

Sample Midterm Questions
ENGL 3335, Fall 2021
Ancient and Medieval World Literature

These are the kinds of questions you will see on the upcoming midterm examination. I have drawn them from a previous 3302 class of mine.

Section I: Identifications

You will be asked to identify a passage from the readings and give some specific information about it. There will be seven passages; subquestions a) and b) are worth two points apiece, c) 1 point, for a total of five points per question; 7 passages @ 5 points = 35 points. Note that I will have underlined a clue for you in each passage.

X1) For this passage, give a) the author, b) the title of the work, and c) the Latin name of the system of loyalty and protection in exchange for service that the author is describing.

On the field of battle it is a disgrace to a chief to be surpassed in courage by his followers, and to the followers not to equal the courage of their chief. And to leave a battle alive after their chief has fallen means lifelong infamy and shame. To defend and protect him, and to let him get the credit for their own acts of heroism, are the most solemn obligations of their allegiance. The chiefs fight for victory, the followers for their chief. Many noble youths, if the land of their birth is stagnating in a long period of peace and inactivity, deliberately seek out other tribes which have some war in hand. For the Germans have no taste for peace; renown is more easily won among perils, and a large body of retainers cannot be kept together except by means of violence and war. They are always making demands on the generosity of their chief, asking for a coveted war-horse or a spear stained with the blood of a defeated enemy. Their meals, for which plentiful if homely fare is provided, count in lieu of pay.

X1a) Tacitus
X1b) <i>Germania</i>
X1c) <i>comitatus</i>

Section II: Short answer

I will give a lengthy list of terms for you to choose from; for seven of the terms, give the work or works they are associated with, the author if known (if the author is not known, say "anonymous"), and a brief definition of the term that includes the term's importance in the text or the context of the course (no more than two or three sentences should be needed – don't spend a lot of time writing a short essay). 7 terms @ 5 points/question (1 for author if known, 1 for work/s, 3 for definition and importance) = 35 points.

X2) "Our whelp":

The whelp is mentioned in *Wulf and Eadwacer* by an anonymous author. It appears that Eadwacer is the female narrator's lover and Wulf is her husband; the whelp appears to be the child of the narrator and Eadwacer, whom Wulf is going to abandon to its death in the woods. This shows the stress that the heroic ethic places on personal relationships. (Note the underlined parts: title of the poem, 'anonymous' as the author is not known, and the definition as it connects to the material discussed in the course.)

X3) Ashburnham House:

Ashburnham House is associated with Beowulf (anonymous), the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, version G (commissioned by Alfred the Great, but exact writer unknown), and The Battle of Maldon (anonymous). The British Museum stored the Cottonian MS collection in Ashburnham House, and when it caught fire in 1731, the *Beowulf* MS was singed around the edges; *Maldon* and ASC G were destroyed. (note multiple works here with authors, in each case anonymous)

X4) *adventus Saxonum*:

The *adventus Saxonum* is a Latin term for “the coming of the Saxons” in 449. The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes were brought to Britain as mercenary soldiers to help the Britons fight the Picts and the Scots (Irish) and began to migrate to Britain; Gildas and Bede and Alfred make it sound like an invasion but their numbers probably weren’t that big. This is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (commissioned by Alfred, but exact writer unknown), Gildas’s *Ruin of Britain*, and Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*. (note the multiple texts and the authors known for two of them; also notice that order doesn’t matter as long as all questions get answered)

Section III: Essay

You will be given one question with a choice of passages from the identifications and asked to write about one specific point that comes up in that passage.

X5) The works which we are examining all emphasize that history looks not only at good deeds to be emulated, but the mistakes which are to be avoided. Each text sampled in the identification passages above in some way treats the idea of failure - failure to understand, to pay attention, to follow social or cultural ideals - and the consequences of that failure. Choose one of the passages above and write an essay of about 200-300 words about a/the failure that the author is warning against; you may treat an episode of failure from the whole work or from just within the particular passage above, as you see fit. What are the consequences of that failure for the individual and/or the society, and what, if anything, can be done about it?

Answers will vary, but a good essay for the sample passage given above might note that a lord's reputation for victory is as much a weapon as his sword, so he will want to make sure he leads by example and that his men follow his orders to the letter. Cowardice is not tolerated, and a fallen lord must be avenged whether the result is survival or death. Should a lord fail to achieve victories, he will lose the respect of his men, and should a man fail his lord, he and his family would be shamed. The comitatus ethic holds the lord's society together, and a failure could result in the whole people being destroyed.

How to Avoid Losing Points:

Be sure you give me what I am asking for in your answers.

- A manuscript (MS, pl. MSS) is a hand-written (*manu scripta*) medieval document, such as a book, letter, charter, etc. It was produced by a scribe (who did the physical writing or copying in the MS) and written by an author (who composed the text itself, which was eventually copied into an MS). Unless you are dealing with an autograph copy, the author and the scribe are usually not the same person. Answers like London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv (the *Beowulf* MS);

London, British Library, MS Add. 45025 (the Ceolfrith Bible); or Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Amiat. 1 (the Codex Amiatinus) are what I am looking for when I ask for a manuscript.

- A text is a prose or poetic work (*The Husband's Message*, *Beowulf*, *On Christian Doctrine*, etc.). Although modern publishing uses the term for many academic works (see the textbook section in the bookstore), we will use it to refer to the works we are reading in this class. The edition from which our works may be taken is not the correct answer in this case.
- If I ask for a MS's formal designation, I want the official name of the MS in its city-library-shelfmark format (e.g. Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501); if I ask for an informal designation, I want what a MS is commonly called (e.g. the Exeter Book).
- In modern publishing, a 'manuscript' is a copy of a text that an author has produced for submission to a press or journal for consideration and that has not yet been accepted. (It is technically a typescript, as it was produced on a printer or typewriter; this term drives us medievalists nuts.) **DO NOT CONFUSE THE MODERN AND MEDIEVAL USES OF THE TERM "MANUSCRIPT"**. A lot of exam errors appear to be from people who are using the term 'manuscript' to mean a work or a text in general, and I suspect that the idea of people discussing 'manuscripts' in the modern sense may be partially responsible.