

History 388: The Fall of the Roman Empire
Spring 2010

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Office hours TTh 3-4

This class will consider the fate of the Roman Empire between the reigns of Diocletian (284-305) and Justinian (527-565). These turbulent centuries saw Roman political, cultural, and religious life utterly transformed, and it is the purpose of this class to take stock of these changes in the face of often fragmentary and difficult evidence. Through a careful consideration of primary sources both literary and material we will examine a range of topics including: the machinery of political life, the identity and impact of the barbarians (so-called), the late Roman military and the problem of the frontiers, the spread of Christianity and the resilience of the old religions, the divergent fates of east and west, and persistence of Roman institutions long after the fall of Rome. In addition, we will ask what historians ancient, medieval, and modern have made of this fall, what really fell, and the degree to which the idea of a fall itself is a useful way of thinking about these later centuries of the Roman world. Special attention will be paid to the conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity and its implications, the pagan revival of the emperor Julian, and the disastrous wars of reconquest (again, so-called) waged by Justinian.

Required books

Mitchell, A History of the Later Roman Empire AD 284-641 (Blackwell, 2007) 978-1405108560
Ammianus Marcellinus, The Later Roman Empire, trans. Hamilton (Penguin, 1986) 978-0140444063
Procopius, Secret History, trans. Williamson (Penguin, 2007) 978-0140455281

Grading

attendance and participation in discussion: 15%
source assignments: 25%
midterm essay: 30%
final essay: 30%

Important dates

2/2: Last day to drop classes with no tuition penalty
2/4: Source assignment 1 due
2/16: Source assignment 2 due
2/19: Last day to drop
3/4: **Midterm essays due**
3/8-14: Spring holiday
3/19: Source assignment 3 due
4/6: Source assignment 4 due
4/22: Source assignment 5 due
5/6: **Final essays due**

Blackboard

For better or for worse blackboard plays an important role in this course as a repository for many of our readings. Please ensure that you have access to our blackboard page: courses.gmu.edu

Email

Please ensure that you have both a working email account and that you are registered with this account in Patriot Web. On occasion I will send important updates and other information by email and I have only the class email list as generated by Patriot Web with which to work.

Source assignments

Over the course of the term everyone will write a series of short (1-2pp.), informal essays on some of our more interesting and important primary sources. These assignments are designed to guide and focus your reading of ancient texts. In general you will be asked to work closely with a brief moment in the text in question, and discuss in detail the strategies and techniques the author uses to convey his meaning. Due dates are listed in the schedule below, and specifics for the individual assignments will be posted in the

assignments folder on blackboard. These assignments are designed to encourage experimentation and bold readings and so are graded only lightly: ✓ for completed assignments, + for assignments done particularly successfully, - for assignments perfunctorily done, and 0 for assignments not done.

Attendance and participation in discussion

Both are mandatory. More than three absences will adversely affect your grade.

Academic honesty

This course is bound, as all its participants are bound, by the terms of the GMU honor code:

<http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/9798/honorcod.html>

Plagiarism or cheating of any kind on any graded assignment will result in an F for the course.

Disabled students

Students with disabilities who need special accommodation for our assignments must contact both GMU's Disability Resource Center and me.

Late policy

All graded assignments decline by one grade-step per 24 hours late. Thus for an assignment between 1 and 24 hours late, an A becomes an A-; for an assignment 25-48 hours late, an A becomes a B+, etc. No source assignments will be accepted late.

Schedule of topics and reading

NB: items marked with a star (*) are available on our blackboard page: courses.gmu.edu

Week 1

T 1/19: Introduction
no reading

Th 1/21: Hadrian's Roman Empire
read: *Aelius Aristides, Oration XXVI, "Regarding Rome," cc. 58-109; *Population Estimates for the Roman Empire

Week 2

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 2, "The Nature of the Evidence" and c. 7 "From Pagan to Christian"

T 1/26: A bad half-century: 235-284
read: *Cameron, Later Roman Empire, c. 1: "The Third Century Background"

Th 1/28: Christians and Christianities
read: *Paula Fredriksen, "Christians in the Roman Empire in the First Three Centuries"

Week 3

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 3, pp. 45-62

T 2/2: Diocletian and the Roman state
read: *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, "Carus et alia," cc. 11-21; *Cameron, Later Roman Empire, c. 2, "The New Empire: Diocletian"

