

HISTORY201: Encounters Across the Medieval Mediterranean

Fall 2025 University of Wisconsin-Madison

Instructor: Selenay AYDIN

Email: saydin@wisc.edu

Office Hours: Mondays, 1:30-3:30 PM, either via Zoom (**link available on Canvas**) or in person at George Mosse Humanities Building, **Room 5269**, and also by appointment if needed (please send an email).

Course Time: Monday 11:00 AM - 12:55 PM

Location: 5257 George Mosse Humanities

Instructional Modality: In person

Course Description

This course examines the medieval Mediterranean (500-1500 CE) as a space shaped by both exchange and conflict, where merchants, envoys, pilgrims, and soldiers moved across borders, encountered unfamiliar worlds, and forged new forms of contact. From pilgrimages and commercial ventures to imperial conquests and diplomatic negotiations, the Mediterranean became a zone of interaction that connected Western Christendom, the Islamic world, the Byzantine Empire, and emerging Turkish states.

We will examine how trade, warfare, religious identity, and geography structured cross-cultural relationships and perceptions. Special attention will be given to the Italian maritime republics, especially Venice and Genoa, and their ties to the Eastern Mediterranean, from Crusader states and Muslim cities to port economies and contested frontiers.

Students will work closely with a wide range of translated primary sources: travel accounts (e.g., Ibn Battuta, and the Piacenza Pilgrim), letters, legal treaties, crusade chronicles, and medieval maps.

We will analyze how different communities understood themselves and others, how they recorded their experiences, and how contemporary historians reconstruct those encounters. From early Islamic governance and pilgrimage routes to crusader campaigns and Venetian-Ottoman diplomacy, the course traces both continuity and transformation across the medieval centuries.

Assignments are designed to build historical skills through a step-by-step structure. Early group projects focus on visual sources and travel narratives, followed by individual primary source analyses, creative visualizations, and thematic reflections. Students will experiment with digital tools, such as mapping platforms, to explore new ways of interpreting historical space and identity. Throughout the semester, they will participate in structured peer review to help each other revise and strengthen their arguments and writing. The course culminates in a major research paper based on student-designed questions, combining textual and visual analysis. This final project is supported by a sequence of preparatory assignments: research proposal, annotated bibliography, draft sections, and feedback workshops.

This course fulfills the Communication-B (Comm-B) requirement and serves as a core course for the History major and certificate. It equips students with essential skills in historical research, critical reading, analytical writing, and public presentation, while offering a deep engagement with the complexities of the medieval Mediterranean world.

Credits and Course Attributes

- **Credits:** 3
- **Course Attributes:** Satisfies the Communication-B (Comm-B) requirement. Core course for the History major and History certificate.
- **Prerequisites:** None. Not open to students with credit for HIST SCI 211.
- **Course Designation:** Gen Ed - Communication Part B; Breadth - Humanities; Level - Intermediate; L&S Credit - Counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S.

Grade Scale:

- **A:** 93-100%
- **AB:** 88-92%
- **B:** 83-87%
- **BC:** 78-82%
- **C:** 70-77%
- **D:** 60-69%
- **F:** 59% and below

Assignment / Component	Weight
Primary Source Analysis I (Sept 13)	5%
Primary Source Analysis II (Sept 20)	5%
Secondary Source Analysis I (Sept 27)	5%
Secondary Source Analysis II (Oct 4)	5%
Group Presentation Sequence (Oct 27) - includes poster, planning worksheet, reflection, peer evaluations	25%
Research Question (Oct 31)	Complete / Incomplete*
Research Proposal & Historical Question Development (Nov 7)	10%
Annotated Bibliography & Source Critique (Nov 14)	10%
Partial Draft of Final Research Paper (Nov 25)	10%
Final Research Paper (Dec 13)	15%
Participation & Engagement (weekly discussions, peer review, in-class activities)	10%
	Total: 100%

*The Research Question is a required milestone graded on a Complete / Incomplete basis; it does not have a separate weight but is required for successful completion of the Research Proposal.

