In his new book on Peiresc’s Mediterranean World (Harvard, 2015), Peter Miller has made a powerful argument for the value of thinking more, and more deeply, about how the historical, antiquarian, philological, and orientalist scholarship pursued by early modern figures like Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637) related to the concrete circumstances of communication and connectivity in the contemporary Mediterranean. When Peiresc wanted Samaritan manuscripts from the Levant, for example, he relied on merchants plying the trade routes between Damascus and Marseille to bring them; likewise, when Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) set about deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics in Rome, he was able to do so only because generations of diplomats and consular officials had brought back spolia and rubbings from their missions to Alexandria and Cairo. To some extent, the questions which scholars asked and the tools at their disposal for answering them were dictated by the patterns and pathways in which non-scholars moved around the Mediterranean. In this reading course, we will come to grips with the early modern Mediterranean through the lens of scholarship, exploring the ways in which the Middle Sea served the great polymaths of early modern Europe as a kind of laboratory and/or archive for experimenting with new ways of learning about other civilizations past and present.

**Requirements**

**Attendance and participation:** We will meet approximately once/week for 2+ hours at a time. (We may occasionally allow two weeks between meetings if justified by the reading load.) Class participation will count for 20% of the final grade.

**Examinations:** There are no examinations in this course.

**Written assignments:** There are three written assignments for the course. Two will take the form of a ca. 3–5-page reading response to the weekly readings corresponding to the weeks in which the student leads the class discussion. These should be distributed via email no later than 5pm the day before class, and will each count for 15% of the final grade. The third assignment, which will be due on Dean’s Date and will account for the remaining 50% of the final grade, should take one of two forms: either a historiographical review essay which expands upon one of the weekly topics of the course; or an independent research project closely tied to the themes of the course. Students should meet Prof. Beaver to discuss their topics and their bibliographies during the course of the semester.

**Readings**

In addition to the weekly readings, you may find the following general works to be of some use:


**Schedule of Seminars**

23 Sep. Course introduction

30 Sep. It’s Miller Time


7 Oct. Men in a Boat


14 Oct. The Islamic Republic of Letters


28 Oct. Merchants and Antiquarians Abroad

Della Valle, Pietro. *The travels of Sig. Pietro della Valle, a noble Roman, into East-India and Arabia Deserta: in which, the several countries, together with the customs, manners, traffique, and rites both religious and civil, of those oriental princes and nations, are faithfully described, in familiar letters to his friend Signior Mario Schipano….* London: J. Macock, 1665.


4 Nov. Fall Recess

11 Nov. Other Travelers: A Dragoman Renaissance?


18 Nov. Armchair Orientalists and Sacred Historians


25 Nov. Thanksgiving Recess (i.e. the other Turkey in this course)

2 Dec. Collecting the East


9 Dec. Spain


16 Dec. Egypt


12 Jan. Dean’s Date; final papers due