



Left: Cat churning butter (12th century Germany); Right: Monk playing dice (14th century Germany).

Plagues, Peasants, and Pirates: Late Medieval Europe, 1000-1500

UC SANTA CRUZ • HISTORY 65B • SPRING 2023

Professor: **Benjamin Breen** (bebreen@ucsc.edu)

Teaching Assistants: Linda Ulbrich (lulbrich@ucsc.edu) and Leonard Butingan (lbutinga@ucsc.edu)

Schedule: Tuesdays/Thursdays 1:30 pm-3:00 pm

Location: Baskin Engineering 152

Office hours: Prof. Breen 11 am to noon Thursdays at Stevenson 279 or Zoom; Linda Ulrich (TA) 10 am to 11 am Thursdays at Global Village Café or Zoom; Leonard Butingan by appointment via Zoom.

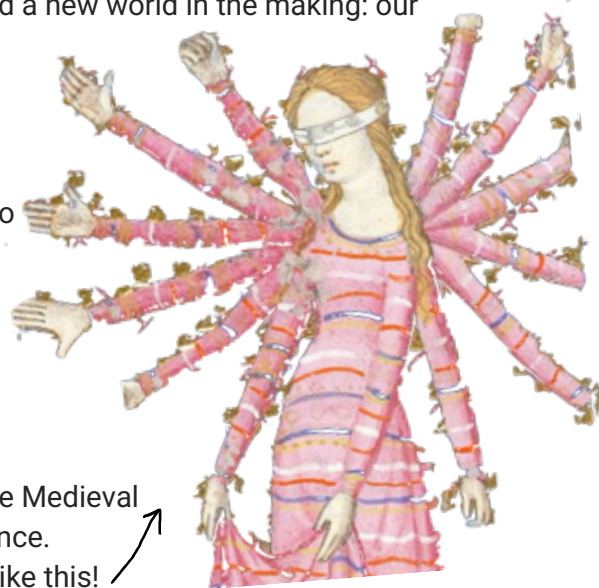
Course description

This class is a fast-paced survey of one of the key times and places in world history: late medieval Europe from the age of the crusades (in the eleventh century CE) to the beginnings of the Atlantic slave trade and of the colonization of the Americas in 1500 CE. In between were some of the most impactful, dramatic, and fascinating moments in all of human history. There are truly epic disasters such as the Bubonic Plague (the most devastating global pandemic ever to strike the human species). There is the Hundred Years War, a century-long conflict between England and France that featured one of the most improbable military leaders of all time: a seventeen-year-old French peasant girl named Joan of Arc. And there are a host of other fascinating figures and themes which still resonate today: the history of European witchcraft; the rise of the Catholic Church, one of the world's most powerful organizations to this day; the formation of the modern concept of race; rapid developments in technology including the introduction of gunpowder into warfare; the epic transcontinental journeys of silk road travelers such as Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo.

As we will see, the Late Middle Ages was not just a period of disaster and decay – although there was plenty of both. It was also a period that witnessed a new world in the making: our world.

What do I hope you will learn?

Above all, the core goal of this course is to teach you how to think historically and write about the past in a compelling and convincing way. You will need to think critically and creatively rather than simply memorize facts.



Other learning objectives:

- Learn different theories of the historical significance of the Medieval period, including debates about the origins of the Renaissance.
- Analyze and understand fascinatingly weird Medieval art like this!
- Learn about the deep histories of the Catholic Church and the surprisingly exciting and unusual history of monastic communities.
- Understand how the Iberian conquest and colonization of Mexico and Peru had origins in medieval crusader ideology
- Study global connections between Late Medieval Europe and the so-called “Gunpowder Empires” of Asia, such as Ming Dynasty China, medieval India, and the Ottoman Turks.
- Learn about the unlikely survival of the Roman Empire in the east, centered on present-day Istanbul, and its role as a conduit for the transfer of knowledge, foods, and technologies between Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- Learn to read primary sources with an eye toward building an historical argument through interpretation and analysis.

How to excel in this class:

- Attend class regularly and actively participate in class discussions
- Take notes on important concepts and themes
- Utilize study guides and review materials provided by the instructor
- Start working on your research paper early to give yourself enough time to research and write
- Take advantage of office hours and seek help if you need it
- **READ THE REQUIRED READINGS!** The only book you have to buy/rent for the class is the 12th edition of *Medieval Europe: A Short History* by Judith Bennett ([Bay Tree link is here](#)).

