

HONS 391: Pagans, Priests, and Poets; Religion in the North

Instructor: Prof. Cormack

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Office Hours: MTW 10-12; or by appointment

This course takes a chronological perspective on religion in Northern Europe, primarily Scandinavia, traversing two conversion periods: from pre-Christian religions to Christianity, from pre-Reformation Christianity to Lutheranism. It will be based for the most part on careful reading of primary sources, and evaluation of such sources as evidence for religious belief and practice will be an important part of the course. In particular, we will look backward (and forward) from medieval Christian accounts of the pagan past to modern-day descendants of medieval beliefs as they appear in folklore. 'Religion' will be interpreted widely to incorporate all sorts of beliefs and practices pertaining to the supernatural (gods, elves, witches, magic, ghosts, religious institutions, etc.).

Grading Scale

A	94 points
A-	90 points
B+	87 points
B	83 points
B-	80 points
C+	77 points
C	73 points
C-	70 points
D+	67 points
D	63 points
D	60 points
F	below 60

Grades will be based on:

- 2 Hour Exams and one Final Exam, 20% each
- Group Project 15 %
- 8-10 page Research Paper. Due at exam time April 25 15 %
- Class Participation 10 %

Missed classes/exams:

I assume all class members are adults and able to manage their time in such a way as to be in their seats when class starts. Class participation includes attendance and preparedness.

Read the syllabus for exam dates. If you anticipate a conflict, it is far better to deal with the problem **BEFORE** it arises than afterwards. I am always willing to work with a student who plans ahead to arrange make-up (or make-before) exams. If you miss an exam without having made prior arrangements, you receive an automatic F unless I receive notification from the dean that you have a valid excuse. **It is necessary to take all 3 exams and complete the group project and research paper in order to pass the course.**

CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

All students are subject to the Honor Code. See the Code of Conduct in the Student Handbook, which can be accessed at

http://www.cofc.edu/studentaffairs/general_info/studenthandbook.html#honor

Please note that the definition of cheating includes handing in work you have already used in another course, unless you have written permission from BOTH instructors.

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Assignments on which cheating or plagiarism are suspected will be forwarded to the Dean of Students, who will bring the issue before the Honor Board. If a verdict of cheating or plagiarism is delivered by the Honor Board, the result will be an F for the ENTIRE COURSE, not just the assignment.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Please note that this schedule is PROVISIONAL. This is the first time I have taught the course, and there may be some adjustment as we progress.

Because of a conference I am attending, there will be NO CLASS on Friday, Jan. 11.

Monday, Jan. 14

Tacitus, *Germania* Use the College Ebook, *Tacitus' Agricola, Germany, and Dialogue On Orators* pp. 57 - 87, or Penguin or other translation. There is a slightly archaic one at: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/tacitus-germanygord.html>

For discussion on Monday:

What do you think of Tacitus's 'noble savage'? How noble is he?

What does Tacitus tell us about government, warfare (warrior ethos), religion, and women among the Germans? How might he be using these topics to criticize Rome of his own time (c. 56-117 CE; I assume you've all taken Western Civ!)?

NOTE ABOUT EBOOKS. IF YOU DECIDE TO USE THIS OPTION, PRINT IT OUT ASAP. This is a slow process . . .

Wed. Jan. 16 **ER: Early Christian Contacts**

What do these extracts from the lives of missionary saints tell us about Scandinavian culture and religion? Christian culture and religion?

Fri.. Jan. 18 **R. I. Page, *Runes***. Read the book and write your name and a SHORT sentence about yourself using the futhark. Pay attention to the fact that there is not necessarily a one:one correspondence between letters and runes (I should really have written 'fupark')

Optional: Jansson, *Runes in Sweden* (on reserve)

Jan 21 M. L. King Day, no class

Wed. Jan 23 **ER: Lidén, 'From Pagan Sanctuary to Christian Church'**

Fri. Jan. 25: **ER: Sørheim 'Lead Mortuary Crosses'**

Jan 28 **ER: Early Norwegian Law; Scanian Church Law**

Jan. 30 **ER: Elucidarius**

Feb. 1. **ER: *Heimskringla*; Lindow, 'Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others'**

Feb. 4 **Book of the Icelanders** What is Ari's main concern?

Wed. Feb 6 **Grágás, Christian Laws' Section** What are the main concerns of these laws? How would people be aware of them?

