

# THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN

HIST 327

Fall Semester, 2019 (3 credits)  
Thursday 4:00–6:45 in HSS 155

**Professor Fred Astren**



T-O map from the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, 1472

Office: HUM 426

Phone: 338-3152 / Email: [fastren@sfsu.edu](mailto:fastren@sfsu.edu)

Office Hours:

Mondays and Wednesdays 4:45–5:30 and Thursdays 2:00–3:30  
(—or by appointment at other times)

Department of Jewish Studies:

Office and Reading Room: HUM 415 / Department phone: 338-6075

Mailboxes: HUM 415 or HUM 125 (*not* in History Department)

The meaning of the word “Mediterranean” from its Latin roots means “middle of the earth,” thereby suggesting a particular worldview that only partially reveals the many dimensions of history in and of the Mediterranean. In fact, many worldviews (imperial, religious, economic, intellectual, etc.) offer a wide range of conceptualization of the sea and its surrounding areas. The physical Mediterranean is characterized by a great deal of variety in terms of regionality and geographical compartmentalization—even micro-regions—and by interconnectivity. In it, endemic dearth is countered by redistribution, and distance can be measured less by propinquity than by accessibility. Interconnectivity sometimes brings sites connected by the Mediterranean into closer proximity than inland locales that are geographically nearby.

In terms of culture, this means that the medieval Mediterranean is not to be thought of so much as a place of cultural influence, but rather as one where societies and people were often bi-cultural or multi-cultural. Instead of thinking about contact between cultures, it may be more useful to consider cultural interdependency and overlap among cultural groups. And, where space—large and small—is shared, people could have changing situationally-based identities that created a social environment with common features recognizable to inhabitants.

The meaning of the word “medieval” comes from a three-part historical periodization that reflects an emerging European historical self-consciousness of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Such thinking identifies a difficult-to-define “middle” between antiquity and modernity. Through examination of the history of the Mediterranean, notions of the what constitutes the Middle Ages will be interrogated and refined. Significantly, we will notice different beginnings and ends to the medieval period depending how we approach its history.

*Prerequisite: Successful completion of GE Areas A1, A2, A3, B4, and E; or consent of the instructor.*

*GE: UD-C: Arts and/or Humanities; Environmental Sustainability; Global Perspectives.*

Required reading:

Readings are available on iLearn, along with occasional handouts, plus:

David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).



## Course Schedule

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### 1. (8/29) Thinking About the Mediterranean

Course requirements, basic terminology, etc. First thoughts.

#### 2. (9/5) What is the Mediterranean?

- How does the Mediterranean work?  
Abulafia, “What is the Mediterranean?”, *The Mediterranean in History*, 11–32.  
“The Physical Background,” “Climate,” *The Mediterranean Region: Biological Diversity in Space and Time*, pp. 5–16.
- The Mediterranean of Rome  
Rickman, “The Creation of Mare Nostrum: 300 BC–500 AD,” *The Mediterranean in History*, 127–153.

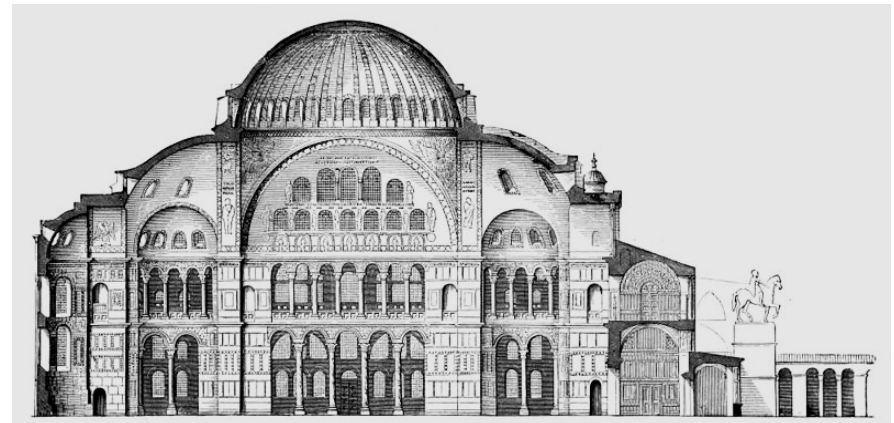
#### 3. (9/12) After Rome

- Old and New Faiths, AD 1–450 / Dis-integration, 400–600  
Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, 212–238.
- “After” Rome: Material Culture and Society  
Ward-Perkins, “The Death of a Civilization” and “The Disappearance of Comfort,” *The Fall of Rome*, 87–122, 138–168.