Communication

I am available to answer questions via email during weekdays and will aim to respond to all emails within 48 hours. Please be sure to contact me at least 48 hours in advance when

requesting extensions on all assignments. **Please note that the optional readings will likely change – consult Canvas for the most up to date list.**

Grading policy

In grading assignments my goal is always to encourage students to improve their writing and research through constructive feedback. I invite you to reach out to me via email (bebreen@ucsc.edu) if you'd like to talk through an assignment before submitting and get some preliminary feedback. I also enjoy working with students on improving their writing through revision. Instead of a final exam, the final assignment for the class is a paper that will be based on a rough draft, which will give you a chance to respond to feedback and work with me and Leonard on your ideas and argument.

Letter Grade guide: I use the grading scale available [here](#) (A is 93 points and above, etc).



AI writing policy: as you will find below, we are going to be using ChatGPT actively in this class in the form of an in-class activity and accompanying assignment. My personal take is that AI language models are a major breakthrough when it comes to aiding humans in research and writing, and I strongly recommend learning how to use them to **augment** and **supplement** the work you do. But I also urge you **not to use them to replace** the skills of writing and research. In other words, you are not allowed to submit work written by ChatGPT or similar LLMs (large language models) in this class. However, I would love for you to see this class as an experiment in teaching and learning with these tools – I use them myself for research and getting feedback on my writing, and I will be discussing some tips and best practices in class.

Assignments

- 1) **Film memo assignment (due 4/22):** Watch a film about the medieval period from the list of options provided on Canvas, find three adequate secondary sources that refute, confirm, or answer questions that the film generated when you watched it, then, in the persona of a historical consultant on set, write a memo making suggestions to the filmmakers which cites its sources. The memo should be 4-5 pages and include an introductory paragraph that summarizes the main argument of the film, a body that deploys historical evidence to discuss three specific aspects of the film that need improvement or deserve praise based on their historical accuracy, and a conclusion that provides recommendations for how to improve this. You should also include a bibliography of your sources at the end of the memo. (20% of grade)

- 2) **HistoryLens demo (due 5/9)**. This is the assignment spanning the first three weeks of class, and it requires setting up a free account for ChatGPT (chat.openai.com). It is a “proof of concept” version of a GPT-based AI app I am developing called HistoryLens, which is a historical setting simulator for use in the classroom. Even in its current experimental form, I think it is a really interesting tool for sparking critical thinking about history and, in particular, the limits of historical sources and our own ability to understand and visualize the past. In these first three weeks of class, students will immerse themselves in one of four different historical settings and, using a prompt I’ve designed for use with ChatGPT, will interact with randomly generated virtual characters and environments. The goal is to enhance students’ historical empathy and critical thinking skills.

In the first week of the assignment, students pick one of four possible settings/times:

- a. A trade delegation of byzantine merchants in Venice in 1087, who share news of the conquest of Aleppo by the Seljuk Empire.
- b. Peter Abelard giving a public lecture based on his work "Tractatus De Intellectibus" on Montagne Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, in 1136.
- c. Sacra di San Michele monastery on Mount Pirchiriano, near Turin, Italy, in January of 1327, during the time of the theological disputation between the Pope and the Franciscans regarding the poverty of Christ, at a moment when the famed scholastic philosopher William of Ockham is visiting the monastery.
- d. The London docks on All Saints Day, November 1, 1348, after a ship from Bristol has arrived on which the better part of the crew are infected with the Plague.

The outcome of this assignment will be a **three to four page reflection paper** (due at the end of Week 5). (20% of grade)

- 3) **Rough draft of final paper (due 5/23)**, which connects any theme from any week of the class (using primary and secondary sources available on Canvas plus the student’s choice of research done for the HistoryLens and film memo) to contemporary events. The rough draft should be 6-8 pages long and include a clear thesis statement that states your main argument and how it relates to both medieval and modern times, an introduction that provides background information and context for your topic, a body that develops your argument using evidence from primary and secondary sources, and a conclusion that summarizes your findings and implications. You should also include a bibliography of your sources at the end of the paper. (20% of grade)
- 4) **Final draft of the final paper (6/10)** which draws on feedback from the TA and me and adds a 1 page cover letter explaining all changes made. The final draft should be 8-12 pages long and follow the same structure as the rough draft. You should also attach a cover letter that explains how you revised your paper based on our comments and suggestions. The cover letter should highlight what you learned from the revision process and how it improved your writing skills.

