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History 612 Introduction to Historical Methods

Mondays, 2:00 - 4:50, McKenzie 375

This course is intended to help entering graduate students think about the way histories are crafted. Some of the characteristics of good historical scholarship hold true across all fields: good scholarship elaborates an original and persuasive argument, imparts a substantial amount of new information, rests on solid research, and is written in a clear and engaging style. Beyond that, however, historians differ with respect to the evidence they seek, the questions they ask, the theoretical models they espouse, and the genre of their presentation. This course is framed around the first two of these indices -- evidence and questions -- though issues of theory and genre are likely to emerge in the course of discussion.

When historians talk about evidence, they may be referring to a variety of things. They may refer to facts or events that support an interpretation. They may refer to data of various kinds. Most often, though, when they talk about evidence, historians have in mind primary sources, whose collection, synthesis, and interpretation arguably constitute *the* defining method of our profession. The historian's encounter with sources has a major impact on the writing of history, as it is a key avenue through which we develop something new to say. New sources may enable the historian to *answer* questions, but they may also open up new lines of inquiry or condition the questions that the historian asks. The encounter with sources is thus a creative encounter as well as an essential part of our research practice.

The first, and longer, of the two units of our syllabus centers on precisely this creative engagement. Each week (weeks 2-6), we will be reading works that highlight a particular class of sources. This is clearly an artifice; most historical writing relies on a variety of sources, and even the books and articles selected here draw on a wider source base than the week's heading implies. Still, by isolating, to the extent that it is possible, treatments of particular kinds of primary source, the course should help you to think about the types of questions that can be explored or answered with the help of each source, and to give you a sense of the possibilities for framing historical writing through sources. There is also a short writing assignment (4-5 pages) that asks you to choose a class of sources and analyze its impact on your geographical and chronological field.

The second unit (weeks 7-10) is devoted to specialized subfields within the historical discipline. The classic way of defining historical specialties is through place and time -- a nation or region in a particular period. Every geographical/chronological field has its own field-specific questions, based on the unique events that defined the historical experience of that area as well as the trajectory of historiography in that field. The core of most geographical/chronological fields today comprises a fluid mixture of social, cultural, and political history, with considerable attention to particular events and an interpretive framework defined by the field's characteristic questions. You should be encountering these field-specific concerns, as well as mainstream historiography for your field, in your specialized coursework here.

In this course, by contrast, we will be looking at subfields that fall somewhat outside the mainstream. The idea is a little like that of using books that emphasize *one* source as a way of getting at the treatment of sources in general. No historical subfield develops in isolation from the discipline's broader intellectual trends, but subfields less firmly tethered to the chronological/geographical framework tend to develop distinctive approaches, forms of argumentation, and evidence. For a methods course, they also have the advantage that they are often explicitly comparative. Thus, we will be exploring the way that historical questions evolve by sampling thematic and methodological subfields that cut across spatial and temporal boundaries. Here, too, students will be asked to write a short paper that explores the intersection between a thematic or methodological subfield of their choosing and their geographical/chronological field.

This is a methods course rather than a historiography course. We are not primarily concerned with general historiographical trends, discussions of which usually flatten the historical landscape in any case. The starting point of the course is that history benefits from variety and cross-fertilization, as well as from the historian's basic skills. That said, most of the assigned readings were published recently, and accordingly offer an indication of some of the current preoccupations of the field.

Grading: Grades will be based on a holistic evaluation of your class preparedness and performance on written and oral assignments. Since graduate students tend to be very good students, the grading scale is foreshortened. I use A- to indicate solid performance, clearly satisfactory for the graduate level (I expect this to be my standard grade, but I may be wrong and end up giving more As). An A means especially impressive work that exceeds my expectations at the graduate level. Grades in the B to B+ range tend to mean that your performance fell somewhat short of my expectations in terms of intellectual sophistication or thoroughness. Grades below a B are rare at the graduate level, and should be taken as a real warning. You will get feedback on each assignment so that you have a sense of how you are doing in the course.

Assignments: There are three kinds of assignments for this course: papers, methodology exercises, and an oral interview with a UO faculty member.

-- **Interview.** Students quickly learn which faculty members work in geographical and chronological areas adjacent to theirs, but they do not always find out who has relevant methodological expertise. In the interests of helping you match your interests to potential outside members of a thesis committee, and also simply to vary our class time a bit, we will be interviewing faculty members about their scholarship. To the extent possible, professors have been matched with subjects that they have explored in their own work. Each of you will sign up to interview one of the professors on the syllabus, who should not be your primary advisor. In preparing your interview, you will need to see what the person has written and try to track how their interests have shifted over time. You do not need to read any book in its entirety, but try to get a sense of what the person was trying to

accomplish in his or her writing, focussing especially on books and recent articles. That way, you will be able to frame your questions about the historian's methods, sources, thematic interests, etc. in an informed way. The interview should take 25-40 minutes -- and since historians can be garrulous with regard to their research, we may well get through fewer topics than you prepare.

-- **Methodology exercises.** The methodological exercises for this quarter center on analytical reading. Although they are written, they are not supposed to take up very much time. Gorgeous prose is not necessary. Ideally, they should help focus your reading of the assigned texts.