### II. THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN

#### 4. (9/19) Rome After Rome: The Byzantine Empire

- The Emperor Justinian’s Roman Empire  
Gregory, “The Age of Justinian,” *A History of Byzantium*, 119–147.
- The Medieval Byzantine Empire in the Tenth Century  
Gregory, “The Apogee of Byzantine Power,” *A History of Byzantium*, 237–256.



Architectural section of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople

One croat, “Petrus Dei gracia rex.” Peter III, King of Aragon, King of Valencia, Count of Barcelona (1276–85), King of Sicily (1282–85).



## 5. (9/26) **The Early Middle Ages**

- Mediterranean Troughs, 600–900 / Crossing the Boundaries Between Christendom and Islam, 900–1050  
Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 241–270.
- Economic Recovery in the Early Middle Ages  
Jacoby, “Venetian Commercial Expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean, 8th–10th Centuries,” *Byzantine Trade, 4th–12th Centuries*, 371–391.  
Constable, “Funduk, Fodaco, and Khān,” *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, 145–156.

**(10/3) No class — study day**

## 6. (10/10) **Ships and Travel**

- Ships  
van Doorninck, “Byzantine Shipwrecks,” *The Economic History of Byzantium*, 899–905.  
Pryor, “Types of Ships and their Performance Capabilities,” *Travel in the Byzantine World*, 33–58.
- Jewish Merchants of the Cairo Geniza  
Goitein, “Introduction,” *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, 3–21.  
Some translated documents from the Cairo Geniza.

## 7. (10/17) **The Middle of the Middle Ages**

- The Great Sea-Change, 1000–1100 / ‘The Profit that God Shall Give,’ 1100–1200  
Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 271–303.
- Ways across the Sea, 1160–1185 / The Fall and Rise of Empires, 1130–1260  
Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 304–333.

## 8. (10/24) **The Late Middle Ages**

- Merchants, Mercenaries and Missionaries, 1220–1300 / *Serrata* – Closing, 1291–1350  
Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 334–369.

## 9. (10/31) **Responses to the Black Death**

- The Second World Pandemic  
Byrne, “Overview: Plague in the Middle Ages” and “Individual and Civic Responses in Cairo and Florence,” *The Black Death*, 1–14 and 103–23.
- Imagining the Mediterranean  
Boccaccio, “Second Day, Novel VII,” *The Decameron* (trans., Flameng, 1881), 80–95.  
Kinoshita and Jacobs, “Ports of Call: Boccaccio’s Alatiel in the Medieval Mediterranean,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* (2007), 163–195.



Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem (photo 1925)

## 10. (11/7) The End of the Middle Ages

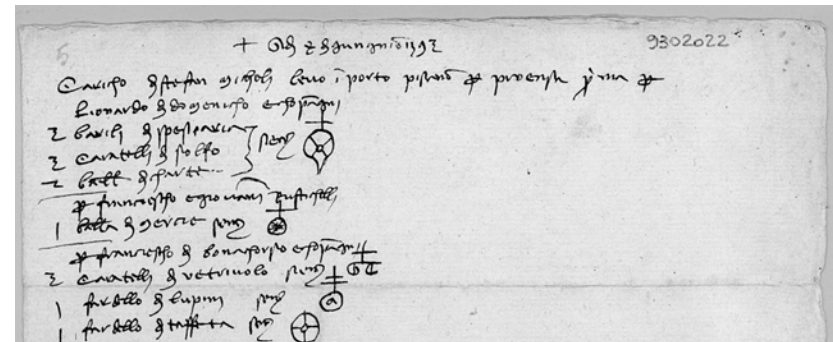
- Would-be Emperors, 1350–1480 / Transformations in the West, 1391–1500  
Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 373–410.

