

History 259
Term 1 (Sept-Jan 2013), UBC

**Science, Medicine, and Technology in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds:
A History in Stories**

The Management: Carla Nappi
carla.nappi@ubc.ca

Office Hours: Tues 2-3.30 pm (in Buchanan
Tower 1109) & by appointment

Teaching Assistant: Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda
gaceves@alumni.ubc.ca

Office Hours: Friday 12.10-1.30 pm (in cafeteria in main
floor of Buchanan A) & by appointment

No [person]¹ is equipped for modern thinking until he has understood the anecdote of Agassiz and the fish:

A post-graduate student equipped with honours and diplomas went to Agassiz² to receive the final and finishing touches. The great man offered him a small fish and told him to describe it.

Post-Graduate Student: 'That's only a sunfish.'

Agassiz: 'I know that. Write a description of it.'

After a few minutes the student returned with the description of the Ichthus Heliodiplodokus, or whatever term is used to conceal the common sunfish from vulgar knowledge, family of Heliichtherinkus, etc., as found in textbooks of the subject.

Agassiz again told the student to describe the fish.

The student produced a four-page essay. Agassiz then told him to look at the fish. At the end of three weeks the fish was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the student knew something about it.

- Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934)

Welcome, fellow travelers, to the fascinating world of the global history of science, technology, and medicine in its earliest forms. Welcome, regardless of your academic background: whether you've never studied the history of science or have a longstanding interest in the topic, this course is for you.

Over the term, we're going to collectively explore the science and medicine of classical antiquity and of the medieval period, looking in turn at material translated from Greek, Latin, European-language, Chinese, Arabic and Persian sources. We'll pay special attention to the connections and translations that not only made possible the knowledge of various kinds of bodies (human, animal, pharmaceutical, planetary, spiritual) but also enabled that knowledge to circulate and transform in a global context. Along the way, we will talk about the universe, drunkenness, the soul, the stars, eyeballs, equations, blood, dinner, horses, and alchemical secrets, among many other things.

It is a major premise of the course that the ways we have come to know about the world in the past, and the ways that we know about it now, are fundamentally grounded in our ability to tell stories. These stories might be in the form of scientific articles, anatomy textbooks, poems, blog essays, mathematical equations, and diagrams, among many other possibilities: in each case, the form that the story takes helps shape the knowledge that we

¹ Pound says "man" here, not person, but not all of us gathered here are men, and so I'm taking liberties.

² Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), a famed paleontologist, geologist, and scientist of the history of life and its traces.

gain from it. We will be keeping this in mind throughout our journey through some fascinating material during the term. A close attention to storytelling forms will infuse every aspect of our time together: the lectures, reading discussions, and writing assignments will all be opportunities for you to both learn about some of the major works in the history of science and medicine, and to use different narrative forms to play with that history and find some aspect of it that inspires your passion and creativity.

The Shape of the Course: Lectures, Discussions, and Workshops

Most of the semester, we will see each other's smiling faces in person three times per week.

Tuesday Lectures: Tuesdays from 11-12.20 will be devoted to interactive lectures that provide a broad context for the week's reading.

Thursday Reading Discussions: Thursdays will be devoted to discussions of the week's reading materials, with the class broken up into two sections for this purpose: Group A (student with surnames A-K) will meet during the first half of the lecture period from 11-11.40, and Group B (student with surnames L-M) will meet during the second half of the period from 11.45-12.25 pm. We will start promptly, so make sure to be ON TIME!

*Pro Tip: The Management values punctuality above many other things.

Thursday or Friday Workshops: Thursday afternoons and Fridays (depending on whether you're in L01, L02, or L03) will be devoted to a combination of workshopping drafts of your assignments and further discussion of some major historiographical themes and approaches that are central to historical writing, and topics and concepts in the history of science, medicine, and technology in the early and medieval worlds.

An **online discussion board** will provide a space to continue class discussions of the course materials outside of the physical classroom walls. During the two weeks when we don't have Thursday or Friday in-person sessions, our discussion will move online after Tuesday's collective meeting.

Grading and Requirements

The Management loves it when people do well in one of her courses. She will do everything she can to help you do fabulously, learn lots, and enjoy the process. The success of this, however, will depend entirely on your efforts. To do well in the course, here's what you'll need to do:

1. Come to class! Attendance will form a significant part of your grade, and The Management will be practicing Random Acts of Attendance-Taking throughout the semester.
2. Complete the readings by the time indicated in the syllabus! Stay awake during class! Come to class having thought about the material, having made notes of what interested or perplexed you, and ready to actively discuss it with your instructor and colleagues! Laugh at The Management's jokes, which are likely to get increasingly horrible over the course of the semester!
3. Submit thoughtful weekly thinkpieces, thoughtfully, to Connect on time (and thoughtfully). Avoid, "I thought Ptolemy was cool. The End." kinds of thinkpieces. They need not be more than a paragraph or so, but put some brain-muscle into it.
4. Complete all of the written assignments on time.
5. Abide by the collective class compact (re: use of electronics, food and drink, etc.), which we'll set during the first or second class meeting.

