The World of Late Antiquity, ca. 286 – ca. 750

Course Description

The period which we now call Late Antiquity saw the Classical world changed forever. The early centuries are marked by the collapse of Roman power in Western Europe, and the rise of new states founded by migrating German tribes among the ruins of the Empire. During this same period Roman power in the East remained strong. From their great city of Constantinople the eastern emperors continued to dominate the Balkans and the Near East, and interfere in the affairs of their western neighbors, and in those of the Sassanian Empire of Persia. During this period Christianity became the dominant religion of the European and Mediterranean world. This class will explore the expansion of Christianity, and the repercussions that this had on the lives of the inhabitants of the Late Antique world, from the fate of those who remained true to the old gods, education, the rise of monasticism, and social developments. The final centuries of Late Antiquity are dominated by the overthrow of the existing order and the creation of a new world. While Rome and Persia fought a destructive final war the new religion of Islam was founded in Arabia. Within a few short decades Persia ceased to exist, and the Mediterranean, which had once united the Christian world, had become a battleground between the remnants of the Roman Empire and the Caliphate. Meanwhile in the west the Carolingians began creating a new European civilization.

This course will explore both the political upheavals that led to the end of the Classical World, and the parallel cultural developments taking place in the Roman and barbarian worlds. We shall explore the rise and fracturing of Christianity and Islam. For Late Antiquity we are lucky to have a wealth of surviving material, written, archaeological, and artistic, at our disposal, and all of these sources will be explored to generate a picture of the Late Antique world and those who lived in it.

Grading

Attendance will be taken each class; after four unexcused absences, the student’s grade will begin to be affected. All students are required to come to office hours at least once during the course of the semester to discuss their paper topics. There will be two exams: a mid-term and a final, and a 12 page paper in this class. Students are free, and indeed, encouraged, to pick a paper topic of their own liking, however, all topics must be discussed with the instructor.

The exams will consist of four parts: IDs, gobbets, a visual question and essays. Terms to be identified will be taken from handouts distributed each class. ‘Gobbets’ will be short passages pulled from assigned readings: students will be asked to give the significance of the passage and provide as much identifying information as they can. The visual question will consist of a map, chart, or image. Students will be asked to identify and comment. Essays will focus on larger issues addressed in class lectures and assigned readings.

The second exam will not be cumulative and will only cover material from the second half of the course.

Throughout the class students will be expected to present as part of a small group. Topics available for presentation are, an individual Christological controversy, diplomatic missions,
entertainment, Jews in the later Roman Empire, childhood, education, the role of the emperor, a city of the group’s choice. Topics will be assigned on a first come first served basis.

On February 20th Dumbarton Oaks will host its sixth annual Teaching Fellows’ Day. This event is tailored to the classes currently being taught on Byzantium at George Washington University, and is a chance for students to hear experts in the field speaking about select topics. This year’s event is titled *Byzantine Lives* and focuses on the way in which the Byzantines portrayed each other, and tried to portray themselves to those around them in a variety of ways and media. Students will have chance to meet the speakers, tour the museum collection and handle Byzantine objects. Breakfast, lunch and snacks will be provided.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Fellows’ Day</th>
<th>5%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Presentations</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography and Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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**Textbooks and Readings**

P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*

C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome*


Unless stated otherwise all primary source readings are to be found in *Readings in Late Antiquity*, second edition, ed., M. Maas (Routledge, 2010). The majority of other primary readings can be found on the Internet Medieval Sourcebook, links to which are given under the headings for each class.

**Part I Rome Saved**

**Class 1 – The Roman World in the year 286**

**Class 2 – Diocletian and Constantine the Great**

- 1.3.1 – Diocletian’s reforms, Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors* 7.1-8
- 1.3.4 – Administrative hierarchy, *Theodosian Code* 1.15.1
- 1.3.9 – Aristocracy of Service, Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 299
- 1.3.11 – Picture of the Roman Empire, Eumenius, *For the Restoration of the Schools* 20-.21
- 1.4.1 – Diocletian’s Edict of Maximum Prices
- 1.4.3 – The Colossal Wealth of Aristocrats, Olympiodorus of Thebes, *Fragment* 41.2
- 3.2.1 – Zosimus, *New History* 2.34
- 4.2.1 – Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1.29
- 4.2.2 – Arch of Constantine, Inscription
Class 3 – The Fourth Century Recovery

