

Purdue University, Department of History

HISTORY 495

A Person and a Place: the Joy of Microhistory

PLACE AND TIME

Dates: Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 12th January – 8th May 2026

Location: WALC 2127

Office Hours: Online, by request

Zoom room: <https://purdue-edu.zoom.us/j/6898881530>

COURSE GOALS

This course will develop students' historical research and writing skills through the exploration of the writing of microhistories. During the semester, students will read and analyse a series of works focusing on either of up to four individuals, or of a particular location no more than 100 sq. mi in size. Such readings will showcase the power of closely-focused and richly sourced work in getting to the subjective experience of historical figures, and a keener sense of how large historical processes unfold on a human scale. Based on this, students will then choose their own microhistorical topic, and complete a research project of their own.

Previous study of history is not required for this course.

Please notify me if you have a learning disability or have physical limitations that require accommodation. We will work together to develop a plan that suits your needs.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Yadin, Yigael. *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome*. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children Since the Thirteenth Century* (1979, Eng. trans. 1983)
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Translated by John and Anne Tedeschi. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Dalrymple, William. *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857*. London: Bloomsbury, 2006.
- Walther, Anne. *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

CONTACT

I can be reached at swijeyer@purdue.edu. Please note that if I receive messages after 1800 I may not be able to reply until after 0900 the next day. Notification of absence or requests for extensions should be communicated as soon as possible; messaging immediately before the deadline is generally unacceptable except under extenuating circumstances.

Please take advantage of my office hours; I want to get to know you and I'm there to help. You may also email if you have questions or concerns, but I may not be able to respond to all emails. If it is important, please speak with me in person.

Emails exchanged between us will be professional communications and should therefore be composed politely and properly. This includes addressing them to me by my title and surname. Please do not message me as if composing a text to a friend. Explanations should be clear and concise. You will be expected to be polite and respectful of others in class.

CLASSWORK

Grading for this class will be as follows:

- **Participation:** 25%
 - You will be graded on your participation in discussions, contributions to class, and behaviour, **at the instructor's discretion.**
- **Book analyses:** 2 x 15%
 - Please select **two** texts from our reading list to present to class.
 - Your presentations should be **ten minutes +/- one minute** and should contain:
 - A historiographical evaluation of the work
 - Comparisons to any similar ones
 - Anything that struck you as interesting about the *methodology* of the piece.
- **Final project**
 - **Paper [2500-3000 words]:** 30%
 - Your final paper should be a work of original research on:
 - A single individual
 - A group of no more than four people.
 - A location no more than 100 sq. mi in size.
 - **Methodology Presentation [15 minutes]:** 15%
 - Your final presentation should explain to the class:
 - Why you chose this topic
 - Your methodology
 - A close discussion of sources you found particularly valuable
 - Lessons learned from the project

Make sure you read the guidance linked [here](#) for essays.

Essays that are not formatted, footnoted, or properly grammatical will be penalised at the instructors' discretion.

- Students unable to complete an assignment by the due date should consult their instructor as early as possible to discuss an extension.
- Extensions are not normally granted for reasons of work due in other courses or extra-curricular activities, but may be granted for reasons of illness or a death in the family. Any extension granted must be confirmed by email from the instructor. In no case will an extension of more than one week be granted. Students submitting written assignments late without an extension are penalised at the rate of one grade per day of lateness.
- All required work must be submitted in order to receive a final grade for the course.

PARTICIPATION AND IN-CLASS BEHAVIOUR

I will try my level best not to make this class boring, but in return I expect you to pay attention and engage with the subject matter.

- Students who sleep, are consistently tardy, do not read the materials, and/or are otherwise not paying attention in class will see their behaviour impacting this mark.
- Please familiarise yourself with the university's policies on:
 - [Academic honesty](http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academic-integrity/index.html) (www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academic-integrity/index.html)
 - [Use of copyrighted materials](http://www.purdue.edu/policies/academic-research-affairs/ia3.html)
(www.purdue.edu/policies/academic-research-affairs/ia3.html)
 - [Attendance and other regulations](http://www.purdue.edu/studentregulations/regulations_procedures/classes.html)
(www.purdue.edu/studentregulations/regulations_procedures/classes.html)
- Please turn off all cell phones and pagers. E-mailing or web-surfing via your laptop is also not appropriate. Such distractions will affect your participation grade.
- Depending on the location, you may be allowed to eat or drink in the classroom, but please do not distract other students; if you do, your participation will be affected.
- All work, including readings and web postings, missed due to absence must be made up before the next scheduled class meeting.
- **Attendance is not optional**, but with prior notice you may miss one class without incurring any penalty. Except in the case of genuine and documented emergencies, such absences must be confirmed with me via email before class begins.
- **Students with more than 3 unexcused absences will receive a -5% penalty to their final score**, with a further -1% per absence