- 5) **Class participation**, Class participation includes several random in-class Canvas quizzes. Students are allowed two “free” missed quizzes. There will be an opportunity for extra credit at the end of the quarter for students who want to improve their class participation grade. (20% of grade).

Note: To earn extra credit, students can choose one of the following options:
a) Write a personal reflection (not a book review!) relating to one of the secondary sources from the syllabus (2-3 pages), or
b) Write a creative piece inspired by one of the primary sources from the syllabus or Canvas (poem, story, song, short graphic novel, etc.) The extra credit assignments are due by June 16 and can earn up to 5% extra points for class participation.

Week 1: Why Medieval History Matters

Dates: Tuesday April 4 – Thursday April 6

- The medieval period was a time of both decline and growth, a time of fear of the apocalypse but also new beginnings. We will explore how the medieval world relates to our own times, such as grappling with new technologies, pandemics, climate change, and religious diversity. We will also discuss how history is constructed and interpreted through different sources and perspectives.
- **Required reading (due Thursday April 6):** Judith Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 12th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2020), Introduction and chapter 1 (“Romans, Christians, and Barbarians”)
- Optional secondary source readings:
- Optional primary sources: Anonymous, *The Song of Roland*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess (London: Penguin Books, 1990); excerpt.
- Optional fiction: Nicola Griffith, *Hild* (FSG, 2013) [note: this is a wonderful novel set in 7th century England – recommended].
- **Guidance:** In this week, we will introduce the course and its main themes and objectives. We will also explain the final paper assignment, which requires you to connect any theme from any week of the class to contemporary events. You will also learn how to analyze primary and secondary sources critically and creatively.

Week 2: Feudalism, Power, and the “Structures of Everyday Life”

Dates: April 11 - April 13

- The feudal system defined many of the social and economic conditions of medieval society. We will study how lords and vassals, knights and peasants, kings and nobles interacted with each other in a hierarchical order. We will also discuss how states emerged and consolidated their power and authority over their territories and subjects. We will also learn about conflicts between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor as an example of how political and religious interests clashed in medieval Europe.

- **Required Readings:**
 - Tuesday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 7 (“Economic Takeoff and Social Change in the Countryside”)
 - Thursday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 8 (“Economic Takeoff and Social Change in the Town”)
- Optional secondary source readings: Fernand Braudel, excerpts; “Feudal Society” by Marc Bloch; Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*.
- Optional primary sources: “Investiture Controversy Readings” on Canvas, [Palladius, “On Husbandry,” c. 350](#), [Dialogue on Laborers, c. 1000](#)
- **Guidance:** In this week, we will learn about the origins and characteristics of feudalism as a system of land tenure, military service, and loyalty. We will also analyze how feudalism affected the social structure, economy, and culture of medieval society.

Please be sure to sign up for OpenAI account and bring a laptop or tablet, if possible, to class on Thursday April 13, as we will be doing a trial run of the HistoryLens assignment (which isn't due until May 9).

Week 3: The World of Medieval Catholicism

Date: April 18 - April 20

- This week is all about the role of the Catholic Church in medieval society. We will study how the papacy and new monastic orders shaped the religious landscape of Europe and beyond. We will also examine how different forms of Christianity emerged and competed for followers.
- **Required Readings:**
 - Tuesday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 2 and ch. 4 (“Early Western Christendom” and “The Islamic Empires”)
 - Thursday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 9 (“Popes and the Papacy”).
- Optional secondary source readings: “The Medieval Church: A Brief History” by Joseph H. Lynch and Phillip C. Adamo; “The Crusades: A History” by Jonathan Riley-Smith
- Optional primary sources: “The Rule of St. Benedict”
- **Guidance:** In this week, we will explore how religion influenced every aspect of medieval life, from politics and culture to art and education. We will also investigate how religious diversity and dissent challenged the authority and unity of the Church.

NOTE: the “Film memo” assignment is due at the end of this week.

Week 4: The Crusades in Global Perspective

Date: April 25 - April 27

- We will study the causes, events, and consequences of the Crusades from the perspective of both Christians and Muslims. We will also examine the impact of the Crusades on the political, social, and cultural developments of Europe and the Middle

East, and set them against the larger hemispheric context of the rise of Genghis Khan and the Mongols.

- **Required Readings:**
 - Tuesday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 10 ("New Paths to God")
 - Thursday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 11 (Conquests, Crusades, and Persecutions")
- Optional secondary source readings: *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* by Amin Maalouf
- Optional primary sources: "The Deeds of God Through the Franks"; "The Travels of Ibn Battuta."
- **Guidance:** In this week, we will explore the origins and motivations of the Crusades. We will also trace the course and outcome of the major Crusades, from the First Crusade in 1095 to the Fourth Crusade in 1204. We will also discuss how the Crusades affected the relations between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Europe and the Middle East. **Note:** You will also use HistoryLens in class to experience your chosen setting this week, in class. You will share your experience with other students who chose the same setting and explore issues, problems and questions that came up in the simulation by researching secondary sources in class.

Week 5: Scholasticism, Globalization, and Pinning Down "Medieval Culture"

Date: May 2 - May 4

- The intellectual and cultural achievements of medieval Europe. We will study how scholasticism emerged as a method of learning and inquiry that combined faith and reason. We will also examine how medieval culture expressed itself in various forms of art, literature, music, and architecture. We will also discuss the idea of a twelfth-century renaissance that marked a revival of classical learning and culture in Europe.
- **Required Readings:**
 - Tuesday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 13 ("Literature, Art, and Thought")
 - Thursday: Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, excerpts.
- Optional secondary source readings: "The Intellectual Life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages" by André Vauchez; "The Twelfth-Century Renaissance" by R.N. Swanson
- Optional primary sources: "Summa Theologica" by Thomas Aquinas; "The Canterbury Tales" by Geoffrey Chaucer.
- **Guidance:** In this week, we will learn about the main figures and schools of thought that shaped medieval philosophy and theology. We will also explore how medieval culture reflected and influenced the values and beliefs of medieval society.

Note: This week you will write a 3 page reflection on how the HistoryLens reflection paper that analyzes your simulation by fact checking and contextualizing it with reference to the secondary and primary sources available on Canvas. **Submit by May 9.**

Week 6: The Bubonic Plague

Date: May 9 - May 11

- Theme: The Black Death as a devastating pandemic that killed millions of people in Europe and Asia in the mid-fourteenth century. We will study the causes, symptoms, and spread of the disease, as well as its social and economic impact on medieval society. We will also examine how people reacted to and coped with the plague in different ways, such as religion, medicine, art, and literature.
- **Required Readings:**
 - Tuesday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 14 ("Famine, Plague, and Recovery")
 - Thursday: HistoryLens plague scenarios (randomized)
- Optional secondary sources: *The Black Death: A New History* by John Hatcher; *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* by Samuel K. Cohn Jr.; David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*.
- Optional primary sources: excerpts from *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio
- **Guidance:** In this week, we will explore one of the most catastrophic events in human history that changed the course of medieval Europe. We will also analyze how the Black Death affected various aspects of medieval life, such as population, economy, politics, religion, culture, and mentality. **Begin working on rough draft of final paper.**
- Optional fiction: *The Years of Rice and Salt* by Kim Stanley Robinson.

Week 7: The Hundred Years War and the Reconquista

Date: May 16 - May 18

- Theme: The Hundred Years War as a long-lasting conflict between England and France over the succession to the French throne and the control of lands in France. We will study the causes, events, and consequences of the war, as well as its impact on politics, society, and culture in both countries. We will also discuss the Reconquista as a series of wars between Christian and Muslim kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula over the control of the region. We will examine the motives, strategies, and outcomes of the Reconquista, as well as its effects on religious diversity and tolerance in Spain and Portugal.
 - **Required Readings:**
 - Tuesday: Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 15 ("Toward the Sovereign State")
 - Thursday: **no required reading:** work on rough draft!
- Optional secondary source readings: "Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources" edited by Olivia Remie Constable (Introduction and Chapter 9); "The Hundred Years War" by Christopher Allmand
- **Guidance:** In this week, we will explore two major examples of how warfare shaped medieval Europe in different ways. We will also analyze how warfare affected the lives and identities of ordinary people, such as peasants, soldiers, women, and minorities.

Note: Rough drafts of the final are due on May 23.

Week 8: The Fall of Byzantium, Humanism, the Rise of the Ottomans

Date: May 23 - May 25

- We will study how Byzantium declined and collapsed under internal and external pressures, especially from the Ottoman Turks. We will also examine how the Ottomans expanded their empire and challenged the Christian world. We will also discuss how humanism, art, and culture flourished in Italy and other parts of Europe in the late medieval period.
- **Required readings:**
 - Tuesday: **No required reading**: work on rough draft, which is due today.
 - Thursday: Bennet, *Medieval Europe*, ch. 16 ("Diversity and Dynamism").
- Optional primary sources: "The Lives of the Artists" by Giorgio Vasari (Introduction and selected biographies)
- Optional secondary sources: "Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire" by Judith Herrin (Chapter 15); *The Swerve* by Stephen Greenblatt
- **Guidance**: In this week, we will learn about two contrasting civilizations that emerged in the late medieval period: Byzantium and the Ottomans. We will also explore how Europe experienced a cultural revival that paved the way for the Renaissance.

Week 9: Late Medieval Europe and the Wider World

Date: May 30 - June 1

- Theme: The interactions between medieval Europe and other regions of the world. We will study how European explorers such as Columbus and Vasco da Gama reached new lands and established contacts with different peoples and cultures. We will also examine how European trade and colonization affected Africa, Asia, and America. We will also discuss how Europeans developed concepts of race and ethnicity in relation to other groups.
- Required readings:
 - Tuesday: Geraldine Heng, "The invention of race in the European Middle Ages," <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2011.00790.x>
 - Thursday: Pauline Watts, "Prophecy and Discovery: On the Spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus's "Enterprise of the Indies" *American Historical Review*, 1985.
- Optional secondary sources: "Race in Medieval Europe" by Cord Whitaker; "Black Africans in Renaissance Europe" edited by T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (Introduction)
- Optional primary sources: "The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus" edited by J.M. Cohen; "The Travels of Vasco da Gama" edited by E.G. Ravenstein
- **Guidance**: In this week, we will explore how medieval Europe embarked on a violent and exploitative expansion into other regions of the world. We will also analyze how these encounters created and reinforced European notions of racial and cultural superiority and difference.

Week 10: The Legacies of the Middle Ages

Date: June 6 - June 8

- The legacies of the Middle Ages in modern culture and society. We will study how myths and legends from the medieval period such as King Arthur, Robin Hood, Joan of Arc, El Cid, and Dracula have been retold and adapted in different media and genres. We will also examine how political tropes such as feudalism, chivalry, monarchy, crusade, and holy war have been used and abused in modern times, as well as the current historiographic debates about the role of race and racism in the Middle Ages.
- **NO REQUIRED READING**
- Optional readings: “The Invention of Tradition” edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Introduction and Chapter 4); “Medievalism: A Critical History” by David Matthews (Chapter 1), “The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend” by Alan Lupack (Introduction); “Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography” by Stephen Knight (Introduction and Chapter 4)

NOTE: FINAL PAPER DUE JUNE 10 at midnight.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All members of the UCSC community benefit from an environment of trust, honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility. You are expected to present your own work and acknowledge the work of others in order to preserve the integrity of scholarship.

Academic integrity includes:

- Following exam rules
- Using only permitted materials during an exam
- Viewing exam materials only when permitted by your instructor
- Keeping what you know about an exam to yourself
- Incorporating proper citation of all sources of information
- Submitting your own original work

Academic misconduct includes the following:

- Disclosing exam content during or after you have taken an exam
- Accessing exam materials without permission
- Copying/purchasing any material from another student, or from another source, that is submitted for grading as your own
- Plagiarism, including use of Internet material without proper citation
- Using cell phones or other electronics to obtain outside information during an exam without explicit permission from the instructor

- Submitting your own work in one class that was completed for another class (self-plagiarism) without prior permission from the instructor.
- Violations of the Academic Integrity policy can result in dismissal from the university and a permanent notation on a student's transcript.

ACCESSIBILITY

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by email, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. I encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact the DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

STUDENT SERVICES

Counseling and Psychological Services

Many students at UCSC face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Student Success and Engagement Hub

The Division of Student Success provides campus-wide coordination and leadership for student success programs and activities across departments, divisions, the colleges, and administrative units.

Tutoring and Learning Support

At Learning Support Services (LSS), undergraduate students build a strong foundation for success and cultivate a sense of belonging in our Community of Learners. LSS partners with faculty and staff to advance educational equity by designing inclusive learning environments in Modified Supplemental Instruction, Small Group Tutoring, and Writing Support. When students fully engage in our programs, they gain transformative experiences that empower them at the university and beyond.

