

Dying for their faith: martyrs and martyrdom in early modern Europe

Start date 7 July 2019

End date 8 July 2019

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Dr Ceri Law

Course code 1819NTX013

Director of ISP and LL

Sarah Ormrod

**For further information on
this course, please contact
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Tutor biography

Dr Ceri Law is currently working as a Postdoctoral Research Associate on the interdisciplinary project 'Remembering the Reformation', which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Before this she worked as a Lecturer in Early Modern British History at Queen Mary University of London, after completing her PhD in History at the University of Cambridge. Her first book, *Contested Reformations in the University of Cambridge, 1535-84* was published by the Royal Historical Society in 2018. This focuses on religious change in sixteenth-century England and takes the University of Cambridge as a case study. Her current research focuses on the role of memory in how early modern people understood and debated the religious changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with a particular focus on biographical and autobiographical forms of memory.

Course programme

Sunday

Please plan to arrive between 10:00 and 12:00. You can meet other course members in the bar. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

13:00	Lunch
14:30 – 16:00	What Makes a Martyr and Why Did It Matter?
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	Saints and Heretics: The Medieval Legacy
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Witnesses for the Gospel: Protestant Martyrs

Monday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Dying for the true church: Catholic Martyrs
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Spreading the Word: Images and Accounts of Martyrdom
12:45	Lunch
14:00 – 15:30	What Did Martyrs Make? Impact and Legacy of Early Modern Martyrdom

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course has three aims:

- To offer a broad outline of the course and nature of religious conflict in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, and the role that concepts of martyrdom played within this
- To consider similarities and differences in concepts of martyrdom between different religious groups and across time, and what this reveals about early modern culture
- To introduce students to a range of contemporary source material on martyrdom, both written and visual, and to consider how this can be evaluated

Content:

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries notions of Christian unity in Western Europe were forever changed by the process of Reformation: multiple religious groups claimed to represent the 'true Church'. In the course of the conflicts that followed, thousands of men and women died for their faith. The status of these people – and which of them could be claimed as 'martyrs', as those who has died for the true faith – was much discussed, and much disputed. This course takes the powerful cultural ideal of 'martyrdom' both as an important topic in its own right and as one window into broader processes of religious conflict and change in early modern Western Christianity.

Beginning with a consideration of late medieval concepts of martyrdom, the course will include sessions devoted to both Protestant and Catholic martyrs, allowing us to compare and contrast across time and across different religious traditions. One session will focus particularly on martyrologies (written accounts of martyrs), and the ways that ideas about those who had died for their faith spread and were communicated. In a final session, we will reflect on the significance of martyrdom in Europe and beyond, and the long legacy that these early modern conflicts over the dead created. Throughout we'll try and address some important questions together: why were martyrs so contested? What did they represent to early modern people? What can they tell us about the world in which they lived – and died?

Presentation of the course:

This course will be taught through a mixture of lecture and class discussion, with a particular emphasis on early modern sources, both written and visual (all sources will be given in English translation where necessary).

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a critical understanding of the ways in which the term 'martyr' was used in early modern Europe, and the ways in which this varied over time and among different groups
- Evaluate the role of the concept of martyrdom in broader religious debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries
- Analyse appropriate contemporary source material, considering its significance and challenges for modern historical understanding

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Harvard University Press, 1999) This was a seminal book, and is the most comprehensive comparative study of both Protestant and Catholic approaches to martyrdom in early modern Europe. It is the most highly recommended text on this list.

Diana Wood, *Martyrs and Martyrologies* (Blackwell, 1993)

This collection of essays covers a much longer time period than this course so you might want to read selectively within (if you do have the time, though, you may find a longer-term perspective very helpful)

Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer (eds), *Martyrs and martyrdom in England, c. 1400-1700* (The Boydell Press, 2007) There are many useful items in this essay collection; the introduction and first chapters are particularly helpful overviews

Robert Kolb, *For All the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Mercer University Press, 1987)

David Nicholls, 'The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation', *Past & Present* 121 (1988)

Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603* (Ashgate, 2002)

Susannah Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Written by a literary scholar, this offers an important perspective and is particularly useful because it compares across different religious groups.

Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethan England* (Continuum, 2011). This is an interesting case study which explores the broader ramifications of one particular martyr.

Website addresses

www.johnfoxe.org

An online scholarly edition of perhaps the most famous early modern martyrology. It is well worth exploring: as well as the various texts (and images), there is a wealth of information in the 'Essays' section (see under 'Critical Apparatus').

<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-K-AST-00007-00015-A/5>

If you find yourself fascinated by Foxe you may also want to look at these high-quality digital reproductions of the images in Cambridge University Library's copy of this famous text.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

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