Comm-B Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify, analyze, and interpret primary sources from diverse cultural and linguistic traditions of the medieval Mediterranean.
- Evaluate secondary scholarship, engage with historiographical debates, and situate their research within broader scholarly conversations.
- Formulate clear, researchable historical questions and design projects that integrate textual, visual, and spatial evidence.
- Construct original, evidence-based historical arguments supported by critical analysis of sources.
- Communicate research findings effectively through multiple modes - formal writing, oral presentations, and visual media
- Reflect critically on their own research process, incorporating feedback to revise and strengthen arguments.

Course Policies

Attendance

This course is a small, discussion-based seminar. Your active presence is essential, not only for your own learning but for the collaborative work we will do together. Missing a seminar session is not the same as missing a lecture; each meeting involves shared analysis, peer feedback, and group discussion that cannot be replicated outside class.

- **Expected standard:** Students should attend every scheduled class session, arrive on time, and remain for the full period.
- **Absence limit:** You are allowed **one unexcused absence** during the semester without penalty. Additional unexcused absences will lower your participation grade by 1 point (on a 5-point scale) per absence.
- **Excused absences:** Absences will be excused only for illness, family emergencies, religious observances, or other reasons recognized by university policy. Please notify me by email as soon as possible if you must miss a class.
- **Make-up work:** Students with excused absences are responsible for contacting me to arrange an alternative way to engage with missed material (e.g., written reflection, make-up meeting). Unexcused absences will lower the participation grade.

Late Submission of Assignments

Assignments are due by 11:59 PM on the stated date.

- Work submitted late will lose **1 point per calendar day** from the total possible points for that assignment. For example, if an assignment is worth 5 points, a one-day late submission will be graded out of 4 points, two days late out of 3 points, and so on.

- Assignments **more than 5 days late** will not be accepted unless prior arrangements are made for a documented reason.
- If you anticipate difficulty meeting a deadline, **contact me before the due date**; extensions may be granted for documented emergencies or circumstances beyond your control.
- Partial submissions will be graded based on the work submitted by the deadline, and late penalties will apply to missing portions turned in after the due date.
- Technical issues (e.g., Canvas errors, internet outages) are not automatic grounds for extension; you must document the issue and notify me as soon as possible.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

This course emphasizes developing your own historical thinking, writing, and analytical skills.

- **Permitted uses:** You may use AI tools for basic tasks such as brainstorming, generating preliminary research questions, or locating primary source repositories—provided you critically evaluate the output and verify all information. For the **Group Presentation** assignment, you may use AI to generate images related to your sources, but **maps must come from external, non-AI-generated sources** (e.g., historical atlases, academic databases, ORBIS).
- **Prohibited uses:** You may not submit AI-generated text, translations, or analyses as your own work. Copying or lightly editing AI output and presenting it as your own is considered academic misconduct under UW-Madison policy.
- **Transparency:** Any use of AI tools must be disclosed in your work. For the **Group Presentation**, you must explain in your **Group Planning Worksheet meeting** how you plan to use AI tools for images, including what prompts you will use, how you will verify historical accuracy, and how you will integrate these images into your analytical work.
- **Responsibility:** You are fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and copyright compliance of any AI-generated content you choose to include. Misuse may result in academic misconduct procedures.
- **University Guidelines:** For full details of UW–Madison’s policy on the use of artificial intelligence, <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/artificial-intelligence/>

Academic Integrity

The exchange of ideas is at the core of academic inquiry, and you are encouraged to discuss course material with your classmates. However, all work that you submit for a grade must reflect your own thinking and writing. Passing off another person’s words or ideas as your own is not only unfair to your peers; it is also theft of the original author’s work, silencing their voice in the academic conversation.