## 11. (11/14) Two Views of the Mediterranean

- Recapitulating the Medieval Mediterranean: Sardinia  
Laura Gallopini, “Overview of Sardinian History (500–1500),” 85–114.
- Naval Warfare Concludes the Medieval Mediterranean  
Carla Rahn Phillips, “Navies and the Mediterranean in the Early Modern Period,” 3–28.



Artist's reconstruction of the Serçe Limanı ship (11th c.)



Merchants' notes on goods loaded onto a ship (June 10, 1393)

## III. CONCLUSION: FROM THE MEDIEVAL TO THE EARLY MODERN

### 12. (11/21) Eating in a Connected World: Spices and Trade 1

Freedman, *Out of the East*, 1–103.

(11/28) No class — Fall Break

### 13. (12/5) Eating in a Connected World: Spices and Trade 2

Freedman, *Out of the East*, 104–192.

### 14. (12/12) From the Mediterranean to the Ocean Sea

Freedman, *Out of the East*, 193–226.

- Guest lecture: **Prof. Sarah Crabtree**, History Department, SFSU

(12/19, Thursday) 1:00–3:15 — final exam scheduled

## Method of Instruction

Required readings are from electronic files available on iLearn, with the exception of Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, and Freedman, *Out of the East*, which are available online on the SF State Library website. Assignments deserve close reading and thoughtful analysis on the part of the students.

The scheduled course times will consist of both lectures and discussion. The lectures are intended to supplement assigned reading. The discussions have a two-fold purpose: (1) to clarify and expand the materials in the readings; and (2) to focus on major issues in medieval Mediterranean history. Each student is responsible for the material covered in class. Students will be expected to bring the appropriate book or other assigned reading to every class session, and to be prepared to comment upon the assigned readings.

Since every topic cannot be covered to each individual's satisfaction in class discussion, it is advantageous for students to utilize office hours. They permit students to discuss reading assignments, writing, or anything else that pertains to the course. The office hours create space for exploration of subjects that were not covered in class. If you cannot make the designated times, please arrange for an appointment or phone call. Professor Astren will try to accommodate.

A note on writing assignments: All submitted written material must be word processed. You are responsible to keep an extra copy of all written work (on disk or hard copy) in the event that your assignment is lost or misplaced. Assignments that are late or are less than the assigned length will be marked down accordingly. Avoid plagiarism! Plagiarism means the appropriation of another person's work and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of it in one's own work. It is doubly unethical, since it deprives the true author of his/her rightful credit and then gives that credit to someone to whom it is not due.

The assigned readings and course schedule may change as the instructor deems fit. That is, the syllabus does not represent a rigid schedule, but a general guide to the progression of this course. However, this syllabus constitutes a contract between each student and the professor. By registering for this class and accepting this syllabus you are agreeing to be responsible for all the content of readings, handouts, and assignments.

## Grading and Assignments:

How your grade will be computed:

1) Occasional writing assignments and/or quizzes	15%
2) Analytical or research papers (2 analytical at 30% or 1 research at 60%)	60%
5) Final exam	10%
5) Preparation and participation	15%

Small writing assignments or quizzes will be assigned occasionally as deemed necessary by the instructor.

Lack of attendance will result in a lower grade—if you miss more than 3 class sessions, you will get an F for the course. Exceptions granted *only* in case of an emergency.

