Case Studies Directory

CLASSICAL

Paola Bassino: The Hellenistic World: 331-31 BC.

During the reign of Alexander the Great, the boundaries of the Greek world were pushed towards previously unexplored territories, and the Greeks had to confront themselves with new cultures, religions, and political systems. The centre of the Hellenic world shifted away from Athens and mainland Greece. After the death of Alexander, his Empire was divided in smaller kingdoms, but the process of transformation of the Greek world and the Greek identity continued. This case study is concerned with various aspects of this new world. Areas of interest include: Greek identity and perception of the other, Athens in the Hellenistic period, Hellenistic kings and queens, the Library of Alexandria and scientific progress, Rome and Egypt.

Suggested readings:


Eoghan Maloney: Ancient Sparta – More than a Mirage?

Our case study sets out to review the history of one of the key powers in classical Greece: Sparta. This was a city-state unlike any other in antiquity, a *polis* that continued to elicit fear and admiration right up to modern times. In our study, we shall assess the ancient accounts of life in this remarkable society and consider what can we really determine about ancient Sparta. For one classical commentator, Sparta was home both to people who were ‘the most free and the most enslaved’: we shall consider whether the city is deserving of its utopian or its dystopian reputation.

Suggested readings:

- Anton Powell & Stephen Hodkinson eds., *Sparta. Beyond the Mirage* (Swansea, 2002)

Carey Fleiner: Women in the Roman World

This group will look at the materials, sources, and scholarship on women in the Roman world, from the Republic through to the early Roman Empire. Topics covered may include politically influential women such as Cornelia, Livia, and Agrippina the Younger; women’s domestic duties; women in comedy; education and literacy; religious roles; women’s work; the idealised woman – both good
and bad; gender roles and sex; depictions of Roman women in modern media. We will consider the sources for studying Roman women, and the key scholars and historiographic trends that have shaped interpretation of the images of these women over the past century.

**Suggested readings:**


**MEDIEVAL**

**Robert Houghton:** Justinian and Theodora

Having largely escaped the upheaval caused by the disintegration of the western Roman Empire in the 5th century, Byzantium in the 6th century was at a high point of cultural and political ambition that would not be seen again until some 600 years later. The reign of Justinian was driven by a vision to restore the Empire, centred on Constantinople but aiming also to re-conquer lost territory in the West. This case study explores how the recapitulation of imperial power was expressed through military expeditions; programmes of building and lavish decoration in Constantinople itself but also in Italy; the patronage of writers; and the collecting of Roman law together in a major work of synthesis.

**Suggested readings:**


**Ryan Lavelle:** Anglo-Saxon and Norman Winchester

This module addresses the evidence for the culture, lives and politics of the inhabitants of Winchester between the seventh and twelfth centuries. Although driven by what has been written about the city, from the city, and about events within the city, the confluences and distinctions with the material evidence of the city also inform this module, from the early foundations of the Anglo-Saxon minster to the records of the lives and occupations of ordinary inhabitants in the ‘Winton Domesday’ in the twelfth century. We will also address how Winchester may be considered ‘England’s Ancient Capital’.

**Suggested readings:**

- James, T. B., *Winchester: From Prehistory to the Present* (Stroud, 2007)

NB James and Lavelle are more easily accessible books. Biddle and Rumble are library-copy books and you shouldn’t expect to have to find your own copies.

**Katherine Weikert: Memory and Commemoration in Late Anglo-Saxon England**

This case study will examine the methods, meanings and use of remembrance in late Anglo-Saxon England, from remembering the dead or creating heroes to using the past in the political present of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. Special attention will be paid to cross-Channel correspondence to place Anglo-Saxon England in context with its Continental contemporaries. Primary sources may include *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, letters, charms, wills, laws, poems and skalds, and hagiography.

**Suggested readings:**

- *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900-1200*: Elisabeth van Houts (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999)

**Cindy Wood: Medieval Death**

The later middle ages are often referred to as a period obsessed with death. This case study shall investigate this claim through a variety of sources, both physical and documentary to see how medieval attitudes to death can be identified, put into context and examined. We shall study this phenomena through burials, churches, tombs, art and literature, as well as secondary studies. *Medieval Death* will examine contemporary attitudes to death, how to die well, what happened to a soul after death and efforts to avoid too many horrors of Purgatory and ultimately Hell.

**Suggested readings:**

- Epstein, S., *An Economic and Social history of Later Medieval Europe, 1000-1500* (Cambridge, 2009)
Rebecca Oakes: Medieval Peasants’ Revolts

This case study will require students to examine the historical circumstances that surround peasants’ revolts in Europe in the late medieval period, more specifically (but not exclusively) those of the late fourteenth century. Key examples of the revolts which may be covered in this case study include the revolt of the Jacquerie in France (1358), the revolt of the Ciompi in Italy (1378), and the Great Revolt in England (1381). The case study will consider who participated in such revolts, what motivations might be discerned for their actions, how they were viewed and portrayed by their contemporaries, and how these revolts fitted within the broader changing economic landscape in Europe. This is also an area of great historiographical value, and students will be asked to consider how Marxist schools of thought, the protest movements of the 1960s, and more recent attention to the social and culturally history of medieval Europe may have informed the debates on this topic.