In my experience, violations of academic integrity tend to have two causes:

1. Lack of awareness about citation standards
2. Procrastination followed by panic

This course is designed to mitigate both. We will discuss how to cite your sources for each assignment; if you are unsure about a particular case, ask me. If you are worried about not

finishing an assignment as a deadline approaches, please email me. It is always better to accept a late penalty or turn in less-than-perfect work than to cheat.

If you plagiarize, the case will be handled as a disciplinary infraction rather than a learning opportunity. Serious academic misconduct may be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Accessibility

I am committed to ensuring that all students receive equal access to the course materials and equitable opportunities to achieve the course learning goals. If you experience or anticipate any challenges related to the format, materials, or requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. We can explore a range of options for removing barriers to your learning.

If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, you may also wish to work with the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) to discuss accessibility in this and other courses, including possibilities for official accommodations. All communications regarding accessibility will remain confidential.

Religious Observances (Academic Policy)

In accordance with Wisconsin state law (Wis. Stat. § 36.43) and UW-Madison policy (UW-880), students who have a conflict between an academic requirement and a religious observance are entitled to a reasonable alternative for meeting that requirement.

You must notify me within the first two weeks of class of the specific date(s) for which you request an accommodation. Requests will be accepted at face value and may include travel time. Make-ups may be scheduled before or after the original requirement. While reasonable limits may be set on the total number of days claimed, I will be as flexible as possible if prior notice is not feasible.

Some religious observances last multiple days and may begin at sunset on the preceding day. You are encouraged to review the [UW-Madison Academic Calendar](#) for major holidays and to plan ahead.

For more information, please see the official [UW-Madison Religious Observances Policy](#).

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging UW-Madison's Commitment to Diversity

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background - people who, as students, faculty, and staff, serve Wisconsin and the world.

In this course, we will work together to foster a respectful and inclusive environment where all students can engage fully, share their perspectives, and contribute to collective learning. Studying history often involves engaging with complex and sometimes sensitive topics, including race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and national identity. We will approach these discussions with curiosity, openness, and respect for the wide range of perspectives and experiences in the room.

At the start of the semester, we will create a **shared Class Agreement** to establish norms for constructive and respectful dialogue. Disagreement and debate are welcome as long as they remain focused on ideas rather than individuals. Listening actively, asking clarifying questions, and restating a peer's idea before responding can help ensure that conversations are both rigorous and collegial. If at any point you have concerns about the classroom environment, please reach out to me so that we can work together to address them.

Additional Resources

UW-Madison and the History Department offer a wide range of resources to support your academic success and personal wellbeing. I encourage you to familiarize (or re-familiarize) yourself with the following:

- [University Writing Center](#) (Individual consultations, workshops, and online guides on all aspects of academic writing.)
- [History Lab](#) (A resource center for undergraduates in history courses staffed by experienced graduate students who can assist you with writing history papers. You can sign up online for an individual consultation at any stage of the writing process.)
- [Great University Tutoring Services](#) (Study skills support and peer tutoring across academic subjects.)
- [Mental Health Services](#) (University Health Services (UHS) provides free, confidential mental health support for students, including individual counseling, group therapy, crisis support, and workshops on stress management, mindfulness, and coping strategies. If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or struggling with any aspect of your well-being, I encourage you to take advantage of these resources.)
- [Resources on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence](#) (The Sexual Misconduct Reporting and Response Program is the primary reporting and support office for matters related to sexual assault, sexual exploitation, dating or domestic violence, and stalking. The Office of Student Assistance and Support can provide additional help to students who have experienced concerns of this nature. Reports made through the online form are routed to the Sexual Misconduct Reporting and Response Program.)

Major Assignments and Course Components

This course is structured around a scaffolded sequence of assignments designed to introduce students to the historian's craft through close work with primary sources, critical reading of

secondary scholarship, and development of research and writing skills. Emphasizing cross-cultural encounters in the medieval Mediterranean, the assignments build progressively from focused source analysis to a substantial, independent research paper.

