

At Sea: Medieval English Literature and the Mediterranean

I initially proposed as my project for the NEH Summer Seminar a syllabus for an upper-level undergraduate seminar that focused on in the way in which the medieval English imagination of the figure of the Jew insistently returns to Iberia and the Mediterranean. I imagined tracing this trope through texts such as Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* and its analogue in Spanish Alphonsus a Spina's *Fortalitium contra Judeos, Saracenos, aliosque Christiane fidei inimicos*, the Aragon setting of the *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, the fifteenth-century Castilian translations of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*; and in stories of interfaith encounters along the pilgrimage trail in the English-language Pilgrims' Guides to Santiago de Compostella.

Ultimately, however, I found myself inspired by Sharon Kinoshita's work on medieval French literature, particularly medieval French romance, and its representation of travel in the Mediterranean to take a broader approach. Although England does not enjoy a Mediterranean coast, the Mediterranean world is no less part of the English literary imagination: and in any case, geographical contiguity should not be the only paradigm through which we envision medieval literary and cultural exchange. Crusading culture, travel narrative, romance, and other genres all constantly and insistently refract medieval English experience through a Mediterranean lens.

The syllabus I designed, therefore, is divided into three parts, focusing on the themes of travel, romance, and science. The course opens with the first week devoted to thinking about "the Mediterranean" as a literary as well as a geographical location, as we read seminal work by Sharon Kinoshita and David Abulafia alongside some medieval maps. These maps disrupt nationalizing models, and imagine instead a world with the Mediterranean (and Jerusalem) at the center.

Each section of the syllabus proceeds chronologically. Thus in Part One: Travel, we will read two texts that are found in the same manuscript that contains *Beowulf*, *The Marvels of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*; some excerpts from crusader chronicles; and *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. In the case of the *Beowulf* manuscript, while it is widely known that the other texts copied alongside *Beowulf* seem to share a fascination with the "East," this has most often been discussed in terms of the manuscript's seeming interest in monster stories, or in terms of Anglo-Saxon literary culture's engagement with the classical heritage. *The Marvels of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* are both narratives about the marvels that one might encounter in travelling east, or, viewed differently, around the Mediterranean.

Part Two turns to the related genres of romance and epic. Here, we will read *The Song of Roland*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès*, *Boeve de Hantoun*, and Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale." In

this section, we will focus on the different modes of representing the medieval Mediterranean across epic and romance. Using the paradigm for reading medieval romance through a Mediterranean lens that Sharon Kinoshita models in her work on *Cligès*, we will subsequently turn to the Anglo-Norman romance *Boeve de Hantoun*, which similarly thematizes travel around the Mediterranean, in order to perform a Mediterranean reading of that romance.

Part Three of the syllabus turns both to science and to that quintessentially English medieval author, Geoffrey Chaucer. Having already read Chaucer's romance, "The Man of Law's Tale," we now turn to Chaucer's ties to Iberia. First, we consider the "Canon Yeoman's Tale," which seems to have its source in the Majorcan Ramon Llull's *Felix* in order to think about the frame tale as a specifically Mediterranean genre, as well as the stakes of literary borrowing and adaptation in the Middle Ages. Then we turn to Chaucer's well known but little studied "Treatise on the Astrolabe," the earliest extant technical manual written in English, translated from a Latin translation of an Arabic treatise out of a manuscript written in Iberia.

The goal of this course is to reimagine medieval English literature's relationship with the world not simply along the models of the development of nationalism or the clash of civilizations, but as a continued engagement in the networks of travel, trade and transmission that characterized the medieval Mediterranean.

At Sea: English Medieval Literature and the Mediterranean

Week 1: English Medieval Literature and the Mediterranean

Monday: Mapping English literature onto the Mediterranean: the Hereford World Map (c. 1285)

Wednesday: What is Mediterranean Literature?

Sharon Kinoshita, "Medieval Mediterranean Literature," *PMLA* 124.2 (2009): 600 – 608.

David Abulafia, "What is the Mediterranean," in ed. Abulafia, *The Mediterranean in History* (Los Angeles, 2003), 11 – 31.

Part I: Travel

Week 2: Beowulf in the Medieval Mediterranean

Monday: *The Marvels of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* (c. 1000)

Wednesday: *The Vikings* (DVD)

Andy Orchard, "The Alexander Legend in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto, 2003)

Week 3: Crusading Cultures: Richard the Lionheart & Salah ad-Din

Monday: Richard of Holy Trinity, *Itinerary of Richard I and Others to the Holy Land* (c. 1220)

Wednesday: Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (Al Saqi Books, 1984), excerpts.

Helen J. Nicolson, "The Hero Meets His Match: Cultural Encounters in Narratives of Wars Against Muslims" in ed. Jenson, Salonen, Vogt, *Cultural Encounters During the Crusades* (Odense, 2013): 105 – 118.

Week 4: An Englishman Abroad in the Mediterranean

Monday: *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (c. 1370)

Wednesday: Iain Higgins, "Introduction," and "The Eastern Mediterranean," in *Writing East: The "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville* (Penn, 1997), 1 – 28; 63 - 91

David Lawton, "The Surveying Subject and the 'Whole World' of belief: Three Case Studies," *New Medieval Literatures* 4 (2001): 9 - 37

W. M. Ormrod, "John Mandeville, Edward III, and the King of Inde," *Chaucer Review* 46.3 (2012): 314-339

Part II: Romance & Epic

Week 5: Pagans Are Wrong and Christians Are Right?

