

Europe in the 13th Century

A Time of Great Turmoil and Promise

To explore the social, intellectual, and artistic contributions of 13th century Europe, and their relevance for today.

Moderator:	Jim Averill
Date and Time:	Thursday 10:00 AM - Noon 10 weeks, starting February 22, 2018
Format:	Seminar
Location:	Smith College, Lilly Hall room 308, Northampton

Description: Why devote a seminar to the thirteenth century? As the historian G. Holmes observed, “The thirteenth century had been one of those periods, like the later ages of Renaissance and Romanticism, when a new intellectual impulse gave rise to bold and original speculation and the construction of dazzling systems of thought”. In this seminar we explore the truth of that observation. Potential topics range from everyday life in a feudal society, to the emerging nation/states of Europe and the personages who led them.

However, our interest is not simply factual. When entering a Gothic cathedral, like the one at Chartres, with its high, vaulted ceilings and stained glass windows, the visitor cannot help but marvel at the people who built such structures, without the aid of modern technology. Less tangible but equally impressive was the establishment of universities (most notably, at Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge), leading to some of the “dazzling systems of thought” alluded to by Holmes. And universities were not the only source of “bold and original speculation”. Then, as today, practical interests inspired enduring works of literature (Dante), mathematics (Fibonacci), geography (Marco Polo), and environmental concerns (Francis of Assisi). Interpersonal relations also underwent subtle but important changes during the period (chivalry, courtly love). Of course, not all was benign. When not off on crusade (the fourth through seventh), knights jousting with one another for prestige and entertainment, and the Inquisition sent many hapless victims to gruesome deaths.

Role of participants: Prepare a presentation and lead a discussion on a topic of your choice. A detailed list of potential topics is available from the moderator (via e-mail) on request.

Resources: Recommended: James J. Walsh, *The Thirteenth: Greatest of Centuries*. This book was originally published in 1907. Revisions, if any, after the 4th [1912] edition are inconsequential and can be ignored. The last hardback edition was 1970, as far as I know. Print-on-demand paperback copies are available through Coyote Canyon Press for \$29 (order through a local bookstore). Copies can also be obtained through on-line booksellers and the used book market, most for under \$20, and on loan from academic libraries.

About the Moderator: I have moderated three previous seminars; while I have no special expertise on the 13th century, I look forward to learning with you about this, one of the most vibrant yet overlooked periods in Western history.

Maximum number of participants: 18 **Emeritus/ae accepted:** yes

Course # S18EC