

Bede and His World

History 492.002

Timothy C. Graham

R 4:00 – 6:30

The Venerable Bede (673–735) is a towering figure in medieval historiography, hagiography, exegesis, and computistics. His massive achievements are the more impressive in that he lived and worked in a part of England that had only recently converted to Christianity and developed a literate population. In this seminar we will first immerse ourselves in the historical context of the Northumbrian Renaissance, a cultural movement that witnessed the production of such extraordinary artifacts as the Franks Casket, the Ruthwell Cross, the Codex Amiatinus, and the Lindisfarne Gospels, not to mention such landmark literary productions as *Cædmon's Hymn*. We will study the specific environment within which Bede worked: the monastic complex of Wearmouth-Jarrow, founded in the late seventh century by Benedict Biscop. Bede has himself left a detailed record of the early history of the twin monasteries in his *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, a work that is supplemented by the anonymous *Life of Ceolfrith*, Bede's first abbot at Jarrow. We will then focus especially on the detailed study and analysis of Bede's most famous work, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, before moving on to consider his key hagiographical, exegetical, and computistic writings, including (but not limited to) his *Life of St. Cuthbert*, his *On the Temple*, and his *The Reckoning of Time*. During the semester we will read several of Bede's major works in translation and will also familiarize ourselves in depth with the rich scholarly literature that has grown up around this most important author and teacher who is justly reckoned the greatest historian of the early Middle Ages. Enrollment in this seminar is open to seniors who are History majors.