Monday: *The Song of Roland* (c. 1150)

Wednesday: Sharon Kinoshita, "Pagans Are Wrong and Christians are Right: From Parias to Crusade in the *Chanson the Roland*," in *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Penn, 2006)

William Roach, "Fransisque Michel: A Pioneer in Medieval Studies," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 114. 3 (1970): 168 – 178

Michelle Warren, "The Noise of Olifant," *Exemplaria* 16. 2 (2004)

Week 6: Romancing the Mediterranean, pt 1

Monday: Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès* (c. 1170)

Wednesday: Sharon Kinoshita, "Chrétien de Troyes in the Medieval Mediterranean," *Arthuriana* 18.3 (2008): 48 – 61

Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, (2006), excerpts

Week 7: Romancing the Mediterranean, pt 2

Monday: *Bevis of Hamptoun* c.1250

Wednesday: M. Dominica Legge, "The Ancestral Romance" in *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963): 139 – 175

Week 8: Romancing the Mediterranean, pt 3

Monday: Chaucer, "Man of Law's Tale" (c. 1400) & *Emaré* (c. 1400)

Wednesday: Siobhain Bly Calkin, "The Man of Law's Tale and Crusade," in eds. C. Cannon and M. Nolan, *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature* (Boydell & Brewer, 2008)

Shayne Lagassie, "Among Other Possible Things: the cosmopolitanisms of Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale," in ed. Lagassie and Ganim, *Cosmopolitanism in the Middle Ages* (Palgrave, 2031): 181 – 205.

Part III: Science

Week 9: Chaucer's Iberian Connections

Monday: Chaucer, "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale" (c. 1400)

Wednesday: Ramon Llull, *Felix (The Book of Wonders)* (c. 1289), excerpts

Willa Babcock Folch-Pi, "Ramon Llull's Felix and Chaucer's Canon's Yeoman's Tale," *Notes and Queries* 212 (1967): 10 – 11

John Spargo, "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale" in ed. Bryan and Dempster, *Sources and Analogues to the Canterbury Tales*, 685 – 95

R. F. Yeager, "Chaucer Translates the Matter of Spain," in ed. Bullon-Fernandez, *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th – 15th Century: Cultural, Literary and Political Exchanges* (Palgrave, 2007)

Week 10: Chaucer and Arabic Thought: Alchemy & Astronomy

Monday: Chaucer, "A Treatise on the Astrolabe" (1390s)

Wednesday: G. Aloni and S. Sharon-Zisser, "Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Lyne Oriental': Mediterranean and Oriental Languages in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 16. 2 (2001): 69 – 77.

Michael Masi, "Chaucer, Messahala and Bodleian Selden Supra 78" *Manuscripta* 19 (1975): 36 – 47

John Tolan, "Forging New Paradigms: Towards a History of Islamo-Christian Civilization," in Suzanne C. Akbari and Karla Mallette, eds. *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Toronto, 2013).

Further Reading:

- David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Penguin, 2012)
- Suzanne C. Akbari and Karla Mallette, eds. *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Toronto, 2013)
- Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Identity,": *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.1 (2001): 39 – 56.
- Ferdinand Braudel , *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London 1972-3).
- Maria Bullon-Fernandez, *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th – 15th Century: Cultural, Literary and Political Exchanges* (Palgrave, 2007)
- C. Burnett, *The Introduction of Arabic Learning into England* (London, 1997)
- M. Cooke, E. Göknar, and G. Parker, eds. *Mediterranean Passages: Readings from Dido to Derrida* (Chapel Hill, 2008)
- John Dagenais and Margaret Greer, "Decolonizing the Middle Ages: Introduction," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30.3 (2000): 431 – 48.
- Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2000)
- Sharon Kinoshita, "Locating the Middle Ages: The Spaces and Places of Medieval Culture," in ed. Weiss and Salih, *Locating the Middle Ages: The Spaces and Places of Medieval Culture* (London, 2012): 39 – 54.
- _____. "Mediterranean Literature" in ed. Holden and Kinoshita, *A Companion to Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2014)
- Alice E. Lasater, *Spain to England: A Comparative Study of Arabic, European and English Literature of the Middle Ages* (1974)
- Maria Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Penn, 1987)
- Michael Pye, *The Edge of the World: How the North Sea Made Us Who We Are* (Viking, 2014)
- Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400 -800* (Oxford, 2006)
- Dorothy Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven, 1977)

When the fourteenth century arrived, England was ceasing to be bilingual. If Norman-French was the language of the court, English modified by Norman-French had nevertheless become the common language of the gentry and of the common people. Moreover, the intellectual revival of Italy had just blossomed into sudden glory with Dante, and Dante was succeeded by Petrarch and Boccaccio. A wave of culture flowed over Europe, and the last half of the fourteenth century saw the creation of a true English Literature by William Langland, John Wiclif, and Geoffrey Chaucer in England, and Bishop Barbour in Scotland. The role of the sea in culture has been important for centuries, as people experience the sea in contradictory ways: as powerful but serene, beautiful but dangerous. Human responses to the sea can be found in artforms including literature, art, poetry, film, theatre, and classical music. The earliest art representing boats is 40,000 years old. Since then, artists in different countries and cultures have depicted the sea. Symbolically, the sea has been perceived as a hostile environment populated by monsters. The Mediterranean Sea [Lat., =in the midst of lands], the world's largest inland sea, c.965,000 sq mi (2,499,350 sq km), surrounded by Europe, Asia, and Africa. Literature and the Arts. Medicine. People. The Mediterranean is a vast sea positioned between Europe to the north, Africa to the south, and Asia to the east. It covers an area of approximately 2.54 million square kilometers; at its longest it is 3,800 kilometers, and at its widest it is 800 kilometers. To the west it is connected to the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Gibraltar, to the east with the Black Sea through the Dardanelles Straits, and to the south, since 1869, when the Suez Canal was opened, to the Red Sea.