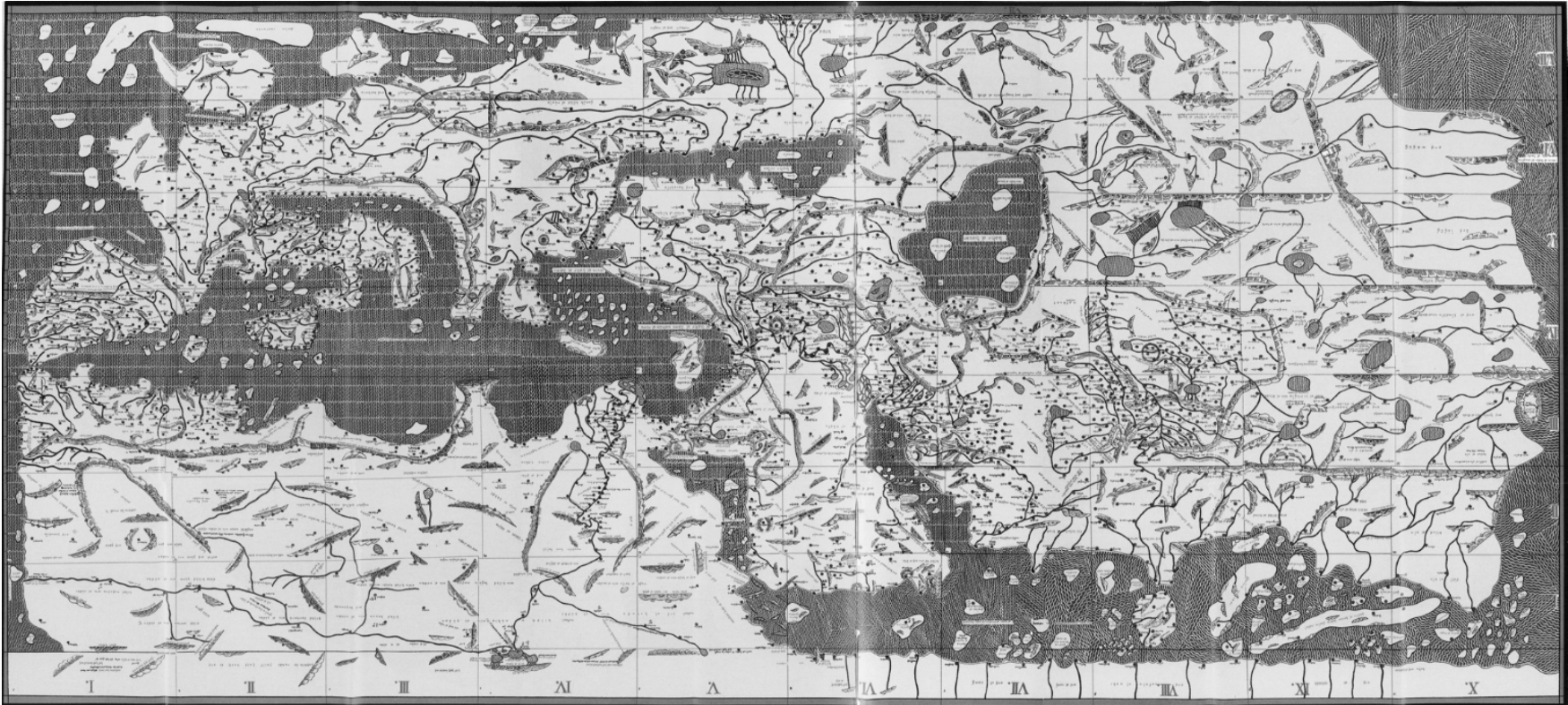
Class participation and preparation will raise your final grade.

Work handed in late will be marked down a full grade (for example, a B+ becomes C+). Exceptions granted *only* in case of an emergency.

All assignments must be completed in order to receive a passing grade.



Dinar of Fāṭimid caliph al-Āmir, 1101–30



The Tabula Rogeriana, drawn by al-Idrīsī for Roger II of Sicily in 1154

**Note:** SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students.

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

- The SAFE Place, 415-338-2208, [http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe\\_plc/](http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/)
- Counseling and Psychological Services Center, 415-338-2208, <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/>

For more information on your rights and available resources:

<http://titleix.sfsu.edu>

**Note:** Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Services Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email: [dprc@sfsu.edu](mailto:dprc@sfsu.edu).