

NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES

EXPRESSION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE CHRISTIAN - JEWISH - MUSLIM MEDITERRANEAN

HOME PROGRAM FACULTY & ORGANIZERS PARTICIPANTS FACILITIES FAQ

Unit I: July 6th- July 10th

Thinking Mediterranean:

What characterized culture and identity in the medieval Mediterranean? Our 2015 Institute, "Negotiating Identities," is organized around the conceit of "lines"—how the lines scholars use to delineate the Mediterranean and its ethno-religious identities are drawn, how to read between them, and how they can be blurred. Unit I introduces the Institute's two main themes: ethno-religious diversity and Mediterranean culture. This week the Co-Directors will serve as Institute's principal faculty, delivering introductory talks that frame the Institute theme in terms of their own scholarly perspectives: Brian Catlos on minority-majority relations and intergroup dynamics and Sharon Kinoshita on cultural identity and textual production. In addition, each will lead two seminar discussions: Catlos on the emergence of a medieval "Mediterranean culture" and its implications for intergroup relations, and Kinoshita on the ways literary texts reflect, inflect, and transmit that culture.

Unit II: July 13th-17th

Blurring the Lines:

How do differentiated ethno-religious and political identities participate in a Mediterranean of shared styles, tastes and values? Following on the historical and literary emphases of Unit I, Unit II turns to material culture and art. Cecily Hilsdale, an expert in the arts of the Byzantine empire, examines how medieval Mediterranean identities are negotiated through objects of exchange—portable things, "minor arts," or "*ars sacra*." By focusing on the movement of sumptuous art objects as they crossed cultural and confessional lines, her work brings conceptual issues of cross-cultural exchange to the concrete level of material culture, drawing on anthropologists of the object who study the "social lives of things" and literary theorists who study "thing theory." She will focus in particular on silk as a commodity and object of desire and value across the Mediterranean. Marcus Milwright brings his archaeological expertise to bear on examples of what might be defined in modern parlance as propaganda – artifacts meant to convey messages to the inhabitants of a given polity and to potential enemies or allies—to question how effective a tool visual culture was in communicating political and religious ideologies. Examples will range from quotidian objects, such as dinnerware, to monumental architecture, such as the Dome of the Rock, in order to tease out the relationship between aesthetic style, cultural identity, and religio-political ideology in a Mediterranean of overlapping and integrated communities.

Unit III: July 20th- 24th

Marking Boundaries:

How did the affinity and difference that simultaneously characterized Mediterranean religious, intellectual, and literary cultures interact? Unit III examines the geography of textual and oral transmission in the high medieval Mediterranean, showing how the nuances and nature of ethno-religious interaction can be gleaned from the comparative reading of texts that, viewed in isolation, seem to portray identity as discrete. John Tolan, the foremost authority on Christian perceptions of Muslims and Jews from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, will discuss the situation of subject minorities before the law in the Christian and Islamic Mediterranean and the interplay between oppressive or marginalizing ideological tendencies and currents that advocated for toleration and legal integration. He will examine the contrast between the urge of legislators to regulate relations between members of different faiths, and the interpretation scholars and judges made of these laws in ways intended to facilitate integration. Thomas Burman is a leading authority on Muslim-Christian polemic and intellectual exchange in the Western Mediterranean and the translation of Muslim religious works (particularly the Qur'an) into Latin. Through the example of the thirteenth-century missionary and polemicist Ramon Marti, he will examine how the translation movement involving Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic texts influenced the development not only of scientific and philosophical thought but also notions of ethno-religious identity: how, for example, Latin translations of the Arabic adaptations of Aristotle and other thinkers affected Christian perceptions of Islam.

Unit IV: July 27th-July 31

Towards the New Mediterranean Studies:

What does Mediterranean Studies bring to our understanding of ethno-religious relations and cultural development? This week's program consists of workshops and discussions, directed by Catlos and Kinoshita, that review and synthesize the preceding weeks' presentations and situate them in relation to their own theoretical and comparative work. The aim is to help participants assimilate the materials covered as they finalize their individual projects, relating the implications of the Institute to their own pedagogy and research. The program concludes with presentations of the participants' projects in a two-day "mini conference" (a change enacted at our 2012 Institute that clearly enhanced our participants' experience). Besides giving the Summer Scholars the opportunity to share their work formally, it allows Catlos and Kinoshita to guide discussions of particular case studies toward the larger questions at the heart of the Institute. We conclude with a closing dinner and ceremony to celebrate and cement the personal and professional relationships forged over the course of the four weeks and to mark the beginning of new collaborations among our Participants.

< July 2020 >

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NEH Summer Institute Barcelona 2015 - Daily Schedule

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Important: Generally, US citizens who wish to stay in Spain for tourist or business purposes for up to 90 days do not need a visa. They should travel with a round trip air ticket and a passport valid for a minimum of six months. To confirm this, and for visa information for foreign visitors to Spain, click here.

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