

The Living Dead: Religious and Cultural Relics in a Global Context
HIST 230-601 – Fall 2016
Tuesday, 5 p.m.-8p.m.

Instructor: Noria Litaker

Email: nlitaker@sas.upenn.edu

Day/Time: Monday, 5 p.m.-8 p.m.

Office Hours: TBA

Office: TBA

Course Description

Why have various people and religious groups – over thousands of years – so insistently preserved, collected and displayed the remains of their revered dead – from the bones of saints to the body of Lenin to Elvis’ hair? And why have these very same remains, at certain points, become targets of extreme violence or heated debate? This seminar will offer an in-depth study of the history and uses of sacred remains and the objects, buildings and sites associated with them. A major focus of the course will be the analysis of how and why bodily remains and material objects become invested with meaning and power.

In the first half of the course, we will examine relics in the context of several major religions, comparing how each tradition has used or rejected relics. We will also pay close attention to the artwork and social phenomena inspired by such relics including pilgrimages, reliquaries/shrines and iconoclasm. In the second half of the course, we will widen our lens to explore bodily and cultural relics in the 19th and 20th centuries, including objects, places or monuments cherished for historical or memorial value. Topics to be explored include relics/sacred sites and politics, modern pilgrimage and how attitudes toward the display of human remains, especially in museums or memorials, has changed over time.

Each class will combine several scholarly articles and primary sources (textual and material) to introduce students to the methods which historians and art historians use to analyze relics, reliquaries, and material objects more generally. Students will then employ these techniques in two essays analyzing reliquaries and relics from different time periods. A final comparative essay will ask students compare the two previously selected relics and to contrast how they functioned in different cultural and temporal contexts. The course will also include field trips to the Mütter Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Penn Museum of Archeology and Anthropology.

Required Texts

Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Available as e-book through Penn Library)

All other texts will be available on the course’s Canvas site and on reserve at Van Pelt Library.

Grade Breakdown

Class Participation – 30%

Paper I: Analysis of pre-1800 religious relic – 20%

Paper II: Analysis of a modern cultural relic – 20%

Paper III: Comparative analysis of modern cultural and pre-modern religious relic – 20%

In-class group presentations – 10%

Papers

Students will produce three formal essays throughout the session: two analyses of relics from different time periods (one pre-1800 religious relic and one post-1800 cultural relic) and a final synthetic essay which compares the two relics and how they functioned in different temporal and cultural environments.

Papers I and II:

Papers I and II should be 5-7 pages long double-spaced and with standard font (Times New Roman) and 1-inch margins. Questions to consider when writing your analyses include:

- What kind of relic is this (primary, secondary, cultural etc.)?
- What is known about the origin of the relic? Where does this come from? Are the sources biased?
- Why has this relic been preserved? Who decided it was important?
- Who owned the relic and commissioned the reliquary?
- How did people access this relic? How is the relic presented to the viewer and why? Has this changed over time?
- How did this relic end up at this particular location?
- Did the relic inspire a pilgrimage?
- Are there particular miracles associated with this relic?
- Is the display of this relic problematic?
- What art or architecture is used to present the relic to the viewer?

At least one of these papers should be based on a religious or cultural relic located in Philadelphia (or somewhere else you will visit during the semester – New York, Washington, DC etc.). Go visit the relic/sacred place and consider the questions listed below.

Potential sites include: Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, reliquaries at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia History Museum (The Ordinary, the Extraordinary, and the Unknown: The Power of Objects Exhibit), the Mütter Museum, the Penn Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, the National Shrine of St. John Neumann, the National Shrine of St. Catherine Drexel, the National Shrine of St. Rita of Cascia, the National Museum of American Jewish History. There are many more! Please feel free to be creative!

Paper III: Comparative Essay

Write a 5-7 page essay comparing the pre-modern and modern relics you selected for your first two essays. Questions to consider include:

- What are the major similarities and differences between the two relics?
- Why were/are they valued as important/holy objects?
- What kind of setting is each “relic” presented in? Why? How are these settings similar and different?

- What external indicators are there that the object is “holy”? What makes the object’s importance legible to the viewer?

Helpful Websites for finding reliquaries for Paper I

<http://www.learn.columbia.edu/treasuresofheaven/>

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/relic/hd_relic.htm

ARTstor (available via library website)

<http://www.atlasobscura.com/categories/relics-and-reliquaries>

Please see me if you have difficulty or questions about locating sources.

Group Presentations

During Week 13, you and a group of fellow class members will give a 15-20 presentation one of three topics: the repatriation and display of Native American remains, the display of Holocaust relics or the display of 9/11 objects and victims’ remains. I have provided several articles to jump start your research, but expect the group to do further investigations into each issue. The presentation should include a history of the remains in question, the context of their current (or former display) and a history of the debate surrounding the display of each type of relic or object.

N.B. Readings are due the day they are listed!!

1. Sept. 12: What is a relic? Why preserve human remains?
 - a. John S. Strong, “Relics,” *Encyclopedia of Religion*
2. Sept. 19: Relics in different religious traditions: A Comparative Overview
 - a. Alexandra Walsham, “Introduction: Relics and Remains” in *Past and Present Supplement 5*, 2010
 - b. Kevin Trainor, “Pars pro toto: On Comparing Relic Practices,” *Numen* 57/3-4, 2010
 - c. Arnold Angenendt, “Relics and Their Veneration” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*
3. Sept. 26: Relics in Christian History (antiquity and early medieval period)
 - a. John Wortley, “The origins of Christian veneration of body-parts,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 223, 2006
 - b. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, entire
 - c. “The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna,” in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, pp. 3-9
 - a. “St. Augustine on the Rites at the Martyrs’ Tombs,” in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, pp. 297-98
4. Oct 3: Relics in Christian History (Relics during the high and late medieval period)
 - a. Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?* 259-262, 410-443

- b. Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, C.700 - C.1500*, 1-43
 - c. “Pilgrimage and Miracles in North Africa,” in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, 299-306
 - d. “The Pilgrim’s Guide to St. James’s of Compostela,” in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, 313-327
5. Oct. 10: Relics and Islam
- a. Brannon Wheeler, “Gift of the Body in Islam: The Prophet Muhammad’s Camel Sacrifice and Distribution of Hair and Nails at his Farewell Pilgrimage,” *Numen* 5, 2010
 - b. Josef W.Meri, “Relics of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam” in *Past and Present Supplement* 5, 2010
 - c. Wendy M. K. Shaw, “Between the secular and the sacred: A new face for the Department of the Holy Relics at the Topkapı Palace Museum,” *Material Religion* 6:1, 2010
6. Oct. 17: Relics in Judaism and Buddhism
- a. John S. Strong, “Introduction” from *Relics of the Buddha*
 - b. Karel R. van Kooij, “Relic veneration in Buddhism”
 - c. Kevin Trainor, “The Buddha’s ‘Cave of the Midday Rest’ and Buddhist relic practices in Sri Lanka,” *Material Religion* 9:4 2013
 - d. Ra’anana Boustani, “Jewish Veneration of the ‘Special Dead’ in Late Antiquity and Beyond,” in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*
 - e. Nimrod Luz and Noga Collins-Kreiner, “Exploring Jewish Pilgrimage in Israel” in *International Perspectives on Pilgrimage Studies: Itineraries Gaps and Obstacles*
7. Oct. 24: Ritual and Art: Housing relics in Christianity –
****N.B. Class will meet at Philadelphia Museum of Art*****
- a. Cynthia Hahn, “What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?” *Numen* 57, 2010
 - b. James Robinson, “From Altar to Amulet: Relics, Portability and Devotion” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*
 - c. Martina Bagnoli, “The Stuff of Heaven: Materials and Craftsmanship in Medieval Reliquaries” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*
 - d. Éric Palazzo, “Relics, Liturgical Space, and the Theology of the Church,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*
8. Oct. 31: Ritual and Art: Housing relics in Other Religious Traditions
- a. Fareeha Khan, “Why Mecca? Abraham and the Hajj in the Islamic tradition,” in *The Hajj: Pilgrimage in Islam*, 2016
 - b. Ifrah Zilberman, “The Renewal of Pilgrimage to Nabi Musa” in *Sacred Space in Israel and Palestine: Religion and Politics*
 - c. Mark Friedman, “Jewish Pilgrimage after the Destruction of the Second Temple,” in *City of the Great King: Jerusalem from David to the Present*

- d. Gideon Bar, “Reconstructing the Past: The Creation of Jewish Sacred Space in the State of Israel, 1948-1967.” *Israel Studies* 3:13, 2008
9. Nov. 7: Changing attitudes to relics in early modern Christianity
***** PAPER 1 DUE*****
- a. Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and the ‘Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed”
 - b. Trevor Johnson, “Holy Fabrications: The Catacomb Saints and the Counter-Reformation in Bavaria”
 - c. Lyndal Roper, “Luther Relics” in *Religion, the Supernatural and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*
 - d. Erasmus, “A Pilgrimage for Religion’s Sake” in *Medieval Saints: A Reader*, 601-628

Relics in the 19th and 20th centuries

10. Nov. 14: From religious to cultural relics: the rise of heritage
- a. David Lowenthal, “Introduction” and “Heritage Ascendant” from *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*
 - b. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History, Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations* 26, 1989

