HIST 455: Forgery and History

Instructor: Bruce O'Brien

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Course description and goals

The course studies forgery from the earliest written records to the present and evaluates the motive behind their creation, the techniques used to make them, and their uncovering. The interest, however, is not with the mere technical expertise involved in forging or in the discovery of forgery, but in what these texts tell us about earlier societies and how they have or can shift our understanding of the past. In that sense, forgeries are important sources for the time of their creation, telling us perhaps better than authentic sources can about the norms of the society for which it was created. Focussing on forgeries also refines our analytical skills by pushing us to think hard about what is and is not true.

Goals

Forgery and History counts as a seminar in the History major. With respect to the goals of the History major, students will gain an:

- ability to read critically primary sources and modern authorities
- ability to write with clarity about the past
- ability to utilize technological resources in research
- understanding of the discipline's methods and processes

Required Readings

All readings are available either online through Canvas or in Simpson Library.

Written work

1. *Article using your forgery as a source*. You will write an 12 to 14-page paper which focuses on a source you forge. Thus, you must create a forgery and then explain, as if your forgery were real, how it changes the historical understanding of the period in which it is set, or the period of its alleged composition. This paper will follow all of the rules governing formal research papers (i.e., footnotes, proper format, etc). When possible, you will want to provide a facsimile of your forgery to accompany your article. This article should be submitted to Canvas as a pdf or doc, and also sent to me as an attachment to an email.

2. *Assessment of another student's article and forgery*. You will review one of your classmates' articles, especially focusing on its forged source in order to test its authenticity. Your judgment will take the form of a 5 to 7-page response to the article. This response will also follow the formal guidelines for historical research (aka Chicago Style), and should be submitted to both me and the author as a pdf attached to email.

3. One-paragraph descriptions of a forgery you would create, brought to class for discussion (part of participation grade)

4. Informal and ungraded writing for class meetings, usually amounting to a paragraph answering a question. These are in order to prepare for discussions and count towards your participation grade.

Course Blog

There is a course blog at umwblogs.org which will serve as a resource for your work. We will all supply the content, which will consist of two types of information. First, you will be encouraged to add short descriptions and links (if available) to interesting forgeries you come across in print or online. Second, you will share any useful resources you discover, so that other students in the class can benefit from it. For instance, if you find a website or online project that focusses on 19th-century handwriting styles, that might prove useful to someone who wants to create letters which would appear to have been written in the 19th century.

Participation

The course runs as a reading and discussion seminar for the most part. For that reason attendance and active participation in discussion are required of all students. This course needs to have excellent participation in order for it to work, and this level of participation can only be reached if all students do all of the readings. There will be occasional ungraded assignments meant to launch discussions; these will be part of the participation grade. Contributions to the blog also are part of participation.

Grading Principles

In this class, an A (93–100) or A- (90–92) mean that the work done is of excellent quality. B+ (88–89), B (83–87) and B- (80–82) mean that the work was well done, competent, even excellent

in some ways, but that there is room for improvement. C+ (78–79), C (73–77), and C- (70–72) signify that the work was satisfactory in most respects, even good in some ways, but that there was much room for improvement. D+ (68–69) and D (60–67) are passing grades, but mean that much more could be done in most if not all areas of the work, but that it was not missing *in toto* any key aspect of the assignment. I assign grades based on a number of variables which, if they can be named (e.g., style, argument, research, etc.), cannot in reality be separated from each other. Each variable affects the others. Deficient style will vitiate argument; poor research will undermine argument, and so on. Students earning less than a C by mid semester will receive a notice of unsatisfactory performance.

As with all courses at UMW, this class will abide by the honor code. In particular, students must not commit plagiarism. Inappropriate collaboration is also forbidden. Any questions concerning the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate appropriation and citation of sources should be brought to the professor before assignments are turned in.

Students with Disabilities

The Office of Disability Services has been designated by the University of Mary Washington as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you receive services through that office and require accommodations for this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodations. I will hold any information you share with me in strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise.

