed? How do you want your remains to be treated and remembered? Would you want to be a relic?*

FIELD TRIP TO CORTONA MARCH 24

WEEK 9 MAR 28-30

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 On the meaning of food and fasting

Meeting 2 Catherine of Siena

Discussion: We will compare and contrast various representations of Catherine. What kind of relationships between body and soul were elaborated by female saints through food metaphors?

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:

- a. *What does Rebecca Lester say are the respective problems with research by Caroline Walker Bynum and Rudolph Bell? What does she argue may be a common motivation for medieval women ascetics and contemporary anorexics?*
- b. *Do you have a healthy relationship to food? Do you think American society has a healthy relationship to food? Do you notice any differences between American and Italian attitudes to food?*

WEEK 10 APR 4-6

Stories and Legends

Meeting 1 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 late medieval society? What was the purpose of gruesome public executions? What moral dilemmas “at stake?”

Readings for the week:

Tamar Herzog, “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:

- a. *What is the revised view of Heinrich Kramer’s Malleus Maleficarum that Tamar Herzog presents? What did Kramer think about women?*
- b. *Why do you think women mystics risked death to make their claims? Do you hold any belief you would be willing to die to uphold?*

WEEK 11 APR 11-13

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 in particular?

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:

- a. *How does Bleeke explain the difference between medieval ideas of agency and contemporary ideas of agency?*
- b. *Do you possess total agency over your life today? Are there areas where you lack agency in your family, community, or society? What is your preferred mode of self-expression (e.g. painting, writing, photography)?*

WEEK 12 APR 18-20

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

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

- a. *How and why does bell hooks use the term feminist movement differently?*
- b. *In this final portfolio entry, consider what you have learned about medieval women: What article did you most enjoy? What historic personality most touched or surprised you? What lessons have you learned by thinking about our present time through the lens of the past?*

WEEK 13 APR 24-28

Final Exams and Special Academic Events Week