Detail of a bas de page scene from the Smithfield Decretals, Southern France (Toulouse), c. 1300–1340, British Library, Royal 10 E IV, f. 247r

HIU12035 Saints and Sinners in Medieval Europe
Co-ordinator David Ditchburn
Credits 5 ECTS
Semester Michaelmas Term
Assessment Two 500-word primary source commentaries (40%), and a take-home exam (60%).
Description The institutional church never had the kind of control over the populace of medieval Europe that modern people think it did. This module explores the multiplicity of types of belief and practice amongst those who lived in accordance with the church's teaching—monks and nuns, wandering preachers, pious families—and the varieties of resistance among those who did not—Jews, Muslims, and heretics, social revolutionaries, sexual nonconformists, practitioners of the occult, student wastrels. We will discuss the kinds of sources that tell us about these groups, including saints' lives, chronicles, Inquisition registers, letters, and poetry. People in the Middle Ages were no more credulous than we are today, but they had different sources of information. This module will help students appreciate how people in the past operated much as people do today, but in a very different world with a different set of assumptions. Continuous emphasis will be placed on the geographical and cultural diversity of medieval Europe and the Mediterranean, and the decentralized and multivocal nature of medieval religion.