Fri. Feb. 8 **Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*: Gylfaginning** (compare to *Heimskringla*)

Feb. 11 **Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*: Skaldskaparmál, Háttatal**

Wed. 13 **ER: Fagrskinna**

Fri. 15 **HOUR EXAM**

Feb 18, **ER Gunnel, *Edda*; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*: Vafþrúðismál**

Wed. **Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, Völuspá**

Feb. 20 **LAST DATE TO WITHDRAW WITH GRADE 'W'**

Friday Feb. 22 **Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, Havamál**

Feb 25, 27, 29 ***Eyrbyggja saga***

A good time to start background reading for your projects . . .

Saga background reading: ER Frank, Foote, McCreesh, Schach

March 2-8 **SPRING BREAK**

March 10, 12, 14

***Kristni saga*. More Eddic Poetry . . .**

March 17, 19, 21 **Saga Presentations**

Choose a saga and (with 2-3 others) be prepared to present it to the class.

Consider how paganism and Christianity (or persons or customs associated with the religions - priests, witches, sacrifice, runes) are represented. If the conversion is represented, how? Consider aggression/violence and gender issues. (You will receive more detailed instructions before spring break.)

Monday: **Saga of Egill Skallagrímsson**

Saga of Gisli (long version)

Wed. Saga of Hallfred the Troublesome Poet

Friday: Saga of the people of Vatnsdal

Saga of the people of Floi

March 25, 27, 29

ER: Nicholas Breakspeare's Canons

ER: Jón Steffensen, 'Margrétar saga and its History in Iceland,'

EXAM Friday

March 31, April 2, 4 *Jóns saga biskups*

April 7, 9, 11 Friday: Link: **Luther's Small Catechism**

<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/little.book/web/book-1.html>

ER: Beyer, On the Transformation of Apparition Stories

ER: Stokker, Legends of the Black Book Minister,

Optional: Stokker, Oldtidens Sortebug; To Catch a Thief

April 14, 16, 18 **Jón Magnússon, *Although this World with Devils Filled***

April 21, 23 Elves in Iceland - past and present

Monday: **ER: Gunnel, Christmas Visitors**

Wednesday: **ER: Hafstein, From the Elves' Point of View**

Texts and Readings

Available at College Bookstore and University Books

(we will read all or part of these):

R. I. Page, *Runes* (also on reserve)

Íslendingabók, Kristni saga

The Poetic Edda, tr. Carolyne Larrington, Oxford University Press, 1966 (on reserve)

Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* tr. Anthony Faulkes, Everyman, 1987

Eyrbyggja saga, transl Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, Penguin Book, 1972

Jón Magnússon, *And Though This World with Troubles Filled*, tr. Michael Fell

If you're interested in folklore (you might get interested in using it in your final project), these are recommended translations (not just retellings for tourists or kids) available on Amazon.com (I'm trying to get them for the library, but who knows when they'll arrive):

Folktales of Norway (Folktales of the World) Reidar Christiansen (Editor), Pat Shaw Iversen (Translator)

Jacqueline Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* Tempus Publishing

John Lindow, *Swedish Legends and Folktales*, Berkeley, Cal. 1978

Reference:

Lindow, John. Handbook of Norse Mythology [BL860 .L56 2001](#)

On Reserve (including Ereserve)

Beyer, Jürgen 'On the Transformation of Apparition Stories in Scandinavia and Germany,' *Folklore* 110 (1999) 39-47

'Conceptions of Holiness in Lutheran Countries c. 1550-1700' *Studies in Folklore and Popular Religion* ed. Ülo Valk, Tartu 1999, vol. 3pp. 137-168.

Clover, Carol, and John Lindow, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature : A Critical Guide* Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985

Cormack, Margaret

Fact and Fiction in the Sagas

Miracles in *Jóns saga*

Poetry, Paganism, and the Sagas of Icelandic Bishops

Dronke, Ursula *The Poetic Edda* (vol. 2; vol 1 on order)

Gunnel, Terry

Edda

How Elfish were the Álfar?

The Christmas Visitors

Frank, Roberta

Marriage in Twelfth Century Iceland

Foote, Peter
Essay on the Saga of Gísli

Hafstein, Valdemar
The Elves' Point of View

Jansson, Sven B. F., *Runes in Sweden*

Lidén,
From Pagan Sanctuary to Christian Church

Lindow, John
Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others
Continuity in Swedish Legends

McCreesh, Bernardine
Structural Patterns in the Eyrbyggja saga

Sørheim, Helge 'Lead Mortuary Crosses found in Christian and heathen graves in
Norway,' *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 14, (2004)

Steffensen, Jón, 'Margrétar saga and its History in Iceland' *Saga-Book of the Viking
Society* 16 (1965) pp. 273-282.

Stokker, Kathleen,
Legends of the Black Book Minister
Oldtidens Sorteboge
To Catch a Thief

Tangerlini, Timothy,
From Trolls to Turks

Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion in the North*

Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature*