Th 2/4: Diocletian and the gods
read: *Lactantius, On the Deaths of the Persecutors 1-16
→Source assignment 1 due in class: Lactantius

Week 4

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 3, pp. 62-70, and c. 8 "Conversion to Christianity," pp. 256-263

T 2/9: Another usurper: Constantine to 313
read: *Eusebius, Life of Constantine (selections); *Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History (selections)

Th 2/11: Constantine between heaven and empire
read: *Eusebius, Tricennial Oration

Week 5

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 3, pp. 70-79, and c. 8 "Conversion to Christianity," pp. 263-267

T 2/16: The meaning of history I: Zosimus and Eusebius (and Lactantius)
→**Source assignment 2** due in class: Zosimus
read: *Zosimus, New History 2.1-39

Th 2/18: Between Constantine and Julian
read: Ammianus, History 14.1-11, 15.1-3 (pp. 41-69)

Week 6

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 5, "The Roman State"

T 2/23: Yet another usurper: Julian
read: Ammianus, History 16.1-12; 20.1-5, 8-9; 21.1-5, 14-16; 22.1-7 (pp. 88-116, 185-192, 196-201, 207-214, 227-233, 234-241); *Julian, Letter to the Senate and People of Athens

Th 2/25: Julian in Antioch
read: Ammianus, History 22.9-14 (pp. 242-251); *Julian, Misopogon

Week 7

T 3/2: Julian in Persia
read: Ammianus, History 23.1-6, 24.6-8, 25.1-8 (pp. 282-304); *Julian, Against the Galileans (selections)

Th 3/4: The Theodosian age
read: Ammianus, History 31.1-4, 8-16 (pp. 410-418, 425-443)
→**NB: **Midterm essays due in class****

Week 8

T 3/9, Th 3/11: Spring holiday

Week 9

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 3, pp. 79-96, c. 6, "The Barbarian Kingdoms," and c. "Conversion," pp. 268-271

T 3/16: Stilicho and Alaric
read: *Zosimus, New History 5.1-18, 26-48, 6.1

Th 3/19: The meaning of history II: Augustine's City of God
read: *Augustine, City of God 1-5 (selections)
→**Source assignment 3** due in class: Augustine

Week 10

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 4, pp. 102-115

T 3/23: Christianities and empire: between Nicaea and Chalcedon
read: Mitchell, History, c. 8, pp. 271-295

Th 3/25: The meaning of history III: Gildas and the fate of Roman Britain
read: *Gildas, On the Ruin of Britain 1-40

Week 11

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 4, pp. 115-120, and c. 9, "The Political Economy of the Later Roman Empire"

T 3/30: (Another) bad half-century: 420-470
read: *Sources for Aetius and Attila

Th 4/1: Odoacer and the long shadow of 476
read: *Anonymous Valesianus 7.36-12.60 (pp. 531-545)

Week 12

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 4, pp. 120-140, and c. 10, "Society and Economy in the Mediterranean and the Near East"

T 4/6: Theoderic's Roman west

read: *Anonymous Valesianus 12.61-16.96 (pp. 545-569); *Cassiodorus, Variae I.17, II.27, 32, 38, 40, 41, III.46, 51

→**Source assignment 4** due in class: Cassiodorus, Variae

Th 4/8: Enter Justinian

read: *sources for the early years of Justinian

Week 13

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 4, pp. 140-148, and c. 11, "The Challenges of the Later Sixth Century"

T 4/13: Justinian's city

read: *Procopius, Buildings (selections)

Th 4/15: Reconquest or conquest?

read: *Marcellinus, Chronicle (selections)

Week 14

textbook: Mitchell, History, c. 12, "The Final Reckoning of the Eastern Empire"

T 4/20: The ruin of Italy

read: Procopius, Secret History, to p. 50

Th 4/22: Procopius, Justinian, and Theodora

read: Procopius, Secret History, to the end

→**Source assignment 5** due in class: Procopius

Week 15

T 4/27: East and west after Justinian

no reading

Th 4/29: Heraclius, the Sassanids, and the coming of Islam

no reading

→**Th 5/6: Final essays due by hardcopy to my departmental mailbox, Robinson B359, by noon**