

**HIS 104 Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages
From Constantine to Charlemagne (ca. 284-888)**

**Claremont McKenna College
Spring 2017**

Professor: M. Shane Bjornlie, Ph.D.
Course Meetings: TTh 4:15-5:30 PM
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“Is it reasonable, is it sensible, to boast of the extent and grandeur of empire, when you cannot show that men lived in happiness, as they passed their lives amid the horrors of war, amid the shedding of men’s blood, whether the blood of enemies or of fellow citizens, under the shadow of fear and amid the terror of ruthless ambition? The only joy to be attained had the fragile brilliance of glass, a joy outweighed by the fear that it may be shattered in a moment.”

Augustine, *Civitas Dei* 4.3

“He who ordains the fate of kingdoms and the march of the centuries, the all-powerful disposer of events, having destroyed one extraordinary image, that of the Romans, which had, it was true, feet of iron, or perhaps of clay, then raised up among the Franks the golden head of a second image, equally remarkable, in the person of the illustrious Charlemagne.”

Notker the Stammerer, *Gesta Caroli Magni* 1.1

Course Description

The culture that we recognize as distinctively medieval often bears little resemblance in the modern imagination to its Roman antecedent, and yet medieval civilization did not rise phoenix-like out of the ashes of a Classical past without first experiencing a long period of transformation. Described as Late Antiquity or the Early Middle Ages, the period from Constantine to Charlemagne (roughly 300 to 800 AD) represents an age of vibrant and dynamic cultural transition sometimes viewed as a crucible for the blending of Roman, barbarian and Christian cultural elements. Using the major primary sources and the standard modern accounts for the period, this course will examine the key categories in which cultural change presents itself to the historian—the political devolution of the Roman Empire and development of ‘successor’ states, the movement of migrant peoples, the interaction of diverse religious practices and the consolidation of the Catholic Church, material and social changes in urban society, reorientation of economy and land use, and the transmission of an intellectual culture through art and literature that was both heir to Classical tradition and aware of its own novelty.

Course Objectives and Methodology

The objective of this course is to provide a survey of the period that takes into account both the basic chronological narrative and topics of particular interest to students of cultural, political,

social and economic history. By the end of the course, students should have a strong sense of the differences (and continuities) between the cultures of Constantine's fourth century, Justinian's sixth and Charlemagne's eighth. The design of this course has in mind that this understanding should complement interests that students may have in both the Classical Roman period and in the later Middle Ages.

The course format is combined lecture and discussion, with heavier emphasis on lecture. In preparation for a class session, students will read and assess a substantial assignment of primary and secondary source materials pertaining to a specific topic. Sessions will generally begin with a lecture, intended to provide background and an interpretive schematic for a given topic, and then move toward open discussion of the assigned readings. Discussions should question and create a dialogue with ancient texts on a number of levels—historicity, authorial intent, audience and reception. What is expected of these discussions is a demonstration of serious, college-level consideration of the material (critical reading as opposed to passive reading knowledge) and the ability to raise productive questions that engage the rest of the class.

Assignments and Grading

During the course, students will submit two short essays pertaining to a topic assigned in class. At the end of the semester, students will submit a final paper (detailed below). Students should anticipate periodic quizzes pertaining to the assigned primary-source readings and a comprehensive final examination given at the end of the course. The final exam (scheduled on syllabus) will provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate familiarity with a wide variety of concepts covered in readings, lectures and discussion. The exam will involve writing short identification essays (for specific terms, events and select primary source passages) and longer argumentative essays addressing topics that will have been provided in advance.

The two shorter papers should be 5-6 pages long and demonstrate thorough knowledge of the primary and secondary sources assigned for that topic (external sources not assigned on the syllabus will not be necessary for these assignments). Students may either choose from topic questions provided by me or design a topic independently. These papers should be argumentative, rather than expository, and they will be graded based on coherency of argument and the use of evidence from the sources (a rubric for grading written assignments will be provided for you prior to the first essay).

Students have two options for the final paper: either a critical book review or a piece of creative fiction. For the first option, students will write a critical book review (8-10 pages) of a single scholarly study (a monograph of at least 100 pages) not included on the syllabus. A bibliography of possible texts will be provided at the beginning of the semester. The analysis of this text should move beyond in-class discussion of a given topic and involve consulting a minimal number of other materials not required on the syllabus. More details will be provided later during the course. For the second option, students will write a fictitious source (10-12 pages) which demonstrates the students' command of the voice and cultural idiom for this period of history. The source may take any form that maps onto the literature produced during Late Antiquity or the Early Middle Ages—personal letters, a portion of a history, a portion of epic poem describing an event, an ethnography about a 'barbarian people', a sermon about a historical

concept relevant to a late-antique audience, a panegyric about an emperor or a piece of hagiography about a holy person, etc.

