MPhil Archaeology
Medieval Europe in a Global Context

2019-20

Department of Archaeology
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“Globalization is one of the most potent theoretical frameworks of the moment, for it provides a means by which we can make sense of our socio-cultural connectivities, and the networks through which those connections are developed and maintained.” (Hodos 2017)

If you are interested in the place of medieval Europe in what was an increasingly connected world then this is the course for you. Its core module spans the period extending from the highly globalised later Roman empire to the demographic crises of the fourteenth century – the Great Famine and the Black Death – prior to the European colonisation of the Americas.

The MPhil in Medieval Archaeology spans a complex period extending from the highly globalised later Roman empire to the demographic crises of the fourteenth century – the Great Famine and the Black Death – prior to the European colonisation of the Americas. It aims to ‘decolonise’ the traditional curriculum by highlighting the diverse experiences of people during this time. We will explore how globalisation theory may be applicable to medieval archaeology, and how material and ideological factors both shaped socio-economic change. We will consider the interaction between natural and anthropogenic environmental change, in the context of fluctuating demographic and settlement histories. Equal weight will be given to archaeological, environmental and historical evidence.

Medieval archaeology benefits from a wealth of archaeological, scientific and historical sources, ranging from molecular evidence (DNA and isotope data) to entire landscapes best viewed from the air. This course uses the full range of archaeological method and theory, and also fosters interdisciplinary approaches in incorporating the study of history, art history, anthropology, historical geography, literary sources and scientific methods (a rare combination of approaches for which this subject is unusually well suited). There are ample opportunities for fieldwork including group visits, volunteering on established research programmes and independent research.

As a wide-ranging course, the Medieval Archaeology MPhil option is intended for students with a diverse range of educational backgrounds (indeed such diversity enriches the learning environment). Students can come to the Medieval Archaeology MPhil option from previous study in archaeology including medieval or historical archaeology, from related subjects such as history, anthropology or geography or be new to the subject.

Structure

- **Medieval Europe on a Global Canvas (G06).** This module is based on weekly seminars and lectures, as well as four practical classes and a fieldtrip to the British Museum. This module is assessed through two essays of not more than 4000 words length (each counting for 50% of the final mark of the module).

- **Core Archaeology (G02),** a seminar-based module shared with other students of the MPhil in Archaeology which reviews fundamental concepts in archaeological theory and practice and provides a shared basis for approaching archaeology. This module is assessed through an unseen examination (67%) and an essay of not more than 3000 words length (33%).

- **Any other module(s) taught within the Department of Archaeology, subject to the instructor’s consent and the approval of the MPhil coordinators.** Where relevant to your dissertation and career plans you may choose from methodological courses in archaeological techniques, other area or period based courses, and thematic courses in museums and heritage.

In addition, you would attend a Research Skills module and write a 15,000 word dissertation on a topic in Medieval Archaeology.

You may also choose to attend lectures offered by Cambridge’s Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic.
G06 Medieval Europe in a Global Context

This is the core module of the MPhil in Medieval Archaeology. Through a series of case studies from Europe, as well as the Arctic, the Asian Steppe, East and West Africa and the Indian Ocean, we will explore key themes such as inter-regional communication, mobility, trade and cultural influences.

The module is taught using a combination of lectures, seminars and practical classes. You will engage with specialists in various fields, both from within the Department of Archaeology and with academics from other institutions who are invited to contribute their specialist expertise.

The module has a research-led focus. Seminars are a space for you to develop your own research ideas in discussion with your peers. Here we critically explore important themes in global medieval archaeology, the relationship between written and material sources for this period and the implications of recent theoretical changes.

Our practical classes make use of Cambridge’s fabulous artefact collections in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and in the Fitzwilliam Museum. During the fieldtrip to the British Museum we will go behind the scenes to get hands-on experience of some of the most important finds of the early medieval period.

Lectures

**Michaelmas Term**
- Introduction: medieval Europe on a global canvas
- Globalisation in the late Roman empire
- Rome and the north
- Connections with the steppes
- After the empire: migrations and decentralisation
- The Late Antique Little Ice Age
- Byzantium and the Eastern Empire
- The long eighth century: trade networks and urbanism in Italy

**Lent Term**
- Byzantium and the Sasanian empire, and their neighbours in East and West
- Islam around the Mediterranean
- East Africa and Indian Ocean trade
- Early Medieval India
- The medieval Arctic: ecological globalisation and indigenous agency
- The ‘High Middle Ages’: demographic and economic expansion
- The long fourteenth century: famine, plague and the Little Ice Age
Seminars

- Fantasies of the Middles Ages: Nationalism, Populism, Medievalism
- Theories of globalisation
- The aftermath of the Roman empire
- The Late Antique Little Ice Age
- Commensal animals: biproxies of globalisation
- Slavery in the first millennium
- Pandemic diseases
- The trade of pepper and other spices
- Medieval urbanism
- The medieval ivory trade
- Sami perspectives on 'medieval' archaeology
- Ecological globalisation and medieval archaeology as environmental history

Practicals

- Medieval human diversity
- Studying parchment
- Currency connections: medieval money and coinage
- Commodities: ivory, fish & furs
- Making and trading glass beads

Teaching content may be subject to change

Key readings