If you have not made contact with the Office of Disability Services and have reasonable accommodation needs, I will be happy to help you contact them. The office will require appropriate documentation of a disability.

Other Resources

If you are depressed or stressed out and finding it hard to cope with school, the people around you, or life in general, I recommend visiting the UMW Counseling and Psychological Services Center: the Center can be reached at (540) 654-1053 (M-F 8-5), or you can stop by Lee 106.

For events and announcements from the History Department, as well as useful pages on research and writing, see the Department's News and Resources website: http://cas.umw.edu/historyamericanstudies/

Warning on Electronic Devices

I am rather torn on this point. I sometimes feel like a warden at an asylum for people addicted to electronic devices. Although there are clear advantages to having laptops in class, I have found over the years that some will not be able to resist the temptation to check email or surf. So for the first half of the course, you cannot use a laptop in class unless you have a specific accomodation for this. We may be able to relax this later in the term. For the entire semester, however, *phones must be turned off completely* and not just set to vibrate. They cannot be used in any way during class. It follows, then, that there will be no texting during class. To text at any point shows you do not respect me or your classmates, let alone the hard work of some who may be paying your tuition. If I see you texting, you will be asked to leave class that day.

Note: This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

Calendar

January

12 Introduction for Forgery, Evidence, and History. Opening case: Jesus' Wife: A Modern Parable

14 Forgery, Scholarship, and History

Read: Karen King article on the Gospel of Jesus' wife; a NYT story on the controversy; and Andrew Bernhard's article on how it might have been forged.

19 Judaism, the Canon of the Bible, in the Ancient World

There is a page listing the works we will look at over the next two weeks, along with some questions to consider. The only reading you need to do for class today is the chapter on Ancient Judaism by Shaye Cohen.

21 Jewish writings in the time of the Second Temple

Read: Letter of Aristeas

FYI: the list of Jewish Second Temple pseudepigrapha and apocrypha. Note that the list does not include texts attributed to pagan authors which nevertheless confirm the truths of Judaism (like the Sibylline books).

26 The One That Made It Into the Bible: *Daniel*

You will find here an online translation of the Jewish version of Daniel (in Hebrew and Aramaic, and not including three stories appended to Daniel by Christians)

The *Wikipedia* article on the Book of Daniel is fine for background and references the debates and facts.

28 The Also-Rans: Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha

The Sibylline Oracles; The Psalms of Solomon; Pseudo-Phocylides; The Treatise of Shem.

February

2 Classical Forgeries: Plato' *Rival Lovers* and Euripides' *Rhesus*.

There are a number of texts to read for class. Start with a brief overview of the issue; Plato, Rival Lovers; Diogenes Laertius' Life of Plato. "Plato" in Oxford Classical Dictionary; Table of contents and a few pages from Plato, Complete Works. For the Rhesus, the Wikipedia article is enough.

4 Reactions: Galen, Dionysius, Theopompus, and the Alexandria Librarians

Read Grafton, Introduction and chapter one and chapters 2 and 3. Pay particular attention to his discussions of Galen, Porphyry, and other Classical critics. (I also include chapter 4 and notes, also linked later in the syllabus)

9 Early Christian Fakes: Letters of Paul and Pseudo-Paul

Here are introductory entries on relevant letters and Paul in the Oxford Companion to the Bible; This short piece discusses New Testament fakes and has a good bibliography; Here are the letters

of Paul which are in the New Testament (which are relevant to the course); and here are the letters which did not pass the test.

11 Popular Christianities

Read: *Acts of Paul and Thecla*; *The Gospel of Thomas*; *The Gospel of Mary*. The last two appear as online translations with very brief introductions. They are in part derived from these print editions, which have slightly more detailed introductions: Gospel of Mary and Gospel of Thomas.

16 Emperors and Biographers: the *Historia Augusta*.

Read the introduction to the *Historia Augusta* by Anthony Birley and an article by Ronald Syme entitled 'The Composition of the Historia Augusta: Recent Theories' (1972), both easiest to read once downloaded.