Lectures and classroom discussions may not be recorded in any medium other than notes.

COURSE GUIDE

Items in red designate items that must be prepared before you come to class; failure to do so will affect your participation score.

Items in bold red are graded items that must be finished by the date indicated in order to receive points.

PLEASE DO ALL YOUR WRITTEN WORK IN THIS FOLDER

Week 1: Basic Historical Theory (Mon 12/01, Wed 14/01, Fri 16/01)

- Introduction
 - [TL;DR](#)
 - [Slides on key historical concepts](#)
 - [Essay guidelines](#)
- Secondary reading/watching
 - [Birkbeck Explains: What is Global History?](#)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3upKyJsaRI>)
 - [The School of Life: History of Ideas - Modernity](#)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIdflecvQG8>)

Week 2: Bar-Kokhba (Mon 19/01, Wed 21/01, Fri 23/01)

- **Lecture:** Introduction to the Roman Empire
- **Required reading:** Yadin, Yigael. *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome*. New York: Random House, 1971.
- Discussion.

Week 3: The Greyhound Saint (Mon 26/01, Wed 28/01, Fri 30/01)

- **Lecture:** Introduction to Medieval Western Europe
- **Required reading:** Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children Since the Thirteenth Century* (1979, Eng. trans. 1983)
- Discussion.

Week 4: Project Formation (Mon 02/02, Wed 04/02, Fri 06/02)

- **Narrow down potential topics**
- **Workshop their feasibility**
- **Settle on a subject**
- **Begin devising an argument**

Week 5: Menocchio (Mon 09/02, Wed 11/02, Fri 13/02)

- **Lecture:** The Prehistory of Modernity
- **Required reading:** Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Translated by John and Anne Tedeschi. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Discussion
- **Work on bibliography**

Week 6: Bahadur Shah Zafar (Mon 16/02, Wed 18/02, Fri 20/02)

- **Lecture:** The British and the Mughals
- **Required reading:** Dalrymple, William. *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857*. London: Bloomsbury, 2006.

- Discussion
- Work on bibliography

Week 7: Matsuo Taseko (Mon 23/02, Wed 25/02, Fri 27/02)

- **Lecture:** Revolutionary Japan
- **Required reading:** Walhall, Anne. *The Weak Body of a Useless Woman: Matsuo Taseko and the Meiji Restoration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Discussion
- Work on bibliography

Week 8: Basic Planning (Mon 02/03, Wed 04/03, Fri 06/03)

- Finalising topic
- Develop a basic structure and preliminary thesis.
- Begin research.

Week 9: Research (Mon 09/03, Wed 11/03, Fri 13/03)

- Continue research in-class.
- Workshop ideas and difficulties

Week 10: HALF TERM BREAK (Mon 16/03, Wed 18/03, Fri 20/03)

Week 11: Research (Mon 23/03, Wed 25/03, Fri 27/03)

- Continue research in-class.
- Workshop ideas and difficulties

Week 12: Workshopping (Mon 30/03, Wed 01/04, Fri 03/04)

- Discuss and evaluate each other's essays.
- Provide feedback.
- Rework.

Week 13: Research and write (Mon 06/04, Wed 08/04, Fri 10/04)

Students may use this week to complete their essay on their own.

Each student may book 1 x 30 minute meeting for focused feedback.

Week 14: Research and write (Mon 13/04, Wed 15/04, Fri 17/04)

Students may use this week to complete their essay on their own.

Week 15: Final Presentations (Mon 20/04, Wed 22/04, Fri 24/04)

Week 16: Final Draft + Picnic with Dogs (Mon 27/04, Wed 29/04, Fri 01/05)

Final essay due 8th May