- 1.3.11 – Eumenius, *For the Restoration of the Schools* 20-21
- 12.1.7 – Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 24.7.1, 3-6
- 13.1.2 – Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 31.4.1-6

Class 4 – Christological Controversies

- 4.5 Theology

Class 5 – The Empire and the Church

- 4.3.2 – Bishop Ambrose, *Letter* 51.4, 6, 11, 13
- 4.4.1 – Council of Nicaea, Canon 4; Synod of Antioch, Canon 9
- 4.4.5 – Philostorgius, *Suda* A 254, Leontius
- 4.4.10 – *Theodosian Code* 1.27.1
- 1.2.10 – Ossius of Cordoba, Letter to Constantius II, quoted by Athanasius, *History of the Arians* 44, 6-8
- 1.2.11 – Justinian, *Novel* 6
- 7.2.1 – Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.2
- 2.3.8 – John Chrysostom, *Homily on Matthew* 37.6
- 2.3.11 – Inscription of the Empress Eudocia, Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.9

**Part II The New Order**

Class 6 – The Great Migrations: Germans and Huns

- 13.1.6 – Paulinus of Pella, *Eucharisticus* 564-81
- 14.2.1 – Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 31.2.1-12
- 14.2.4 – Prosper, *Epitoma Chronicon* for the year 452
- Jordanes, *The Gothic History* 38
  - [http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/451jordanes38.asp](http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/451jordanes38.asp)
- Two accounts of Pope Leo I’s meeting with Attila
  - [http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/attila2.asp](http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/attila2.asp)

Class 7 – The Fifth Century Collapse in the West

- 13.1.10 – Salvian, *On the Governance of God* 5.4-7
- 3.3.10 – Eugippius, *The Life of Saint Severin* 20.1
- 3.6.1 – Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 17.13.3

Class 8 – The Fate of Towns
2.2 City administration
  2.3.1 – Description of the Entire World 35-7
  2.3.2 – Gerontius, Life of Melania the Younger 19
  2.3.5 – Greek Anthology 16.380

Class 9 – Old and New Rome
  • Ammianus Marcellinus, History 14.16
  • 2.3.3 – Symmachus, Official Dispatch 6
  • 2.4 – The City of Rome
  • 2.5 – Rome becomes a Christian center
  • 2.7 – Constantinople

Class 10 – The Fifth Century Consolidation in the East

Class 11 – Pagans, Jews, and Christians
  • 11.1.5 – Julian’s Hymn to Helios
  • 2.8.8 – Prudentius, On the Crowns of the Martyrs 9.5-60

Class 12 – The Successor Kingdoms Part I: Ostrogoths, Vandal, and Visigoths
  • 13.1.12 – Cassiodorus, Variae III.3, III.4
  • A selection of letters written by Theoderic King of Italy
    – http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/theodoric1.asp

Class 13 – Romans and Barbarians in the West
  • 13.1.15 – Victor of Vita, History of the Persecution in the Province of Africa 1.24-6
  • 13.1.13 – Procopius, History of the Wars 5.2.6-19
  • 13.1.14 – Cassiodorus, Official Correspondence 3.9

Class 14 – Office and Administration: Rome and the Successor Kingdoms
  • 1.3.3 – Cassiodorus, Documents 6.5
  • 1.3.5 – Theodosian Code 1.5.1
  • 1.3.9 – Basil of Caesarea, Letter 299
  • Notitia Dignitatum – http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/notitiadignitatum.asp
  • 2.8.1 – Augustine, Confessions 2.3.5

Class 15 – Mid-Term

Part III The Last Gasp of the Ancient World

Class 16 – Justinian
  • 10.4.1 – Evagrius, Ecclesiastical History 29
  • 10.4.2 – Procopius, History of the Wars 2.22-23.1
1.2.13 – Procopius, *Secret History* 3.1 and 5.1
2.3.3 – Procopius, *History of the Wars* 1.24.1-1.2, 7-10
Procopius, *Secret History* chapter 6, 8, 9, 11-19 http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/basis/procop-anec.asp

**Class 17 – Social Developments**

1.4.3 – Olympiodorus of Thebes, *Fragment* 41.2
1.4.5 – Libanius, *Oration* 7.1-3
1.4.11 – *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* I.130, lines 1-10

