

## Term Paper: Requirements and Suggested Topics

**Assignment:** Write a paper on any premodern European literature with an interest in political elements, or on any ruler, regime, system of governance, or political philosophy as reflected in premodern European records and literature. Papers on present-day politics are permitted, provided they take a comparative angle involving premodern subjects or Machiavelli. The length of your paper depends on your module: (within ten percent of) 5,000 words for a first master course in medieval studies, 7,500 words for a follow-up course.

### Some Possible Topics

The following list is intended to help you *find* a topic, but you don't have to limit yourself to the options listed. While you may absolutely copy out a topic directly from this list, it is your own responsibility to develop a thesis. Remember that originality of argument (and by implication originality of research question) is a factor in the assessment of your paper (see marking grid below). The topics listed are biased towards Anglo-Saxon England, but you are not bound to include an English connection.

Some general themes:

- Political ethics
- Political theology
- Plato's political thought
- The justification of power
- Sacral kingship in early Germanic cultures
- Democratic elements in historical regimes
- Tensions between Church and state
- Power struggles
- Biblical models of government
- God's politics
- Anarchy in the Bible
- Augustine's *De civitate Dei*
- Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*
- Politics and *Beowulf*
- Political ethics and the fall of the angels
- Politics and the Fall of Man
- Politics and Orosius's *Historia adversus paganos*, Latin and/or Old English
- Politics and Boethius's *De consolatione Philosophiae*, Latin and/or Old English
- Politics and saints' lives
- *Translatio imperii* and teleology in medieval thought
- Politics and end-time thinking
- The role of land in Church politics

## Some Possible Research Questions

You may use these questions for inspiration, but you'll have to develop your own thesis statement.

- Is the society in Plato's *Republic* an earnest reflection of his politics?
- What political ideal speaks from the "historical books" of the Old Testament? (And how does this come across in medieval adaptations?)
- How do divine interventions in Scripture add up to a political characterization of God? (And how does this come across in medieval adaptations?)
- What was Augustine's position on secular government?
- Were Augustine's contemporaries right to blame the fall of Rome on Christianity?
- What is the origin of three-estates thinking and how did it develop in medieval thought?
- What was the English monarchy's role and interest in the English Benedictine Reform?
- What political ethics do the laws of Alfred (or Æthelred II, or Cnut, etc.) reflect?
- What ideal of government speaks from *Beowulf*?
- What political concerns are addressed in *Beowulf*?
- To what degree was a division of powers in place in Alfred's (or Æthelred's, or Cnut's, etc.) England?
- What developments can be identified in the division of powers in Rome from the time of the Republic to that of the Empire?
- What political commentary may be identified in Wulfstan's preaching?
- What were the powers and influences of the *witena gemot*?
- What role did land play in the politics of the Anglo-Saxon Church?
- What was the business model of the Anglo-Saxon Church?
- What political ideals speak from the saints' lives?
- Do notions of *translatio imperii* and *populus Israhel* go back to the same tradition?
- Did early Germanic societies have an institution of sacral kingship?
- How democratic was tenth-century Iceland?
- How fair is the society depicted in *Hænsa-Þóris saga* (or *Njáls saga*, etc.)?
- To what degree is Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* a political work?
- What lessons can we draw from historical parallels to the Trump (Putin, Assad, Erdogan, Merkel, May) regime?

## Sources

Some clues to primary sources:

- Augustine's *De civitate Dei / City of God* addresses the tension between politics and theology and is available in translation.
- The Old English part-translations of the early books of the Old Testament have not been translated into Modern English, though [Crawford 1922](#) translates Ælfric's synopsis of the whole Bible. Ælfric's adaptations of several Old Testament books may be found in his *Lives of Saints*, translated as per the next point.
- Ælfric's saints' lives exist with facing-page translation ([Skeat 1881–1900](#)).
- Most of Wulfstan's homilies do not exist in translation, but his famous *Sermo Lupi* is translated e.g. in [Treharne 2010](#). Secondary sources can help point you to relevant passages in the original.
- Old English laws exist with facing translations into German ([Liebermann 1903–16](#)).
- *Beowulf* is available in many translations, verse, prose, and facing-page.
- The Old English *Boethius* is available with translation ([Irvine and Godden 2012](#); more scholarly is [Godden and Irvine 2009](#))
- The Old English *Orosius* exists with translation ([Bosworth 1859](#))
- The sagas of Icelanders are generally available in translation.
- Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* is available in translation ([Richards 1982](#))

For secondary sources on political philosophy, Rome, England, Iceland, Church history and politics, and so on, do make use of our library resources, and don't forget:

- [JSTOR](#)
- The Old English Newsletter Bibliography Database at [oenewsletter.org/OENDB](http://oenewsletter.org/OENDB): free registration required.
- At a small fee, you can make use of [interlibrary loan](#) — but place your orders early!

## Marking Grid

The following marking grid indicates the considerations used to mark papers for this course (but not their weighting):

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
Argument (quality, originality)										
Proportion of original thought										
Structure										
Close reading & analysis										
Structural use of primary sources										
Use of secondary sources										
Cultural context										
Command of academic English										
Mechanics (style, referencing, formatting)										
Length										