Suggested readings:


Gordon McKelvie/James Ross: Crisis, Conflict and Cooperation: England, 1381-1414

The years 1381 and 1415 witnessed several dramatic events that permanently altered the nature of English politics and English society. Although the country was generally at peace with France there were numerous internal conflicts, rebellions and usurpations that attracted the attention of medieval chroniclers and generated many administrative records. This case study examines events such as the Peasants Revolt, Richard II’s tyranny and usurpation, the rebellions faced by Henry IV and the rebellion of heretical Lollards against Henry V just before his victory at Agincourt. The case study is intended to introduce students a broad variety of sources used by historians.

Suggested readings:


EARLY MODERN

Ellie Woodacre: The Renaissance

Is it a period, a movement, a ‘swerve’ or a figment of the imagination? We’ll be exploring all aspects of the Renaissance, in Italy and beyond from approximately 1300-1600. In this module, we’ll be looking both at a variety of textual and visual primary sources from the period as well as the contested historiography and concept of the Renaissance itself. We’ll also be looking at the interdisciplinary nature of Renaissance studies, taking in aspects of art history, gender studies and more as well as the history of the period itself.
Louise Curth: ‘The science of the stars’ in early modern England

Although now often dismissed as a pseudo-science, astrology was long thought to be a true science. The underlying theory of ‘the science of the stars’ was that God moved the planets and stars in ways that would result in changes on the earth. This science consisted of what we now refer to as astronomy and astrology, the former used to mathematically calculate planetary movements and the latter to interpret them. While there were many different uses for astrology, this case will focus on the relationship between ‘physick’ (the contemporary name for medicine) and astrology in early modern England.

Suggested readings:

- French, R.F., ‘Astrology in medical practice’ in *Practical medicine from Salerno to the Black Death* (Cambridge, 2010), Chapter 1.

Simon Sandall: Rebellion and Protest in Early Modern England

Sixteenth-century England has been subject to many varied historiographical interpretations and popular protest of the period is a revealing prism through which to examine both historical shifts and the ways that they have been understood in the intervening period. Some historians, following Karl Marx, have taken these disturbances to indicate a nascent capitalist economy, proletarianisation and the emergence of class-based antagonism. Others have adopted a more complex approach, emphasising regional variability and the multiplicity of reasons that could underwrite popular uprisings. This group examines early modern rebellion and popular protest from a range of historiographical perspectives, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses.

Suggested readings:

MODERN

Graciela Iglesias Rogers: The French Revolution in global perspective

Few episodes in history can claim the undeniable global reach of the French Revolution: it galvanized and polarized populations across continents, transforming the map of Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, leading to the first abolition of slavery, movements for the emancipation of women, the rise of the technological age and to profound changes in the arts and in the public sphere in general. In this course, students will gain an understanding not just of the events that took place in France and elsewhere, but more importantly of the complex historical phenomena that contributed to forge a modern global world.

Suggested readings:


Mark Allen: Society in Victorian Britain

This case study looks at the development of British society in the period of the industrial revolution. It will focus on the massive growth of an increasingly urbanised and migratory population, and will address some key issues that this brought. The growth in transport links, the government responses to crippling poverty in some towns, the health of the population, crime and the question of whether the standard of living for ordinary people got better or worse are some of the topics that will be addressed.

Suggested readings:


Xavier Guegan: The Indian Mutiny

The historical debate we are focusing on within this case study is the Sepoys Rebellion / Indian Mutiny / India’s First War of Independence [as you are going to see, naming an event is not always as easy as one might think]. This rebellion (1857-58) and its outcome participated in shifting power from the East India Company to a stronger colonial and imperial society in India: the British *Raj*. Mid-nineteenth century politics, ideologies, literature, art and cultural productions widely framed that event; and for the last century and a half it has continued to be used – and misused – following what was considered by the Victorians as a traumatic experience and the Indian nationalists as a
movement of national unity and attempt for independence. Since 1857 a vast literature has been published on that period – some talk of more than five hundred publications – but different arguments and what is considered as evidence remain a vivid debate and a hot topic.

Suggested readings:

- Pati, B. (ed.), *The 1857 Rebellion* (Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 2010).

