The purpose of this course is to study the ways in which the memory and myth of the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne (d. 814) contributed to the shaping of European culture and society from the ninth century to the modern world. In life, Charlemagne enacted a widespread cultural reform that laid the very foundations upon which modern European society would be built. Where before the ninth century “Europe” was an amalgam of disparate cultural influences – some pagan, some Christian, most an admixture of both – after the ninth century the first seeds of a pan-European consciousness began to take root. In death, the figure of Charlemagne would continue to represent this pan-European consciousness, evoking not just legendary power, but also an imagined unity of the past that predated late medieval and modern European factionalism, regionalism, and nationalism.

Students will learn to use interdisciplinary historical and literary methods to explore a set of ideas and problems of particular relevance to the study of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period: these include the cultural production of myth and memory, the birth of “Europe,” the rise of “the state,” the Crusades, and early colonialism. The seminar will begin in the ninth century, building a firm foundation of knowledge about Charlemagne in contemporary historical memory, before moving briskly forward in time to study Charlemagne in legend: the bearded, aged Charlemagne, who became a symbol of European economic domination and cultural hegemony. Seminar participants will investigate the ways in which writers drew upon the remembrance of Charlemagne to lend their communities social and religious power; we will
discuss the ways in which Charlemagne became a representative figure for all of Latin Christendom in holy war; we will learn how later medieval and Renaissance authors drew upon the figure and legend of Charlemagne to represent the new concerns and ideals of a world that had become remarkably different from Charlemagne’s own.

Required Texts (available at the NYU Bookstore)


Further readings will be posted on the course website.

You will be expected to bring all readings to class, ready for consultation and use, in either hard copy (most preferable) or electronic form (notebook computer).

Course Requirements and Grading

As this is a seminar, students will necessarily be active participants in the course. Students are expected to come to class each week having read all assignments carefully and completely, ready for friendly and lively discussion. During the semester, each student will write two 500-word essays and a final essay concerning collective memory in the modern world (see below for more specific guidelines). Students will be asked to be as creative as possible with these projects and encouraged to use them to develop their own concentration interests and intellectual pursuits.

Discussion questions posted to Course Site (due Sunday nights, 2am) and provocation 15%
Two 500-word essays 15%
10-12 page (12 pt font, double-spaced, 1” margins) final essay draft 15%
Significantly Revised 10-12 page Final Essay 20%
Participation* 35%

* Your participation grade includes attendance, preparation, and active participation in classroom discussion.

Assignments

Discussion Questions and Answers: Good scholarship begins with good questions. Thus we will continually discuss and practice the art of asking strong analytical questions in this class. Each week, NO LATER THAN SUNDAY NIGHT AT 2AM, each student will prepare and post an analytical discussion question, written in complete sentences, about that week’s primary reading.
We will discuss the criteria for good scholarly questions further in class, but in general, questions should be thoughtful and provocative, and should also include a few sentences of information explaining how the readings led to the formulation of the question and even identifying passages that might be fruitful to explore in consideration of the question.

Provocations: It will be the job of two students to begin discussion each Monday. They must read all of the discussion board questions and formulate an opening statement (one to three sentences, usually) that is designed to provoke discussion. By “provocation,” I mean a contentious (but respectful, of course) argument that directly engages the material of a given week and sparks a lively discussion, often by challenging common or “natural” modes of thinking. Make sure that your provocations lead from or suggest a question or series of questions that could produce a multitude of “correct” answers. It takes time to devise a thoughtful provocation. It requires anticipating how a discussion will flow and why. So if it’s your week, don’t leave this to the last minute!

500-word Essays: Students will write two 500 (+/-10)-word essays during the semester. We will discuss all of these assignments in much further detail in class, but the main purpose of these essays is to help students to practice critical thinking skills. For all essays, I will expect you 1) to introduce an argument that answers an analytical question (implied or explicitly stated); 2) to defend that argument with explicit reference to evidence; and 3) to conclude by explaining how that argument contributes to a broader understanding of particular historical-literary concepts, themes, problems, and texts that are at issue in the essay.

Research Essay: Each student will write one 10-12 page (12pt font, double-spaced, 1” margins) essay on collective memory in his or her own world, in dialogue with the scholarship that we encounter in the first unit of the course. Students will be given considerable freedom to link this assignment to concentration interests and should consult with me as soon as possible if they have specific ideas about how they might want to do so. As part of the final project assignment, students will submit a formal project proposal; a formal draft will also be due the evening of 11/17. I will comment on these drafts and will then require a significant revision for the final draft due at the end of term.

Attendance, Late Papers, and Incomplete Policy

In order to experience the course in full, you are expected to attend every class meeting (I’ll try my best to make it worth your while). If it happens, however, that you must miss a class due to illness or some other legitimate conflict, please contact me ahead of time. Note that even legitimate absences should be kept to a minimum. Excessive absences will result in a penalty to your participation grade. More than five unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

Late papers may be docked one letter grade for every 24 hours that they are late. I have designed assignments to be challenging, but eminently doable; thus if you find that you are struggling to meet deadlines, please do not hesitate to contact me for help. There is no shame in doing so (in fact, it’s the whole point of taking a class) and often I will be able to help you to streamline your process and to work more efficiently.

Gallatin has a strong policy on students' taking incompletes, based on two essential premises: (a) students should take incompletes only for good reasons (“I haven't finished yet” is not a good reason), and (b) students should meet deadlines for completing the required work. If a grade of
incomplete is absolutely necessary, the student must request the incomplete in writing (on a form called Request for a Grade of Incomplete) well before the end of term.

**Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Citations**

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

A further note: plagiarism often involves intentionally trying to pass off the words or ideas of other people as your own. But some plagiarism actually happens by accident through incomplete note taking and/or sloppy citation. Note well: *both* kinds of plagiarism, intentional and unintentional, result in the same penalty, which is possible disciplinary action. Thus, you must never allow accidental plagiarism to happen to you. You must work hard to cite every word and every idea that is not your own. Watching out for plagiarism is actually a very good way to gauge how analytical your writing is. If you find yourself wanting simply to retell what other people have written, it’s likely that you’re not being analytical enough in your thinking. This is a good time to seek help from me about how to approach your subject from a stronger critical angle.

In citing sources, you may use either University of Chicago or MLA citation style. The former is preferred by most professional historians. The latter is the chosen style of most professional literary critics. Neither citation style is better than the other, but most writers have a clear preference for which one they like to use. The only two rules are that you must use one of these citation styles, and that you must ONLY use one of these styles. You cannot mix and match.
Schedule of Classes and Major Assignments (CS = reading available on the course website)

9/7   Introduction to the Course; Discussion of Topics, Ideas, and Method

UNIT ONE: Charlemagne in Memory

9/12

*Royal Frankish Annals*

9/14

Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” from *Tropics of Discourse*  

9/19

*Suetonius, Life of Augustus*  
Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne* (9th c.)

9/21

Maurice Halbwachs, *Collective Memory* Chapter 2  

9/26

Walafrid Strabo, “Visio Wettini” (mid 9th c.)  
Anonymous, “Lament on the Death of Charlemagne” (early-9th c.)  
Angilbert, “Surge, meo domno dulces fac” (early-9th c.)  
The Astronomer, *Life of Louis the Pious* (mid-9th c.)

9/28

Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”

10/3

Angelbert, “The Battle of Fontenoy” (mid-9th c.)  
Florus of Lyons, “Lament on the Division of the Empire” (mid-9th c.)  
Nithard, *Histories*

10/5

Nora, Pierre. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.”

*FIRST 500-WORD ESSAY DUE FRIDAY 10/7*
10/10  NO CLASS

10/12

Paul Conerton,  *How Societies Remember* (excerpt)  CS

10/17

The Monk of St. Gall,  *Life of Charlemagne* (late-9th c.)

10/19

Geary, Patrick.  *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 1-21  CS
Matthew Innes, “Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society”  CS

**SECOND 500-WORD ESSAY DUE FRIDAY 10/21**

UNIT TWO: Charlemagne in Myth

10/24

William de Briane,  *The Anglo-Norman Pseudo-Turpin* (11th; 14th c.)

10/26


**FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE FRIDAY 10/28**

10/31 SPOOKY!

*Royal Frankish Annals*, year 778 (8th c.)
*The Song of Roland* (11-12th c.)

11/2

ARTICLE TBA

11/7

Anonymous,  *Voyage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople* (12th c; 15th c.)  CS

The Lyf of Charles the Grete, Preface and Book 1, translated by William Caxton (15th c.) CS
William Caxton, preface to Malory’s *Le morte d’arthur* (15th c.) CS


**FINAL PROJECT DRAFT DUE FRIDAY 11/17**

Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (1517)

ARTICLE TBA

**THANKSGIVING**

Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* cont.


Renaissance Portraits of Charlemagne CS
12/5
Anonymous, Charlemagne (modern title: The Distracted Emperor) (17th c.) CS

12/7
ARTICLE TBA

12/12
Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (excerpt) (18th c.) CS
Thomas Bulfinch, Legends of Charlemagne (19th c.) CS

12/14
Pippin (musical/film 1981)?

FINAL PROJECTS DUE FRIDAY 12/16
How to Ask Good Scholarly Questions: Three Basic Criteria

There are basically three criteria for good scholarly questions, presented here in order of increasing complexity. If your question meets all three criteria, chances are that it could provide you with a strong foundation upon which to build further study. In this course, we will practice asking questions in order to fuel our classroom discussions. But also, later in the semester, you will choose from the questions that you generate and build the best ones into essays. All scholarship starts with strong questions.

Criterion #1: Your question must genuinely intrigue you.

If you look at the question and yawn, it’s not a good scholarly question.

Criterion #2: Your question must be analytical in nature.

If your question articulates a genuine puzzle, has no obvious answer, and instead requires you to interpret several elements of a given topic and then formulate an opinion about it, chances are high that it’s a good question for advanced scholarship. The simplest way to test whether your question is analytical is to think about whether it would create a good discussion (at the dinner table at the dining hall, with your roommates, in the classroom – anywhere). Analytical questions have many possible “right” answers. This multiplicity of possible correct answers leads to discussion and (even better!) debate when people favor one of those answers over another. A non-analytical question, such as a fact-finding question, does not create a good discussion, for once you’ve discovered the answer, the discussion is over. Another trick is to realize that non-analytical questions tend to start with the interrogative words “what,” “who,” “when,” and “where” (What color were Benjamin Franklin’s eyes? When did the War of the Roses begin? Who was Charlemagne’s wife? Where did they get married?). These are important questions, to be sure, but they only create discussion if the facts are in dispute, and in this case they are not. Analytical questions, on the other hand, tend to start with the interrogative words “how” or “why” (How did the War of the Roses affect English attitudes toward monarchy? Why did Charlemagne marry Hildegard in 771?)

Criterion #3: Your question must be answerable with evidence.

This is often the criterion that is the most difficult to meet. There are a lot of great questions out there that are both interesting and analytical, but that are nevertheless still not good questions for scholarship. This is because many questions are ultimately unanswerable with the evidence available to you and in the time that you have. Once a question has satisfied criteria #1 and #2, you have to think carefully about how you would go about answering your question. In this class, you will always be asking questions of primary sources. So ask yourself, does your source material contain enough data/evidence to make an argument? Could you conceivably construct an answer from it? This doesn’t mean that a source has to yield one single answer (in fact, it should yield many possible correct answers). But sources only speak to certain questions. In reading your first major text, The Royal Frankish Annals, you will probably be able to argue a strong answer to the question, “How does/does not the author of the chronicles present Charlemagne as a heroic figure?” But it would be quite difficult to find a viable answer to a question such as this one: “How did the RFA author feel about the peasantry?”