**Class 18 – Thought and Education**

11.1.9 – Agathias, *The Histories* 2.30.3-7, 2.31.1-4
11.1.10 – Simplicius, *On the Heavens* 119.7-9
11.1.11 – Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* 1.2-3, 1.6-7
2.8.1 – Augustine, *Confessions* 2.3.5
2.8.3 – Agathias, *Greek Anthology* 16.36
2.8.5 – Jerome, *Letter* 22.30 to Eustochium
2.8.6 – Basil of Caesarea, *Address to Young Men on Reading Profane Literature*
2.8.12 – Cassiodorus, *An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings* 1.1, 5-6

**Class 19 – The Sassanians**

12.1.1 – Tansar’s Letter to Gushnasp 1-3, 12-13, 22-3, 27, 44
12.1.2 – *The Book of the Council of Zartusht* 2-8
12.1.8 – Zachariah of Mitylene, *Syriac Chronicle* 7.3-4
12.1.9 – Ibn Miskawayh, *The Experiences of the Nations*

**Class 20 – The Last Great War of Antiquity**

12.1.13 – Agathias, *The Histories* 2.24.5, 2.25.3
12.1.14 – *The Easter Chronicle* (AD 626)
12.1.15 – *The Easter Chronicle* (AD 628)
12.1.16 – Theophanes, *Chronicle* (AM 6120)
14.3.3 – Nikephoros, *Short History*, 13

**Class 21 – Peoples of the East**

**Class 22 – Monasticism**

4.2.4 – Athanasius, *Life of Anthony* 2-3
4.8.3 – Bedjan, *The Heroic Deeds of Mar Simeon, the Chief of the Anchorites*
4.8.5 – John Cassian, *Institutes* 1.2, 4.5
4.8.6 – St. Benedict, *Rule for Monasteries* 7
4.8.7 – Romanos the Melodist, *On Christian Life*
4.8.9 – Evagrius Ponticus, *Advice to a Young Woman*

**Part IV A New World**

**Class 23 – The Rise of Islam**
- 15.2.3 – Procopius, *History of the Wars* 1.17.40-7
- 15.2.4 – Ibn al-Kalbi, *The Book of Idols* 3-23
- 15.3.5 – Quran, Sura 112
- 15.3.7 – Quran, Sura 10.38-9

**Class 24 – The Islamic Conquests**
- 15.3.11 – *The Pact of Umar*
- 15.3.12 – Al-Tabari, *The History of the Prophets and Kings* 1.1850
- 15.3.16 – Al-Tabari, *The History of the Prophets and Kings* 1.2050
- 15.3.17 – *Treatise on the Relics of the Patriarchs at Hebron*
- Al-Baladhuri on the Battle of Yarmuk
  - [http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/yarmuk.asp](http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/yarmuk.asp)
- Two accounts of the conquest of Egypt in 642
  - [http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/642Egypt-conq2.asp](http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/642Egypt-conq2.asp)
- Ibn Abd-el-Hakem on the conquest of Spain
  - [http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/conqspain.asp](http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/conqspain.asp)
- Four accounts of the Battle of Poitiers/Tours

**Class 25 – Warfare in Late Antiquity**
- 14.3.1 – Maurice, *Strategikon* 11.2
- 3.3.12 – Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science* 3.2
- 3.4.1 – Abbinaeus, *Archive* 45
- 3.7.1 – Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 20.4.17-18
- 3.8.1 – Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science* 1.1
- 3.9.3 – Augustine, *Against Faustus* 22.74-5

**Class 26 – The Umayyads, an Arab-Byzantine Empire**
- 15.3.20 – Al-Muqaddasi, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*
- 15.3.21 – Al-Baladhuri, *The Book of the Conquests of the Regions*
- 15.3.9 – Al-Bukhari, *Sahih* 3.392-4

Class 27 – The Successor Kingdoms Part II: Franks, Anglo-Saxons, and Lombards

• 13.1.17 – Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain* 24
• 13.1.19 – Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* 2.27
• 13.2.3 – Agathias, *Histories* 1.2.1; 1.2.3-4
• Two accounts of the conversion of Clovis
  - [http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/496clovis.asp](http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/496clovis.asp)
• Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, excerpts to be provided in class.

Class 28 – Abbasids, Carolingians, and Iconoclasts, and the End of Late Antiquity

• 15.3.15 – Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Sermon on the Epiphany*
• 15.3.24 – *The Instruction of Jacob, who was recently baptized*
• 15.3.25 – Theophanes, *Chronicle* AM 6121, 6122
• *Definition of the Council of Hieria* [http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/icono-cncl754.asp](http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/icono-cncl754.asp)