

This seminar will examine medieval civilization viewed through the eyes of Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other travelers. Accounts of journeys were written by people from all walks of life--official envoys, crusaders, missionaries, pilgrims, merchants, scholars, and even tourists. Their journals describe the physical realities (sights, sounds and culinary tastes) of unfamiliar places, as well as cultural encounters, both peaceful and hostile, with people of diverse ethnic, tribal, and religious backgrounds.

The accounts were written for different purposes. Practical travel guides were composed for the instruction of pilgrims or crusading knights. Other manuals contained sophisticated ethnographic descriptions of pagan societies, intended in part to facilitate conversion. In some instances, envoys made detailed assessments of the military capabilities of potential enemies. Participants in the Crusades have left a record, albeit biased, of the military campaigns. Still others wrote travel books to entertain readers with tales of exotic locales and marvels, including strange beasts and monsters.

The reading and analysis of primary sources is supplemented by visual materials on the sites and events mentioned in each text. Each student will deliver an oral presentation offering a critical analysis of one source. The presentation will review the relevant secondary literature on the topic. There will be two required written papers, 5-6 pages each, with bibliography and footnotes. There are no formal examinations. Regular attendance and participation in discussion is expected. Excessive absence may adversely affect your final grade.

A sample syllabus and guidelines for the oral presentations and papers are available in the office of the Undergraduate History Adviser, A.J. Dubois.