18 The Lives of Elagabalus and Other Great Men

Read the lives of Marcus Aurelius, Elagabalus, and the Two Maximini from the *Historia Augusta*. A more recent translation of the life of Elagabalus is also available as a download.

23 Evaluating Authenticity: a Workshop

25 Inventing Sources: a workshop

February 26-March

3—5 Spring Break

8 Inventing Sources: the workshop continues.

10 Conquest and Forgery in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance

Read three important articles about the Golden Age of forgery:

Giles Constable, "Forgery and Plagiarism in the Middle Ages" (1983).

E. A. R. Brown, "*Falsitas pia siue reprehensibilis*: Medieval Forgers and Their Intentions (1988).

Paul Meyvaert, "Medieval Forgers and Modern Scholars: Tests of Ingenuity" (1986).

15 Charters, Laws, and the Quest for Security

Read: O'Brien, "Forgery and the Literacy of the Common Law" (1995); *The Laws of Edward the Confessor* (Laws; chapter one, chapter two; notes)

For discussion, answer the questions on this sheet.

If you are curious how texts are reconstructed from manuscript evidence, you can also read how this was done for the Laws you just read:

Establishing the Text of the Author Part 1; Part 2.

17 Imagined Pasts and Anglo-Norman Credulity

Read: Geoffrey of Monmouth, history of the Kings of Britain (introduction; selection one; selection two)

Henry of Huntingdon, *History of the English*; Gerald of Wales, *Journey through Wales*.

22 Crusade of Lies.

Read: Letter of the Emperor Alexis to the count of Flanders.

24 Annius of Viterbo (a.k.a. Giovanni Nanni) and the Italian Renaissance

Read A. Grafton on Nanni and other Renaissance forgers; and Walter Stephens's interpretation of what was going on in Nanni's head.

Write out an answer to this question: Why did Nanni's forgeries fail?

29 Reformation Forgers: Desiderius Erasmus and Robert Ware.

Read: Diarmaid MacCulloch, "Foxes, Firebrands, and Forgery: Robert Ware's Pollution of Reformation History" (2011); Grafton (where he discusses Erasmus).

Write out an answer to this question: Why do legitimate scholars like Erasmus and Ware resort to forgery?

31 Antiquity and Romanticism: Thomas Chatterton and James Macpherson

Read Chatterton's Rowley Poems (pp. 5-25 and 137-49; you don't have to read the following section (pp. 28-34), which is a survey of the whole collection; it may be useful); A selection from Macpherson's *Ossian*.

Write a paragraph answering the following question: What do the *Rowley Poems* and *Ossian* have in common that would explain their appeal to their contemporaries?

April

5 The Undying Shakespeare: Vortigern

Shakespeare Forged: William Henry Ireland's Vortigern.

Come prepared to act out scenes from this brilliant and undervalued piece of dramatic literature.

7 Forgery and Antisemitism: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*

Read: Selections from the *Protocols*; James Parkes on antisemitism in Russia; and Norman Cohn on the Protocols. A complete copy of the Protocols can be found here.

Write a paragraph in answer to this question: what is the difference between what Parkes writes about

antisemitism and the antisemitism represented by the *Protocols*?

8 Bibliographies for forgery papers due--email submission or upload to Canvas

12 Operation Mincemeat: The Man Who Never Was

Read: a short article in wikipedia on the plan; selections of the documents forged.

Assignment: Create an additional document to accompany Major Martin. Bring it in for discussion. This one is extra fun.

14 Vikings USA!

Read: Barry Fell, Saga America (1980) and Erik Wahlgren, The Vikings and America (1986)

Write a paragraph on the following topic: What does the success (albeit limited) of viking forgeries tell us about American culture?

19 The Mormon Letters and Murder

Read: The Salamander Letter; wikipedia articles on Mark Hoffman, Martin Harris, the Salamander Letter, and the *Book of Mormon*.

Come prepared to discuss all of these.

21 The Ossuary of James, Brother of Jesus

No reading: I will tell a story.

Articles incorporating forgeries due today.

Last day to add to the course blog.

22 Department Symposium

***Final exam period*: Thursday, April 28, by 2:30 (Reports due)**