Course Description and Abstract

Rome – *Umbilicus Mundi*, the navel of the world, the centre of civilisation, by far the greatest city in Antiquity. The “most splendid of splendid cities” counted approximately one million inhabitants in its heyday. Lavish provisions of food and wine, as well as spectacles and various forms of urban decoration, magnificent temples and public buildings; public baths, gardens, libraries, circuses, theatres and amphitheatres… The citizens of Rome all had access to it! An elaborate network of roads and aqueducts, well-maintained throughout the centuries, all led to the Eternal City. At the time, it must have appeared that Rome would never end!

The third to the eighth centuries AD constitute what was traditionally and until recently regarded as a rather turbulent period. Theories of decline and fall (triggered by phenomena such as barbarian invasions, socio-political, military and economic crises, natural disasters, and even the rise of Christianity) dominated the historiography of this era, and a wide range of scholars believed that Rome actually did come to an end.

This course, however, focusing on the City of Rome itself from the third century up to the reign of Charlemagne, intends to demonstrate that the period concerned was a time of gradual transformation and even a certain degree of continuity. Both literary sources and the archaeology and epigraphy of the City shall be combined to show that barbarian invasions did not destroy the walls of Rome, and that the arrival of Christianity did not cause the fall of classical culture.

Throughout this course, some of the major issues in the study of the city of Rome in this transitory period are more closely examined. History is never a single-minded and uniform matter. The various contributions of numerous scholars, along with the use of the textbook of Peter Brown, are all intended to stimulate the mind to ask further questions, and to start thinking into only few of all the possible directions towards possible answers – or mere hypotheses. Primary sources, as well as secondary literature from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, reveal the drama of the history, society, politics, and culture of the City of Rome. This course is focused on evaluating the validity of various theories, research findings, and attitudes related to issues such as “decline and fall”, “continuity and change”, *et cetera*.

**Learning Objectives**

The key objective of this course is to survey the history of the ancient city of Rome in the period of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. One of the main problems concerning the studies of Rome and of the Ancient World in general is always one of evidence. Also in this particular case one has to rely on biased, and often fragmented literary sources. Archaeology and epigraphy supplement the literary evidence, but also provide information that partly stands completely on its own. All the evidence has to be weighed with extreme care and consideration. At the end of this course, students are expected to be aware of all the problems and debates concerning a few key themes taken from this time span, and the sensitivities regarding the evidence at hand. They need to demonstrate an understanding of the working of historical mechanisms. They need to be able to evaluate and critically analyse this historical period, having acquired a set of skills to scrutinize the available source material. They need to demonstrate that they are able to comprehend, paraphrase, summarise, and contextualise both the primary sources and the discussions centred on them.

**Procedures and Policies**

*Emperors, Bishops, Barbarians* meets twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 PM until 01:45 PM. It is expected of students to contribute in a significant way to this course. They are responsible for completing all of the assigned readings, according to the schedule attached to this syllabus. Class discussions
and activities (including on-site meetings in the centre of the City of Rome) encourage students to generate their own ideas, hypotheses, opinions, theories, questions, and proposals; and develop strategies for seeking and synthesizing information to support an argument, make a decision, or resolve a problem. This course has no prerequisites and assumes no prior knowledge of Roman and or Early Mediaeval history, or indeed of the Latin language. It is intended that students acquire a basic knowledge and understanding of the historical background and facts of ancient Rome, as well as that of the working of historical mechanisms, as described above.

It is strongly recommended to take notes, both when reading and listening. These notes are an indispensable part of studying and learning, often the best means to anchor your thoughts with true understanding, transform opinion into knowledge, and establish comprehension rooted in memory. Writing is learning – with half as much effort.

**ATTENDANCE AND ASSESSMENT**

Attendance is mandatory. The success of each session depends to a considerable extent on the students’ presence, as well as on their preparation and participation.

Final grade assessments will be based on the combination of two exams, one mid-term and one final, and one large essay (10-15 pages) concerning a topic of free choice and based on primary sources and secondary literature. A small percentage of the students’ grade will be derived from attendance and participation.

The 2 (TWO) exams will be tests of your acquired knowledge and understanding of the book by Brown, as well as the topics dealt with in the lectures and seminars, as well as the additional secondary literature. The book provides a general outline of the developments of Roman history, society and culture in Late Antiquity. The facts and the various backgrounds of events, both in time and in the city, are the framework of any basic historical understanding and mode of thinking.

As far as the essay is concerned, it is strongly recommended to start thinking of a suitable topic, including (some of) the appropriate material, right at the beginning of the course. In any case will you be summoned for a consult the week before mid-term, in order to establish an outline of the final essay. Essays count a maximum of 15 pages.

Information MUST under all circumstances be cited. Plagiarism of any sort will result in a grade of “F” for the assignment, or, depending on the level, perhaps even for the entire course.

**ESSAY GRADING AND EXAM GRADING SCALE**

Written work, and to a certain extent also the final exam, meriting the grade of “A” (excellent) must:

- address the assigned question or topic directly and intelligently;
- demonstrate a careful and considered reading of the texts at hand;
- present a lucid thesis and a persuasive argument in its defence;
- use correct grammar, punctuation, and sentence construction;
- make ample and appropriate use of quotations from the texts;
- weave together thesis and argument, quotations and interpretations;
- reveal thoughtfulness, originality and insight.

Written work and examinations awarded the grade of “B” (good) adequately fulfil a majority of these criteria, with areas of improvement indicated by grading remarks and comments.

The grade of “C” (average) is given when written work and examinations fail to meet most criteria, therefore indicating to the student that an appointment should be made with the professor, before the next essay assignment, to discuss methods for improvement.
Finally, the grade of “D” is assigned to written work and examinations that are simply unacceptable, according to the criteria outlined above, in which case an appointment must be made with the professor and arrangements determined for re-submitting the assignments in an acceptable form.

**Grading Percentages:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term Examination</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presence / Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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More information on the requirements for the specific essay assignment will be handed out in class. Students who wish to request a review of the final course grade must provide original versions of all their graded course assignments.

**LITERATURE**

- Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London 1971; reprinted in 1993)
- *Reader*
COURSE PROGRAM

Week 1: The ‘Long Third Century’ – The Roman Response to Crisis


Week 2: Why were the Early Christians persecuted?


Week 3: Constantine the Great and Christianity


Week 4: Difficillima tempora?


Week 5: The Making of a Christian Aristocracy

Week 6:  Subterranean Rome – Catacombs and Martyr Cult


Week 7:  Panis et Circenses


Week 8:  The Altar of Victory


Week 9:  Decline and Fall?

**Week 10: Theodoric and Rome – a Barbarian on the Throne?**


**Week 11: Gregory the Great – Aristocrat and Bishop**


**Week 12: The Republic of St. Peter**