



**CLAS 2110H, Spring 2014**  
**Before Literature:**  
**Writing the History of Premodern Literary Cultures**

Stratis Papaioannou, Associate Professor of Classics  
 Department of Classics, Wilbour Hall 105; *E-mail:* [sp@brown.edu](mailto:sp@brown.edu)

**Course Description**

Literature is a modern concept—it rises in Western European thought during the 19th century along with such notions as nation, subjectivity, individuality, or authorship. Yet, we speak of ancient and medieval *literatures*, write their histories, and study their texts. This seminar has a threefold aim/task:

- (a) We will first survey modern literary theory, from New Criticism to Post-structuralism, in order to identify approaches that could illuminate the reading and historiography of pre-modern discursive traditions.
- (b) We will then explore the ways in which modern historiography has treated premodern discursive traditions which defy modern expectations for what literature should be (creative, original, entertaining). The focus will be, though not exclusive, on Mediterranean literatures: Greek and Latin, ancient and medieval; Arabic; Western European vernacular traditions.
- (c) Finally, throughout the semester, we will read, in Greek, the *Alexander Romance* and the *Barlaam and Ioasaph* romance; we will use these two typically premodern tales (anonymous, with fluid textual tradition, wide circulation, oral dimension, etc.) on the ideal ruler as a common ground on which to apply some of the questions/methods discussed throughout the semester.

Especially good for those planning to take the Classics PhD Oral exams.

**Requirements:**

Participation, preparation of readings (ca. 200 pgs in English per week), class attendance, and presentations of readings (70%), a 20-min. presentation, then converted to a final paper matching one of the two texts mentioned above with a modern literary theoretical framework (30%); **Sunday May 11, by email**.

All copies of primary texts and secondary literature will be provided by the instructor.

**Provisional schedule of meetings/readings****First hour of each session:**

**Week one (Jan. 31):** J. D. Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

**Week two (Feb. 7):** The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vols. 7-9 (selections)

**Week three (Feb. 14):** The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vols. 7-9 (selections)

**Week four (Feb. 21):** K. Reichl, *Medieval oral literature* (selections); theories of orality

**Week five (Feb. 28):** I. J. F. de Jong and J. P. Sullivan (eds), *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature* (Mnemosyne supplement 130), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994 (selections) + Whitmarsh, T. (2008) *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel* (Cambridge and New York) (selections)

**Week six (Mar. 7):** Whitmarsh, T. (2004) *Ancient Greek Literature* (Cambridge).

**Week seven (Mar 14): special session for the visiting weekend;** G. B. Conte, *Latin literature : a history* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994)

**Week eight (Mar. 21):** *The Oxford handbook of medieval Latin literature* (2012)

**SPRING BREAK**

**Week nine (Apr. 4):** Kazhdan, A. P. (in collaboration with Lee F. Sherry and C. Angelidi) (1999) *A History of Byzantine Literature (650-850)* (Athens) + Kazhdan, A. P. (2006) *A History of Byzantine Literature (850-1000)* (ed. C. Angelidi; Athens). (selections)

**Week ten (Apr. 11):** M. Zink, *Medieval French literature : an introduction* (1995).

**Week eleven (Apr. 18):** *Arabic literature in the post-classical period* / edited by R. Allen and D.S. Richards (2006)

**Week twelve (TBD): Presentations**

**The second hour of each session will be devoted to the following two texts, which we will read in Greek, divided equally per session:**

*The Alexander Romance*, Recensio γ, ed.

U. von Lauenstein, Der griechische Alexanderroman. Rezension γ. Buch I (1962).

H. Engelmann, Der griechische Alexanderroman. Rezension γ. Buch II (1963).

F. Parthe, Der griechische Alexanderroman. Rezension γ. Buch III (1969).

Cf. *A companion to Alexander literature in the Middle Ages* (2011); full text available from EBSCO eBook Academic Subscription Collection

*The Life of Barlaam and Joasaph*, ed.

R. Volk, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos, Historia animae utilis de Barlaam et Joasaph (spuria): Text und zehn Appendices, VI/2* [Patristische Texte und Studien 60. Berlin - New York: De Gruyter, 2006].