Slug Support Program

College can be a challenging time for students and during times of stress it is not always easy to find the help you need. Slug Support can give help with everything from basic needs (housing, food, or financial insecurity) to getting the technology you need during remote instruction.

To get started with SLUG Support, please contact the [Dean of Students Office](#) at 831-459-4446 or you may send us an email at deanofstudents@ucsc.edu.

Slug Help/[Technology](#)

The ITS Support Center is your single point of contact for all issues, problems or questions related to technology services and computing at UC Santa Cruz. To get technological help, simply email help@ucsc.edu.

On-Campus Emergency Contacts

Slug Help/[Emergency Services](#). For all other help and support, including the health center and emergency services, start [here](#). Always dial 9-1-1 in the case of an emergency.

Complete list of optional primary and secondary sources is available on Canvas.

Films (list of options for film memo assignment – links are underlined):

The Passion of Joan of Arc, 1928, [HBO Max](#)

The Vikings, 1958, [no ads on Amazon Prime](#) or [free with ads on YouTube](#)

Andrei Rublev, 1966, [free on YouTube](#)

The Lion in Winter, 1968, [free on Amazon Prime with free trial](#)

Excalibur, 1981, [Amazon Prime rental](#) or YouTube rental

The Return of Martin Guerre, 1982, [Kanopy](#) [free w/ UCSC library login]

The Name of the Rose, 1986, unavailable to stream – **but on Canvas!**

Henry V, 1989, [Tubi](#)

The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc, 1999, [Amazon Prime](#)

A Knight's Tale, 2001, [Netflix](#)

Kingdom of Heaven, 2005, [rent](#) from Amazon, Apple Tv, etc

Wolf Hall, 2015, [PBS Masterpiece](#) (available on Amazon Prime)

The King, 2019, [Netflix](#)

The Last Duel, 2021, [HBO Max](#)

For fun:

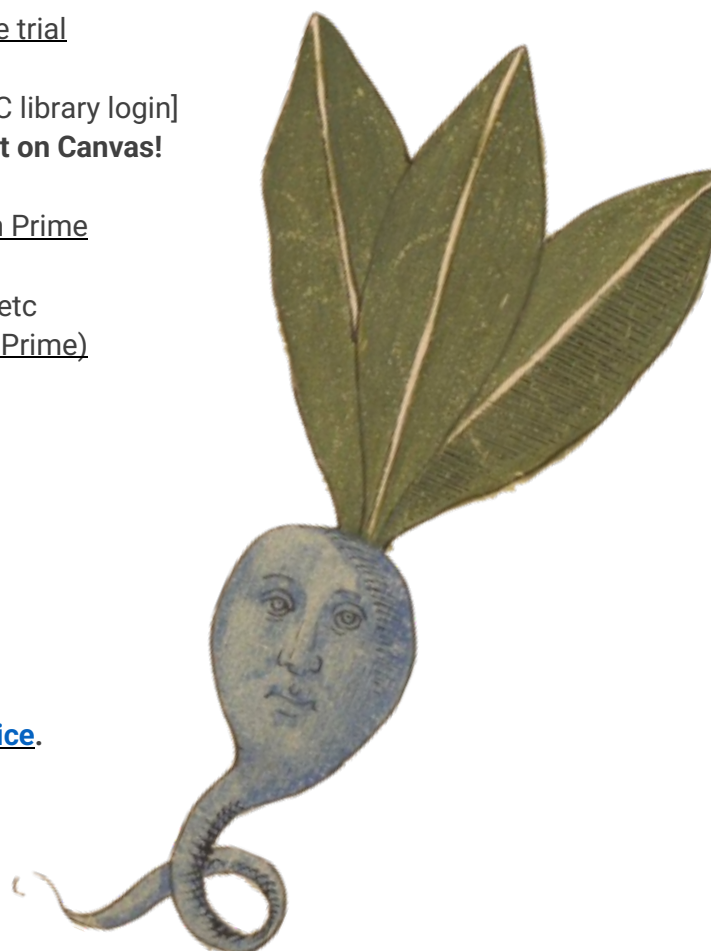
[List of 100 most common medieval English words.](#)

[Medieval price list.](#)

[A 15th century book of manners.](#) And a [summary of advice.](#)

¶ Here Endeth ye Descripcioun of ye Classe.

Goode reader, farewell.



Here will ye
findeth page 12