******Pick group and topic for presentations during Week 13******

11. Nov. 21: National and political relics and holy sites
- a. Robey Callahan, “The Liberty Bell: From Commodity to Sacred Object,” *Journal of Material Culture* 4:1, 1999
 - b. James L. Swanson, “The Blood relics of Abraham Lincoln” and “A Host of Relics from Lincoln's Last Days All Came to Reside at the Smithsonian,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 2015
 - c. Caitlin Dewey, “A Photographic Guide to the World’s Embalmed Leaders,” *Washington Post*, 3/8/13
 - d. Sarah Brumble, “The Atlas Obscura Guide to Communist Mummies,” *Atlas Obscura*, 12/17/12
 - e. Alexei Yurchak, “Bodies of Lenin: The Hidden Science of Communist Sovereignty,” *Representations* 129:9, 2015.
 - f. Jeremy Hsu, “Lenin’s Body Improves with Age,” *Scientific American*, 4/22/15
 - g. Avi Sasson, “From unknown saint to State site: The Jewish dimension in the sanctification process in the State of Israel,” in *Sacred Space in Israel and Palestine: Religion and Politics*

12. Nov. 28: Bones of contention: Human remains in museums
N.B. Class with meet at the Mütter Museum

- a. Tiffany Jenkins, “Introduction” and “Transforming Concerns about Human Remains into an Issue,” from *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections*
- b. Jody Joy, “Looking Death in the Face: Different Attitudes towards Bog Bodies and their Display with a Focus on Lindow Man” in *Regarding the Dead: Human Remains in the British Museum*
- c. The Ghosts of Murdered Kings (Bog Bodies Documentary):
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/ghosts-murdered-kings.html>
- d. Jasmine Day, “‘Thinking Makes it So:’ Reflections on the Ethics of Displaying Egyptian Mummies,” *Papers in Anthropology* 21:1 2014.

13. Dec. 5: Bones of contention: Repatriation and Display

*****GROUP PRESENTATIONS DUE*****

Repatriation and Display of Native American Remains

- a. Elazar Barkan, “Native American Restitution: Land, Human Remains, and Sacred Objects” in *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*
- b. Devon Mihesuah, “Introduction” and “American Indians, Anthropologists, Pothunters, and Repatriation: Ethical, Religious, and Political Differences from *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?*”
- c. Melissa Eddy, “Lost in Translation: Germany’s Fascination with the American Old West” and short film – “Native Fantasy: Germany’s Indian Heroes,” *New York Times*, 8/17/14
- d. Alan Knight, “The Several Legs of Santa Anna: A Saga of Secular Relics.”

Displaying Holocaust relics and remains

- e. Oren Baruch Stier, “Torah and Taboo: Containing Jewish Relics and Jewish Identity at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *Numen* 57, 2010
- f. Edward T. Linenthal, “Personalizing the Story: Faces and Artifacts,” in *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*
- g. Timothy W. Ryback, “Evidence of Evil,” *The New Yorker*, 11/15/93

Displaying relics at the 9/11 Museum

- h. Brooke Gladstone, “9/11 Enters the Realm of Museum,” *On the Media* (audio online)
- i. Anemona Hartocollis, “An Unsettled Legacy for 9/11 Remains,” *New York Times*, 4/3/2011
- j. Stephen Farrell, “In ‘Ceremonial Transfer,’ Remains of 9/11 Victims Are Moved to Memorial,” *New York Times*, 4/10/2014

14. Dec. 12: Relics and Remains in the 21st century

****** PAPER 2 DUE ******

- a. Alina Simone, “The Magical Law of Contagion: why people pay silly money for strange celebrity memorabilia.” *Slate*, 10/3/14

*****Preliminary Syllabus – Subject to Change*****

- b. Samantha Rollins and Peter Weber, “Lady Gaga's fake fingernail and 9 other gross celebrity items sold at auction,” *The Week*
- c. “Iraq conflict: Saddam's tomb destroyed in Tikrit fighting,” BBC News, 3/16/15
- d. “Headstone of Hitler’s parents removed,” *USA Today*, 3/30/2012
- e. Judy Dempsey, “Hitler Aide’s Grave Is Removed to Stop Neo-Nazi Pilgrimages,” *The New York Times*, 7/21/2011
- f. “Paris attacker Samy Amimour buried in unmarked grave,” BBC News, 12/27/15
- g. Colby Itkowitz, “The congressman who stole the pope’s water glass and drank from it,” *The Washington Post*, 9/25/15
- h. Neda Ulaby, “Origins of Exhibited Cadavers Questioned,” NPR 8/11/06

**** Paper 3 due on date of Exam****