Class participation will figure as the final component in assessing grades—students should come to class prepared to demonstrate completion of readings through thoughtful participation in class discussion. Full attendance is required for a satisfactory grade. Absences for any reason will be excused only with documentation from either the Dean of Students or campus health services. The final class grade will be reduced by a full grade (for example, from a B+ to a B) for every unexcused absence. Unexcused absences during quizzes will result in failing that quiz (make up quizzes will not be made available).

Grades will be determined as follows:

Participation in class discussion—10%

Quizzes: 10%

Two short essays—30%

Final paper—25%

Final exam—25%

**Important: electronic devices will not be allowed during class sessions

Required Reading (must be purchased)

Brown, Peter, *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971)

Smith, Julia, *Europe After Rome: A New Cultural History, 500-1000* (2005)

Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire* (Penguin 1986)

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*

Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* (Penguin 1976)

Other primary and secondary sources are available on Sakai

Course Schedule

Week 1

Jan. 17—Introduction to the course

Jan. 19—Reading late-antique sources and identifying themes

Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, pp. 8-19, 37-53, 59-69 (Sakai)

Panegyrici Latini 12 (Sakai)

Week 2

Jan. 24—Basic dimensions of the late classical Roman world

Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 7-47

Ausonius, *The Order of Famous Cities* (Sakai)

Theodosian Code, selections (Sakai)

Vegetius, selections from *De re militaris* (Sakai)

Jan. 26—Third century crisis and the rise of the Dominate

Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 49-81

Harper, “Pandemics and passages to late antiquity”, *JRA* 28 (2015)

Week 3

Jan. 31—Rise of Christianity in a landscape of classical tradition

Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 82-113

Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus* 9-18 (Sakai)

Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 35-89 and 111-54 (Sakai)

Feb. 2—Constantine and Christian Roman capitals—first essay assignment given in class

Harries, *Imperial Rome, AD 284 to 363*, pp. 121-55 (Sakai)

Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople*, pp. 5-45 (Sakai)

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, pp. 67-73, 79-89, 103-09, 140-47 (Sakai)

Week 4

Feb. 7—Constantius and Julian—the political, military and religious challenges of Empire

Harries, *Imperial Rome, AD 284 to 363*, pp. 185-228 (Sakai)

Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, pp. 45-50, 55-83, 88-116

Feb. 9—Militarization and “barbarization”—from Valens to Stilicho

Bjornlie, “Romans, barbarians and provincials in the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus”

Ammianus, *Res Gestae*, pp. 117-62, 186-92, 207-228, 234-51, 313-33, 336-42, 350-56, 358-63, 369-81, 397-402, 411-37

Week 5

Feb. 14—Christians and Pagans in the Fourth Century—guest lecture by Professor Yitzhak Hen (University of Ben-Gurion)

Markus, “Paganism, Christianity and the Latin Classics”

Maas, selection from *Readings in Late Antiquity* (Praetextatus’ tomb stone), pp. 278-79

Feb. 16—Christian conversion beyond the imperial context—Childeric and Clovis in the 5th and 6th centuries—guest lecture for Professor Yitzhak Hen (University of Ben-Gurion)

Hen, “Conversion and masculinity in the early medieval west”

Murray, selection *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul* (Remigius’ letter and Gregory of Tours), pp. 260 and 275-76

Feb. 17—first essay assignment due by 5 PM

Week 6

Feb. 21—Bishops, urban authority and religious violence—the cases of Damasus in Rome and Theophilus in Alexandria—Athenaeum lecture (Professor Yitzhak Hen) attendance mandatory

Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 115-48

Sessa, *The Formation of Papal Authority*, pp. 87-124 (Sakai)

Collectio Avellana #1.1-13 (Sakai)

Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.16-17, 6.17, 7.7, 7.13-16 (Sakai)

Feb. 23—Fragmentation of imperial authority in the west—Stilicho to Attila the Hun

McEvoy, “Rome and the transformation of the imperial office”, pp. 151-92

Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri* 1.39-48, 2.1-9, 2.12-43, 3.1-12, 3.14-15, 3.18

Priscus, pp. 70-101 (Sakai)

Sidonius Apollinaris, select *Epistles* (Sakai)