The grading will be assessed as follows:

Participation: 35% (including both online and in class plus thinkpieces)

Assignment 1: 10% Assignment 2: 5% Assignment 3: 10% Assignment 4: 5% Assignment 5: 35%

There are no exams in this class! Wahoo! Instead, you'll be handing in a series of short writing assignments that are designed to culminate in a polished essay by the end of the term. This is meant to be both good **and** good for you. Read on for details.

Each student will have a choice as to the nature of the essay you work on: you might *(A) write a traditional argumentative historical essay, or *(B) use a hybrid format that merges some features and goals of the traditional argumentative historical essay with the narrative and structural conventions of another genre. Option (B) will involve writing a creative historical work **and** a short (5-7 pp) companion piece to accompany the assignment. In both cases, the short assignments (#1-4) are roughly equivalent.

Why am I giving you this option?, you may be wondering. There are many, many forms of historical writing both within and beyond the academic discipline – many exceptionally gifted historians are not just working in the traditional essay format, but are also (or instead) creating poems, fiction, music, visual art, films, and other forms of historical work. We'll talk about some examples over the course of the term. The final project is a chance to make the history of early science and medicine come alive for each of you, to let you pursue some aspect of the course material in much greater depth than we are able to accomplish in class, and to help you learn how to understand and use this history in the service of a larger intellectual goal.

Two of the short writing assignments will be turned in as final pieces. The other three will be turned in two stages. First, a draft of the assignment will be workshopped with peers and instructors. (This will not receive a letter grade but will be counted as part of the cumulative grade for the final assignment.) A week or so following the workshopping of the draft, a final version will be turned in for a letter grade after revisions made in light of the feedback from peer and instructor review.

A brief explanation of the writing assignments follows below. A detailed rubric for each of these interim assignments will be distributed in advance. Bibliographies are **not** included in the page counts cited above and below. Standard margins and use of 12-point font with double-spacing are assumed.

1. Assignment 1: Inspiration (10%)

Choose the genre of historical writing that you'd like to work in. This might be (A) a conventional historical argumentative essay, or it might be (B) another genre. Once you've done that, it's time to learn more about the craft and conventions of the historical genre that you've chosen to work in. Spend some time researching the genre, and submit a short argumentative essay that convinces your instructors and your peers that the particular genre is suited to exploring some aspect of the history of early/medieval science, technology, and medicine. Your essay should use a specific example from the history of early/medieval science, technology, and medicine to illustrate your point. This can be an example from class (if you're still not sure what you'd like to focus on for the final paper), or something from outside of the class readings and lectures (if you already know that you're fascinated with the history of alchemy, drugs, etc.). It should also include a bibliography of sources consulted in researching both the genre and the example (4 pages + bibliography)

24 Sept (by midnight): Assignment 1 *draft* posted to Connect

04 Oct (by midnight): Assignment 1 emailed to your instructor

2. Assignment 2: Exploration (5%)

*Option A [Argumentative Essay]: Library Skills Assignment that will help you explore your paper topic. A detailed rubric and explanation will be distributed well in advance of the due date!

*Option B [Other Historical Genre]: Library Skills Assignment that will help you explore your paper topic. A detailed rubric and explanation will be distributed well in advance of the due date!

11 Oct (by midnight): Assignment 2 emailed to your instructor

3. Assignment 3: Elaboration (10%)

*Option A [Argumentative Essay]: Introduction + one additional paragraph written out entirely + working annotated bibliography PLUS a meeting with your instructor to check in on the progress of the research

*Option B [Other Historical Genre]: Introduction to companion piece indicating the choice of format and nature of the structure of the piece + one additional paragraph written out entirely + working annotated bibliography PLUS a meeting with your instructor to check in on the progress of the genre piece. During this meeting, your instructor will discuss the project with you and determine with you what constitutes “half” of your final project for the purpose of Assignment 4.

22 Oct (by midnight): Assignment 3 *draft* posted to Connect

01 Nov (by midnight): Assignment 3 emailed to your instructor

4. Assignment 4: Conversation (5%)

*Option A [Argumentative Essay]: Write out the first half of the essay + a rough outline of the rest.

*Option B [Other Historical Genre]: Complete a draft of roughly half of the final project + a rough outline of the rest.

12 Nov (by midnight): Assignment 4 posted to Connect

5. Assignment 5: Celebration (35%)

*Option A [Argumentative Essay]: Complete essay (ca. 15 pages + bibliography)

*Option B [Other Historical Genre]: Complete companion piece (5-7 pages + bibliography) PLUS final genre piece.