-- **Papers.** There are two short papers for this course, each of which also entails compiling a bibliography. Both assignments ask you to analyze your own chronological/geographical field in relation to the units of the course.

First paper: due in class, Monday, November 2: Choose a class of sources that has been incorporated into research in your field. a) Develop a list of important sources in the class that you have selected. Where possible, annotate the list: where can this source be obtained? Does it have any peculiarities that one should be aware of? b) Identify a few secondary works (books and articles) that utilize your class of sources extensively. c) Without necessarily reading these histories through (rather, you might focus on reading the introduction and conclusion and glancing through them, as well as perusing some reviews), discuss the way that historians have used your class of sources, its limitations, and its relationship to your specific field (historiographically, or in terms of the specificities of the political system and/or culture you study), in a 5-page essay.

Important: This is an assignment that you should discuss with your principal advisor.

Some types of sources to consider, in addition to the ones we discussed in class (this is not an exhaustive list!): oral history; archeological evidence; manuscripts; newspapers; census records and other statistics; family records; public opinion polls; corporate records; professional journals; medical records; police records; parliamentary debates; petitions; memoirs.

Second paper: due at my McKenzie office on the Wednesday of finals week. Choose one of the subfields below or one that we treated in class, or another thematic subfield that you clear with me. a) Identify some journals that specialize in this area of history and make a list, annotating where possible. b) Identify some books and articles relevant to your own geographical/chronological field in this area. c) As in assignment #1, peruse these articles and books, as well as reviews of the latter, to identify the major debates in this area and the evidence used to support various positions. In a 5-page essay (due in finals week) describe these debates and discuss the ways in which this subfield interacts with, or can inform, mainstream scholarship in your area.

Some specialized subfields to consider: international/diplomatic history, family history, women's or gender history, ethnohistory, history of science or medicine, history of technology, religious history, business history, agricultural history, history of education.

Class schedule

Part I. Some types of sources as reflected in historical scholarship

Monday, September 28. No class - Yom Kippur

Monday, October 5. Intimate sources: diaries

Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
Peter Gay, *The Tender Passion* (vol. 2 of *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud*) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3-43 and 198-254 (optional: 135-97).

Monday, October 12. Intimate sources: letters, photographs

Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Jeffrey E. Hanes, "A Portrait of the Economist as a Young Man," chapter one of *The City as Subject: Seki Hajime and the Reinvention of Modern Osaka* (pp. 10-52).

In-class methodology exercise (no need to prepare for this): Reading a book by its cover

Interview: Jeff Hanes

Monday, October 19. Information flows: State surveillance, social communication

C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in North India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
Robert Darnton, "An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *American Historical Review*, 105, 1 (Feb., 2000): 1-35. Note: Darnton, a past president of the American Historical Association, will be giving a public lecture at 7:30 on Thursday, November 12.

Interview: Ian McNeely

Methodology exercise (due in class): Reading for structure (see handout from week 3).

Monday, October 26. Legal cases

Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Interview: Peggy Pascoe

Methodology exercise (due in class): Reading for interpretations

Monday, November 2. Material sources

John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)

Interview: Ina Asim

First paper due in class

Part II. Some specialized subfields

Monday, November 9. Economic history, demographic history: quantitative methods

Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Massimo Livi Bacci, *The Population of Europe* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 126-63.

Methodology exercise (due in class): Reading for evaluation

Monday, November 16. Environmental history

Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995)

Conrad D. Totman, *The Green Archipelago: Forestry in Premodern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 1-6, 50-80, 171-90.

Interview: Matthew Dennis

Monday, November 23. Military history.

Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare*

Interview: Glenn May

Methodology exercise: Encyclopedias. Choose an event (fairly narrow but not too obscure) and a person (political, cultural, intellectual, military, etc.) in your particular historical field. Look them up in three reference works: 1) Wikipedia; 2) another fairly general encyclopedia (ideally, choose one in a different language) and 3) a specialized historical encyclopedia. How would you compare the treatment in each in terms of thoroughness of treatment, accuracy, up-to-date information, and slant? Evaluate the utility of each resource in a brief written report.

Monday, November 30. Intellectual history

Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*

Interview: Ellen Herman

*** Second paper due Wednesday, December 9, at noon. Slide under my McKenzie office door.

Looking ahead to History 615 (winter quarter)

During the winter, the course drops to 1 credit. Much of our time will be taken up with discussions of job candidates for our two searches (a junior faculty position in Islamic World/Near East and a senior faculty search in the American West). Still, we will continue with some modest methodological assignments (this time centered on the writing of history as against critical reading), as well as with the introduction of UO faculty members, with collective reading of book chapters or articles. The course meets Fridays from 12:00 - 1:20.

For the first session, Friday, January 8, we will be interviewing Robert Haskett about his scholarship in ethnohistory. Please read his recent article, "Dying for Convergence: Faith, Obedience, and the Tlaxcalan Boy Martyrs in New Spain," *Colonial Latin American Review*, 17, 2 (December 2008): 185-212.

There is also a methodology exercise for that day. Based on your wider reading, find a narrative of an event (no more than 4 pages) that seems to you especially engaging. Photocopy or print out those pages and bring three copies to class. Be prepared to

discuss the historian's techniques as a writer that make the narrative effective.