- Assignment Sequence: Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Medieval World

The course progresses through four interrelated phases:

1. Close Reading & Source Analysis
2. Comparative Reflection & Group Presentation
3. Research Design & Drafting
4. Final Research Paper & Reflection

1. Primary Source Analysis I - Individual Close Reading

- **Due: January 30 11:59 PM**
- **Length: 500-750 words**
- **Weight: 5% of final grade**

Instructions:

Choose one primary source from the assigned week's readings. Focus on a specific passage or theme that reveals religious, cultural, or political dynamics in the early medieval Mediterranean. Your analysis must include:

1. Introduction of the author and context (with Chicago citation)
2. Close reading of a key episode
3. Critical reflection on historical significance
4. Connection to course themes (Weeks 1-2)
5. One discussion question for class

2. Primary Source Analysis II - Opposing Tradition

- **Due: February 6, 11:59 PM**
- **Length: 500-750 words**
- **Weight: 5% of final grade**

Instructions: Same structure as Primary Source Analysis I, but choose a source representing a different cultural or political tradition than your first analysis.

3. Secondary Source Analysis I

- **Due: February 13, 11:59 PM**
- **Length: 500-750 words**
- **Weight: 5% of final grade**

Analyze Romney David's *Calamity and Transition* (pp. 49-69). Include:

1. Introduction of the author and context
2. Close reading of a central argument
3. Critical reflection on its historical implications
4. One discussion question for class

4. Secondary Source Analysis II - Comparative

- **Due: February 20, 11:59 PM**
- **Length: 500-750 words**
- **Weight: 5% of final grade**

Choose two assigned secondary sources. Compare their arguments, source bases, and interpretations. Highlight similarities, differences, and historiographical significance.

5. Group Presentation & Digital Poster

- **Presentation Date: March 16**
- **Length: 15-20 minutes**
- **Weight: 25% of final grade**

Overview: Groups of 3-4 students will analyze three primary sources (Western, Eastern, and connecting/bridging). The project includes:

- Digital poster with maps (using ORBIS), images, thematic argument
- AI-generated or historically grounded visual with justification
- Group Planning Worksheet (due February 27)
- Group Reflection (due February 27)
- Peer evaluations of other groups

Grading:

- Poster & Presentation - 15 pts

- Planning Worksheet - 5 pts
- Reflection - 3 pts
- Peer Evaluation & Engagement - 2 pts

6. Final Research Project Sequence

- a. **Research Question** - Due March 20 (Complete/Incomplete, in-class workshop)
- b. **Research Proposal** - Due March 28 (800-1,250 words; 10%)
- c. **Annotated Bibliography** - Due April 10 (6-8 entries; 10%)
- d. **Partial Draft** - Due April 17 (2,500-3,000 words; 10%)
- e. **Final Paper** - Due May 4 (5,000-7,000 words)

Requirements for Final Paper:

- At least 3 primary and 4 secondary sources
- Visual element integrated analytically
- Chicago-style citations
- 300-500 word reflection on research process

Weekly Lecture Schedule (2 Hours per Week)

Week 1 (January 26): The Early Medieval Mediterranean: Landscapes, States, and Periodization

Readings:

1. David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*

→ **Read: Preface, Introduction, and Part Three (Chapters 1-3) (on Canvas)**

✦ *A guide on how to read a secondary source, along with sample annotated examples, is available on Canvas under Week 1 materials.*

2. Scholarly Review of Fernand Braudel's "*The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*"

✦ **Please read before class**

Week 2 (February 2): The Religious Mediterranean: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam

Readings:

1. [Pact of 'Umar \(7th century\)](#)
2. [\(Anonymous\) *Itinerarium: The Piacenza Pilgrimage \(around 6th century\)*](#):
3. [Nasr-i Khusraw, "Safarname" \(11th century\)](#)
4. Isidore of Seville, "Etymologiae" (Book VIII: The Church and The Sects & Book IX: Languages, Nations, Reigns, Military, Citizens, Family Relations) (on Canvas)

Visual Supplements:

1. [Mappa Mundi \(c.1300\)](#): A medieval map representing Christian conceptions of space, time, and sacred history. This will be used in class discussion to visualize how Western Christian Europe imagined geography and the religious other.
2. [Opicinus de Canistris, World Map \(ca. 1296-1300\)](#): A unique set of illustrated maps and anthropomorphic diagrams by a papal scribe in Avignon, blending geography, theology, and psychological introspection.