26 Nov (by midnight): Assignment 5 *draft* posted to Connect

06 Dec (by 5 pm): Assignment 5 emailed to your instructor

Thinkpieces

You are required to post a thinkpiece almost every week **by Wednesday at 5 pm**, as indicated on the course Connect site. This is very, very important. Think of your thinkpieces as spaces to think about the week’s readings and issues before you come to discussion, not as onerous formal writing assignments. They will not receive individual letter-grades, but they will collectively form a significant part of your participation grade. Some TPs will have an assigned topic, and some will be completely free-form. There is no required length, and you should use the space as creatively as you’d like: raise questions, argue with the authors you’ve read, work through something in the readings that particularly excited or troubled you, etc. You should be careful and thoughtful in your writing and show that you’ve done the assigned reading. Avoid thinkpieces that merely state something vague, like “XYZ was interesting.” Wherever possible, cite the course materials. (Check out the thinkpiece rubric for a guide to what you should be shooting for.) Aside from that, the format is up to you. Be creative. Take risks. Use The Force. You’re not required to respond to other students’ posts, but please feel welcome to!

Extra Bonus PRO TIP #1: Rather than typing directly into the Connect web browser, compose your thinkpiece in a separate document on your computer first, and then cut and paste it into the Connect window. This will save you from the otherwise-inevitable frustration of spending kaboodles of time typing out your innermost thoughts on the readings, just to have the browser crash or the connection time out when you try to submit it and POOF! it has vanished into the ether.

Extra Bonus PRO TIP #2: Don’t wait until the last minute to post! This will help avoid your TP being late because of last-minute internet- or website-related shenanigans.

Readings

Most of our reading material takes the form of landmark **primary sources** in the history of science and medicine. (Not sure what a “primary source” is and why it matters? Not to worry! We’ll get to that.) All of the readings are available via our History 259 course website on Connect. I will often post a “Weekly Guide” on Connect that will serve as a roadmap to each week’s material and assignments. Please read it closely!

Course Website on Connect

The course Connect site is our virtual classroom for the semester. It is where you will post your thinkpieces, where our online course sessions will take place, and where I will post the short reading assignments and lecture handouts. You can find Connect here:

<http://elearning.ubc.ca/connect/>

Click the little blue “CWL Login” button and proceed to log in with your CWL. Under “Course List,” click on Tab for “2013W1-HIST259-101-Science, Medicine, and Technology in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds-Nappi.” The “Resources” on the left side of the page contains links to the materials for each week. Click on the relevant link (“Week 2 Materials,” etc.) and it will bring you to that week’s readings, Weekly Guide, any handouts, and other goodies. The “Discussions” link will take you to the discussion boards for each week. This is where you will post your thinkpieces and where we will have stimulating and mind-expanding online discussions.

Posting on the Connect Discussion Board

1. Click the “Discussions” link on the lefthand side of the Connect screen.
2. Click on the topic devoted to the discussion for the week (“Week 2” etc.).
3. To post a new thread, click the bar for “Create Thread” and follow the directions. You can also post attachments.

And so on, and so on. Lather, rinse, repeat. If you have trouble logging in with your CWL, ask the UBC IT Helpdesk using the online form or telephone number available here:

<http://it.ubc.ca/support>

If you have other questions about using the website, ask The Management!

The Importance of Checking Email

IT IS VITAL that you check your email regularly, as email is the primary medium I will use to contact you about the course. Please get in the habit of checking, every day, your official email account on record with UBC.

Lateness and Absences

Attending class is mandatory. You are expected to attend all class sessions, except in cases of a documented family emergency, doctor-excused illness, or religious observance. The Management practices Random Acts of Attendance-Taking in class sessions. All students are allowed one unexcused absence during the term – The Management considers this to be a “There’s Nothing Technically Wrong With Me But My Brain Is Melting And I Just Really Need Some Sleep” get-out-of-absentee-jail-free card. However, two or more absences will directly impact your participation grade (and thus your final grade for the course).

Late assignments will be penalized as follows: (1) No late thinkpieces will be accepted, (2) Late writing Assignments #1-4 will be docked 10 points per day until you hand them in, and (3) No late final papers (Assignment #5) will be accepted. Also, very importantly: MAKE SURE TO SUBMIT ALL DRAFTS ON TIME!!!

Plagiarism! Yuck! Don’t Do It!

I expect all work in this class to be your own, and assignments found to be plagiarized will receive a failing grade. Do not cut-and-paste from websites, do not copy others’ words or ideas without citing the source, and do not hand in work that you have also handed in (or will hand in) for another class. Familiarize yourself with UBC’s definitions of and policies regarding plagiarism: <http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/resource-guides/avoiding-plagiarism/> and come talk to me if you have any questions about this, at any time. So say we all.