**Natalya Chernyshova: Russia and Its Western Borderlands, 1863-1991**

This case study will examine Russia’s relationship with its western borderlands during the imperial and Soviet periods. Using primary sources and secondary literature, we will focus especially on the Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Lithuanian territories, which at various points were under the Kremlin’s control. Historically, these lands have been seen by Moscow as strategically important, and still are today. This case study will invite students to consider such themes as cultural perceptions and identities, the politics of language and religion, strategies of imperial control, security concerns, etc., by focusing on some of the key developments in the region’s relationship with Moscow during the time between the Polish Uprising of 1863 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Suggested readings:

- Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place. From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA, 2005)

**John Blockley: Britain and France in the Scramble for Africa, 1870-1914**

In the generation before the outbreak of World War One, European powers engaged in an unprecedented movement to colonise Africa which, by 1914, had left hardly any corner of that continent untouched. The aim of this case study is to examine the role in this historical process played by two of the major powers involved, Britain and France, by way of considering a series of particular events within the longer process of colonisation. These will include the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the Anglo-French race to control the Upper Nile in Sudan in the mid 1890s, the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 and French efforts to colonise Morocco before and after the 1904 Entente Cordiale.

Suggested readings:

Neil Curtin:  America in the 1920s and 1930s

This case study aims first to re-examine the image of a society apparently split by the clash of rural religious conservatism with urban progressive liberalism during the so-called ‘Jazz Age’. It will then move on to consider the impact of the Great Depression on various aspects of American economic, political, social and cultural life. Though some attention will be paid to foreign affairs in this period, the primary emphasis is on the domestic environment exploring such issues as prohibition and feminism as well as the impact of mass consumption and mass leisure on American culture. There will also be consideration of the responses of the Hoover and Roosevelt Administrations to the Depression with particular attention paid to the New Deal.

Suggested readings:

- Purcell, A., Interpreting American History: The New Deal and the Great Depression, (Kent, Ohio, 2014)
- Stillman, E., The Roaring Twenties, (Rockville, Maryland, 2017)
- The New Deal Network: http://newdeal.feri.org/

Sian Edwards: The ‘People’s War’-the home front during the Second World War

The Second World War had an unprecedented impact on the British public. Faced with aerial bombardment, the risk of invasion, rationing, and evacuation, the British people found their lives dramatically altered by the conflict. Alongside this, civilians were expected to participate in the war effort as never before and were encouraged to ‘play their part’ on the home front in a variety of ways, including munitions work and agricultural production. The effort of civilians was celebrated at the time, as was their ability to remain stoic and brave in the face of fierce hardship. Consequently, the war became known as ‘The People’s War’, an enduring and evocative description still popularly used today. In recent years, however, historians have questioned the extent to which the period from 1939-45 can be understood in these terms and have highlighted the diversity of everyday experience at this time. This course will explore the idea of ‘The People’s War’ through a variety of primary sources and students will be encouraged to critically consider the difference between representation and experience in wartime Britain.

Suggested readings:

Chris Aldous: Heisei Japan, 1989-Present

This case study explores Japan after the Showa period, when elements of the so-called ‘1955 system’ – the one party rule of the Liberal Democratic Party, the pre-eminence of the Japanese economy and Japan as an exemplar of social stability – began to break down. The ‘bubble economy’ gave way to the ‘Lost Decade’ of the 1990s, a period of economic stagnation, and the twin disasters of the Kobe earthquake and the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 questioned Japanese efficiency and social cohesion. Likewise, early Twenty First century Japan has had to face major domestic crises (2011 earthquake) and foreign policy challenges, demonstrating that the Heisei period has witnessed major upheavals for Japan.

Suggested readings:

- Richard J. Samuels, 3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan (Ithaca, 2013)

Robert Gray: Climate, Culture and Disaster in World History

Climate change is the greatest threat facing human civilization. Yet fears over a changing climate, and the impact of climate on society, is nothing new. Throughout history extremes of hot and cold have allowed some civilizations to flourish and brought others to the brink of collapse. A warmer climate in the Middle Ages permitted the growth of European population and the first European expansion into the New World. The ‘Little Ice Age’ of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought famine, disease and war throughout the world. This case study will explore the impact of climate on cultures and societies in the past, asking how we know the climate is changing, how it has changed in the past, and what past experiences of climate change might reveal about the future of life on Earth.

Suggested readings:

- Behringer, Wolfgang, A Cultural History of Climate (Cambridge, 2010)

Emiliano Perra: Genocide

This case study is an introduction to the concept and practice of genocide, in particular in modern history. Through the combination of general concepts as well as specific case studies, the case study will explore what constitutes genocide; when and how genocides happen; perpetrators and victims carry out, and respond to, genocidal violence; how the international community responds to genocides; how victim and perpetrator societies come to terms with the memory and lasting heritage of genocide. In thus doing, the case study will also look at the ways in which these difficult topics are understood in international law, commemorated in collective memory, and represented in popular culture.
Suggested readings: