



SYLLABUS

VOYAGES, DISCOVERIES AND EVANGELIZATION IN AMERICA FROM THE MARITIME CITIES OF WESTERN FRANCE, 16TH – 18TH CENTURY

Professor Gordon Sayre

Contact Hrs: 3/wk

Language of Instruction: French

ANGERS, FRANCE

1) Course content:

The French colonization of the Americas began with seasonal camps in Newfoundland established by St. Malo cod fishermen. It was a Malouin, Jacques Cartier, who first colonized French Canada in 1534. In the mid-1500s there were also several expeditions to America led by French Protestants, whom the King encouraged to emigrate, and who regarded Native Americans somewhat differently from the Catholic missionaries, such as Jean de Brébeuf, who arrived in the early 1600s. In the 1700s the colony of Louisiana was established by the Company of the Indies based in Lorient and La Rochelle. We will read accounts of explorations and missions by Cartier, de Léry, Brébeuf, Dumont, and Chateaubriand, and visit ports, monuments, and museums in these maritime cities.

2) Course Objectives

United States residents often never learn of the role of French exploration and colonization in the history of their country, because the English colonies of New England and Virginia have become so powerfully promoted in our national mythology, as for example the Mayflower, Thanksgiving, and Pocahontas. But French explorers in Québec, South Carolina and Florida in the 16th century long predated the English. Thousands of people in Maine and Louisiana still speak French in daily life. This course will introduce students to five French writers who travelled to the Americas between the 1530s and the 1790s. Their writings range from exploration journals to ethnographic descriptions of the Native Americans to autobiography and the novel. All are written in a straightforward style, although their French prose does reflect changes in the language across nearly three centuries.

A connecting theme of the course readings is the contrast between Catholic and Protestant responses to the encounter with Native American peoples. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the era of the Wars of Religion in France, and our reading of de Léry and visit to La Rochelle will offer a window on some of the most violent episodes in these wars. We will learn how in the years before the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, Protestants enjoyed better relations with the Crown and were encouraged to found settlements in the Americas. We will see how the encounter with Native Americans led religious thinkers to new insights upon doctrinal controversies over the eucharist and the status of primitive peoples who may or may not have been included in original sin or in Christ's revelation. Finally, we will see how after the French Revolution Chateaubriand saw American Indians, specifically the Natchez who had risen up and killed hundreds of Frenchmen in 1729, as emblematic of a reactionary Catholic revival that he imagined for France.

3) Excursions

The course-related excursions will take us to three of the most important Atlantic ports of France in the early modern period. Each is 160-200 kms distant from Angers, making a one-day excursion possible by motor coach. I would like to make one or two of these trips a two-day weekend excursion, however, to allow for more time to visit more sites.

The first trip, on a weekend early in the term, will take us to St. Malo and Mont St. Michel. St. Malo was the home port of Jacques Cartier, the first French explorer of Canada and a major founding father figure for French Canadians today. He was knowledgeable about the area because Malouin fishermen had pursued cod on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland for decades before his voyage. We will visit the Musée Jacques Cartier [<http://www.musee-jacques-cartier.com>], and the romantic tomb of Chateaubriand on the Ile de Grand Bé, which is connected to the city at low tide by a causeway. St. Malo was a walled city further fortified in the seventeenth-century and during the Second World War, and these walls are an exciting place to explore. The following day we will proceed to Mont St. Michel, which is not really connected to the course readings, but is a site that I'm sure the students will want to see. Jean de Brébeuf's family origins are in this region as well, though I do not know of any monuments in his memory.

The second trip will be to La Rochelle, the port where Dumont de Montigny landed upon his return from Québec in 1717 and where he lived until he sailed to Louisiana with a cargo of criminal exiles and German emigrants in 1719. His 1747 manuscript narrative, which two colleagues and I are publishing for the first time ever, includes colorful scenes of life in the port. We can visit, for example the tower guarding the entrance to the old harbor, in which Dumont served as a guard for criminals awaiting exile. He writes of how a few men jumped into the water and escaped. La Rochelle is also the historic capitol of French Protestantism, and the scene of two major sieges, in 1572-73 and 1627-28, during which Catholic royal forces attacked the Protestant residents. We will visit the Musée du Nouveau Monde [<http://perso.orange.fr/musees-la-rochelle/n-monde/index.htm#titre>], and hire a local guide to explain for use the history of the Huguenots there.

The third trip will take us to Lorient, which was founded in the 17th century and derives its name from the fact that it was built as the home port for the Compagnie des Indes, which at first traded with the East Indies and later with America as well, including the slave trade. The period of 1717-1720, when that company was controlled by John Law, whose financial scheme to assume the debt of the French state collapsed so spectacularly, will be of particular interest to us, because Law promoted the colonization of Louisiana and sold land there. This is why Dumont went to Louisiana. He also lived there when he returned from America for good in 1737. We will visit the Musée de la Compagnie des Indes, located in the Citadelle de Port-Louis, the very post in which Dumont served from 1737-1747 [<http://musee.lorient.fr>]. Port-Louis is located across the harbor from Lorient, and we can ride a ferry between the two towns.

I recognize that the students may not share my passionate interest in French colonization of the Americas, so I plan a fourth excursion to the chateaux of Chambord and Chenonceaux, the most recognizable touristic sites of the Loire valley. On this trip we can also visit Tours, the hometown of Marie Guyart, who ran a successful textile business before she had a vision that called her to go to Canada.

4) Instructional methodology

All of the readings will be in French. French will be the primary language in the classroom for instruction and discussions. However, I recognize that many students may be frustrated by their inability to pose complex questions in French. Therefore, I plan to reserve part of each week's course meetings, perhaps one of three 50 minute classes, for English discussion. Also, one of the written assignments will be in English.

My method for teaching exploration texts is to try to help students appreciate the beliefs, ambitions, fears, uncertainties, and passions of the explorers, soldiers, and missionaries whose works we are reading. Some, such as Cartier, wrote in a detached impersonal style, others like Dumont are more intimate. Some were Catholic and others Protestant, some pious and others skeptical. But all these works, and our excursions, will help us learn of the dangers they faced, and the wonder they felt at the encounter with Native American peoples.

5) Method of evaluation/grading

Students are expected to participate in class discussions, both in French and in English, and to participate in the excursions. Written assignments for the course shall include five one-page compositions in French on the

five major texts that we are reading, which may also draw upon the excursions and the insight they offer on the five authors. There will be one written exam in French at the end of the term, and a longer term paper in English.

Grading will be calculated according to this formula:

10% for each of the five short compositions

20% for the final paper

20% for the final exam

10% for overall class participation.

6) Course texts

Jacques Cartier, *Voyages au Canada* Memoire des Ame

François-René de Chateaubriand, *Atala et René* Pocket Classiques

Jean de Léry, *Histoire d'un voyage en terre de Brésil* Hachette

Jean-François Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, *Dumont de Montigny: Sa vie et aventures dans l'Amérique Française, 1715-1747*. Ed. Carla Zecher, Gordon Sayre et Shannon Dawdy. Editions Septentrion, Sillery, Québec, and Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2008

Jean de Brébeuf, *Ecrits en Huronie*, Bibliothèque Québécoise

I will supplement these five books with many visual materials, such as the maps drawn by Dumont, which have been a focus of my own research, and with photocopied excerpts from two additional texts:

First, selections from the *Histoire mémorable de la ville de Sancerre*, de Léry's account of the siege he and other Protestants endured in that town in central France in 1573 in the aftermath of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (after his voyage to Brazil but before his published book about it). Some survived by cannibalism, which offered Léry a perspective on the cannibalism of the Tupi people in Brazil.

Second, excerpts from the letters of Marie Guyart aka Marie de l'Incarnation, a nun who sailed to Canada to establish an Ursuline convent. This institution and the school she founded with it, still exists on the same site in Québec City. Among many other things, she recorded events in the Iroquois wars, which made a martyr of Brébeuf in 1647.

7) Proposed schedule

Week 1: Premier voyage de Cartier

Week 2: Deuxième voyage de Cartier

Week 3: Troisième voyage de Cartier, et presentation des voyages à l'Amérique des colons protestants Ribaut, Laudonnière, et de Léry sous l'amiral Coligny.

Excursion à St. Malo

Week 4: Léry, chapitres 1-10

Week 5: Léry, chapitres 11-16

Week 6: Léry, chapitres 17-22 et *Histoire mémorable de la ville de Sancerre*

Excursion à La Rochelle

Week 7: Brébeuf, *Rélations de 1633-34*

Week 8: Brébeuf, *Rélations de 1635-36*

Week 9: Dumont, chapitre 1: voyage au Québec

Week 9-10: Dumont, chapitres 2-3: premier et deuxième voyages à la Louisiane

Excursion à Lorient

Week 11: Dumont, chapitres 4-7: le soulèvement des Natchez

Week 12: Chateaubriand, *Atala*