Assignment: Primary Source Analysis I (due: January 30)

Week 3 (February 9): Travel, Trade, and Communication in the Early Medieval Mediterranean

Readings:

1. [The Book of Ahmed ibn Fadlan 921-922 \(Part I\) in "Ibn Fadlan and The Land of Darkness, Arab Travelers in the Far North"](#)
2. [Liudprand of Cremona, "The Works of Liudprand of Cremona: Antapodosis, Liber de Rebus Gestis Ottonis, Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana" \(Introduction & Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana \(The Embassy to Constantinople\):](#)

Assignment: Primary Source Analysis II (due: February 6)

Week 4 (February 16): Cross-Cultural Encounters in the mid-Medieval Mediterranean (800-1100)

Readings:

1. [The Bari Annals \(up to 1117\)](#):
2. [Al-Muqaddasi, "The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions"](#) (excerpts: pp.39-71; 98-103; 296-298; 311-331)

3. (Secondary Source) [Romney David Smith, "Calamity and Transition: Re-Imagining Italian Trade in the Eleventh-Century Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Studies* 15 \(2006\): p.49-69](#)

Assignment: Secondary Source Analysis I (Due: February 13)

Week 5 (February 23): Rising Powers and Emerging Conflicts in the mid-Medieval Mediterranean

Readings:

1. [Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Sicily under Christian Rule*](#)
2. [Alexander Beihammer, "Patterns of Turkish Migration and Expansion in Byzantine Asia Minor in the 11th and 12th Centuries," in *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone: Aspects of Mobility between Africa, Asia, and Europe, 300-1500* . pp. 166-192](#)
3. [Mark T. Abate, "Islamic Spain: Al-Andalus and the Three Cultures," in *Handbook of Medieval Studies*, vol.2, ed. Albrecht Classen \(Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015\), pp. 740-771](#)

Assignment: Secondary Source Analysis II (Due: February 20)(choose one of the readings above for the assignment)

Week 6 (March 2): The First Crusades, Italian Maritime Republics, and the Eastern Mediterranean

Readings:

1. [Gesta Francorum \(Anonymous Crusader Chronicle\)](#)
2. [Letters of Pope Urban II](#) (versions of the Council of Clermont speech, 1095)
3. [The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades, Extracted and Translated From the Chronicle of Ibn Al-Qalanisi by H.A.R. Gibbon](#), pp. 41-74

Assignment: Group Planning Worksheet (Due: February 27) **(Before the presentation week, schedule a meeting with me before March 14 to discuss the presentation as a group)**

Week 7 (March 9): Crusader States in the East: Governance and Trade

Readings:

1. [The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades](#) (pp. 74-128)
2. [John Tolan, "The Legal Status of the Jews and Muslims in the Christian States," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations*](#)

3. Choose one of the following:

- [Fulcher of Chartres, A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem, Book II](#) (pp. 137-163)
- [William of Tyre, A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea, pp. 379-410](#)

Optional Readings:

1. Fulcher of Chartres, A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem, Introduction [same link as above]
2. [Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, Chapter 6: Aspects of Life in the Levant in the Crusading Period](#), pp. 329-430

Week 8 (March 16): The Fourth Crusade

Readings:

1. [The Fourth Crusade, Medieval Sourcebook](#) (several Latin perspectives)
2. [Geoffrey de Villehardouin, *Memoirs of the Crusades* \(excerpt: "Of Those Who Took the Cross" and "Alexius Begs the Crusaders to Prolong Their Stay"\)](#)
3. ["Facets of the Fourth Crusade" in *Byzantium and the Crusader States*](#) (pp.53-66)
4. (optional) [Ibn al-Athir's Conquest of Constantinople in 1204](#)

In-Class Activity: Group Presentations

Assignments: Group Reflection Paper (1-2 pages; Due: March 19) & Peer Evaluations and In-Class Engagement (1 page; Due: March 19)

Week 9 (March 23): Western Mediterranean After the Crusades

Readings:

1. [Philip de Novare, *Les Gens des Chypre: The Crusade of Frederick II\(1228-1229\)*](#)
2. [Jean Joinville, *The Life of Saint Louis*, Chapter 3](#) (pp.173-207)
3. [The Capture of Jerusalem \(1244\)](#)
4. (Optional but recommended) [Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, Chapter 5](#) (pp. 257-328)

Visual Sources:

Portolan Charts & Maps (visual analysis and discussion in class)

- https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_18177/?r=0.35,0.34,0.258,0.239,0

- <https://www.myoldmaps.com/late-medieval-maps-1300/240-albertin-de-virga-world/>

- <https://www.myoldmaps.com/late-medieval-maps-1300/238-imago-mundi/>

- <https://www.myoldmaps.com/late-medieval-maps-1300/235-catalan-atlas/>

In-Class Activity: Developing a Research Question

Assignment: Research Question (Due: March 20)

Week 10 (March 30): SPRING RECESS

Week 11 (April 6): Anatolia and the Eastern Mediterranean after the Crusades

Readings:

1. [The Journey of William of Rubruck](#) (pp. 273- 282)
2. [M.E. Martin, The Venetian-Seljuk Treaty of 1220](#)
3. [Al-Makrisi, Account of the Crusade of Saint Louis](#)
4. David Abulafia, The Great Sea, Part III, Chapter 8: *Serrata*-Closing, 1291-1350 (on Canvas)

Assignment: Research Proposal and Historical Question Development (Due: March 28)

Week 12 (April 13): Diplomacy, Empire, and Identity in the Late Medieval Mediterranean

Readings:

1. [The Travels of Ibn Battuta](#) (vol.2) (pp.415- 464)
2. [Kate Fleet, The Treaty of 1387 between Murad I and the Genoese](#)
3. David Abulafia, The Great Sea, Chapter 7: Merchants, Mercenaries and Missionaries, 1220-1300 (on Canvas)

In-Class Activity: Research Proposal Workshop

Assignment: Annotated Bibliography & Research Proposal (Due : April 10)

Week 13 (April 20): New Sects, Centers, and Networks of Knowledge

In-Class Activity: Structuring Arguments and Using Visual Aids Workshop & Medieval Encounters Game

Assignment: Partial Draft of Final Research Paper (Due: April 17)

Week 14 (April 27): The Mediterranean in Historical Writing and Memory

Readings:

1. Dominique Valerian, "The Medieval Mediterranean," in *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, ed. Horden & Kinoshita, pp. 77-90.

2. David Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, Part IV, Chapter 2: Transformations in the West, 1391-1500 (on Canvas)

In-Class Activity: Peer Review Workshop

Historian's Craft - Program Learning Outcomes

This course contributes to the broader learning goals of *The Historian's Craft* curriculum. By the end of the semester, students will have developed skills to:

- Pose clear, focused historical questions and situate them within existing scholarship.
- Locate, evaluate, and interpret primary sources in their historical context.
- Analyze secondary sources, identifying an author's argument, use of evidence, and interpretive framework.
- Engage critically with differing historical interpretations and debates.
- Organize and present historical analysis in written, oral, and/or visual formats.
- Apply appropriate citation practices and academic integrity standards in all work.

These outcomes are adapted from the History Department's program learning goals and are shared across all sections of The Historian's Craft.