Week 7

Feb. 28—Ostrogothic Italy as the synthesis of classical Roman and barbarian Christian
Bjornlie, “What have elephants to do with 6th-century politics?”, pp. 143-71 (Sakai)

Cassiodorus, selections from the *Variae* (Sakai)
Eugippius, *Life of Severus* (Sakai)

March 2—Justinian and the formation of the Byzantine state—topic selection for the final paper due

Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 150-87

Procopius, *Secret History*, pp. 68-113 (Sakai)

Week 8

March 7—Justinian and the boundaries of eastern Empire

Greatrex, “Byzantium and the east in the sixth century”, pp. 477-503 (Sakai)

Pohl, “Justinian and the barbarian kingdoms”, pp. 448-71 (Sakai)

Paul the Deacon, *History of the Langobards*, pp. 41-66, 79-83 (Sakai)

March 9—Mediterranean economy and urban change to the sixth century

Bjornlie, “Law, ethnicity and taxes”, pp. 138-70

Smith, *Europe After Rome*, pp. 1-50

Cassiodorus, selected *Variae* (Sakai)

March 16-20—Spring Break

Week 9

March 21—Late-antique and early-medieval intellectual horizons and culture of learning—second essay assignment given in class

Smith, *Europe After Rome*, pp. 51-80

Augustine, *City of God*, selections (Sakai)
Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*

March 23—Class cancelled for conference

Week 10

March 28—The post-Roman world of Gregory of Tours

Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri*, Gregory's preface, 4.1-3, 4.5-7, 4.11-12, 4.14-15, 4.22-30, 4.41-42, 4.49-51, 5.1-4, 5.14, 5.18-20, 5.24-25, 5.34, 5.44, 5.48-50, 6.2, 6.4, 6.6, 6.10, 6.32, 6.35, 6.45-46, 7.13-15, 7.20-22, 7.29, 7.31, 7.47, 9.19, 9.30, 9.33-35, 9.38, 10.5, 10.10, 10.18-19, 10.25

March 30—Law and status—Romans, Jews and barbarians

Mathisen, "Provinciales, gentiles, and marriages", pp. 140-55 (Sakai)
Smith, *Europe After Rome*, pp. 83-114

Laws of the Langobards, selections from the laws of Rothair (Sakai)

Week 11

April 4—Family and gender

Smith, *Europe After Rome*, pp. 115-47

Jerome, select *Epistles* (Sakai)

Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger* (Sakai)

Gregory of Tours, *Decem Libri* 3.31, 4.46, 5.32, 5.39, 6.16, 6.29, 10.8, 10.27

April 6—The edge of the post-imperial world—early-medieval Britain and Ireland

Flemming, "Recycling in Britain after the fall of Rome's metal economy", pp. 3-45 (Sakai)

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.1-26 (Sakai)

Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain* (Sakai)

April 7—Second essay assignment due by 5 PM

Week 12

April 11—Monasticism and the western frontiers of Christian culture

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.9, 2.12-15, 3.3-5, 3.9-12, 3.19, 3.24-28, 4.18-19, 5.193.23, 4.3-4, 4.7-10, 4.23-25 (Sakai)

Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule*, prologue, 1-2, 5, 22, 28, 32, 35, 38, 41, 53 (Sakai)

Gregory the Great, *Life of Benedict* (Sakai)

April 13—Seventh-century Byzantium and the Rise of Islam

Hoyland, “Early Islam as a late antique religion”, pp. 1053-73 (Sakai)

Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, selections from the *Chronicle* (Sakai)

Week 13

April 18—Images and religious authority—Papacy, Iconoclasm and Italy between east and west

Deliyannis, “Agnellus of Ravenna and iconoclasm”, pp. 559-76 (Sakai)

John of Damascus, *Against Those Who Attack Divine Images*, selections (Sakai)

April 20—The rise of the Carolingian Empire

Costambeys, Innes and MacLean, *The Carolingian World*, pp. 1-30 (Sakai)

Smith, *Europe After Rome*, pp. 217-52

Week 14

April 25—Carolingian culture

Smith, *Europe After Rome*, pp. 183-214

Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne* (Sakai)

Dutton, *Carolingian Reader*, selections (Sakai)

April 27—Vikings in the post-Roman world

Asser, *Life of Alfred* (Sakai)

Beowulf, ll. 53-1250 (Sakai)

Week 15

May 1—senior exams (to be scheduled independently)

May 2—Life beyond the medieval Christian frontier

Njal's Saga, pp. 3-43 and 180-248

May 5—Final papers due by 5 PM

May 10—final exam (for non-seniors) at 9 AM