

Arth 334/Hist 388
Early medieval art and culture
c. AD 300-1000
Autumn term 2015

MW 3-4:15
Art and Design 2026

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Description and goals

This course offers a survey of important artifacts, monuments, themes, and developments in the art of early medieval western Europe from Diocletian's Roman empire of the fourth century to the empire of Charlemagne in the ninth. Through careful consideration of objects and texts we will explore the emergence of a distinctly medieval visual culture and its relationship to the Roman past. Topics include the function of art and architecture as a means of imperial self-representation among both Romans and Franks, the troubled cultural exchange between eastern and western empires, the development and elaboration of Christian iconographies, debates over the nature of sacred art, the rise of the cult of relics and its architectural legacy, and the production, dissemination, and decoration of late ancient and medieval books.

By the end of the course students will be familiar with a range of significant and representative moments in early medieval visual culture, have a sense of the context in which these works of art were produced, and how the distinctive political and religious pressures of the moment shaped artistic production. In addition, students will have developed a set of skills for reading medieval images, allowing them to interact with the objects of this period with a new, richer understanding of how such images work and communicate meaning.

Important enrollment information

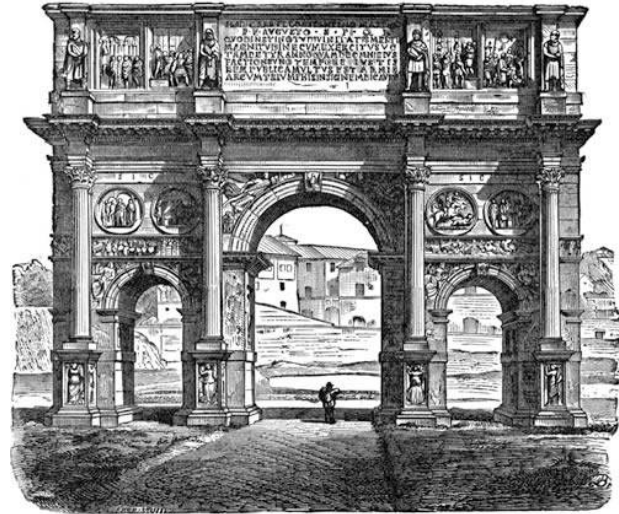
- Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class.
- Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website registrar.gmu.edu.)
- Labor Day, university closed: 9/7
- Last day to add: 9/8
- Last day to drop with no tuition penalty: 9/8
- Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty: 9/15
- Final drop deadline (67% tuition penalty): 10/2. After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.
- Selective withdrawal period (undergraduates only): 10/5-10/30. Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.
- Columbus Day recess: 10/12. Monday classes meet Tuesday; Tuesday classes do not meet this week.
- Thanksgiving recess: 11/25-29.

Students with disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703.993.2474, ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS.

Honor code

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process: <http://oai.gmu.edu>



The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

Blackboard

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

Email

Please ensure that you have access to your MasonLive email account. I will occasionally communicate with the class via email, and the course email lists depend on your GMU mail account. Further, student privacy at GMU is governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and is an essential aspect of any course. For this reason, as well as to adhere to Virginia regulations governing student privacy, all students must use their MasonLive email for all their communication with me in this class.

Student services

I want to remind you that George Mason University has a number of academic support and other resources to facilitate student success. You've already paid for these; they are your tuition dollars at work, so take full advantage of them. In particular:

The Writing Center: writingcenter.gmu.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services: caps.gmu.edu

University Career Service: careers.gmu.edu

Required book

Nees, Early Medieval Art (Oxford, 2002)

Recommended books

While not a hard and fast requirement, everyone would do well by reading a general account of the Early Middle Ages as we move through our material. Along these lines, I recommend either the first seven or so chapters of Norman Cantor, Civilization of the Middle Ages (cranky, opinionated, well-written and engaging) or the entirety of Chris Wickham, Inheritance of Rome (absolutely the best overall treatment of the period, without rival, still very readable). Both of these may be had as inexpensive paperbacks from all the usual sources. Alternately, you can do nearly as well with the shorter treatment to be found in one of the general medieval textbooks. The relevant chapters of any of the following will do, and they're all in the library: Winks and Ruiz, Medieval Europe and the World; Rosenwein, Short History of the Middle Ages; RHC Davis, A History of Medieval Europe.



Artstor

Artstor is an online image database, with the teaching of art history as one of its primary missions. Much of our course material is drawn from Artstor. Each week I will post selected slides from the lectures to the images folder on our blackboard page for you to review. Thanks to Artstor's copyright provisions, these images will be available to you in .shw format, Artstor's proprietary presentation format. To view them, you'll have to create an Artstor account and download and install Artstor's Offline Image Viewer (=OIV). Full instructions for how to do this and view the images may be found in the images folder on our blackboard page.

Grading

three source assignments: 15% each
museum project: 20%
exhibition project: 35%

Source assignments: These are short (3-4pp) papers in which you discuss a medieval object in detail. Full instructions for each source assignment are found in our assignments folder on blackboard.

Museum project: We have, if not an embarrassment of good early medieval art within short striking distance, then at least some early medieval art nearby, and this project asks you to take advantage of it. This project may be fulfilled by a visit to the Dumbarton Oaks Museum, the Freer and Sackler Galleries, or the Walters Art Gallery. Full details and instructions in the assignments folder on blackboard.

Exhibition project

As the culmination of the course, this project asks you to create a virtual exhibition of early medieval art. You will gather together objects on a topic of your own devising, and explain what such a collection tells us about the period. NB: all topics for the exhibition project must be approved with me in advance, so start planning early. Full details in the assignments folder on blackboard.

Exercises, primary sources, and study guides

As you can see from the syllabus, we will make use of a variety of material outside of the textbook, and all of this material is located in the readings folder on blackboard. Please read medieval sources in translation and their associated study guides before you come to the class for which they are assigned. Occasionally I've included short exercises designed to help you come up to speed with a particular object or style of art. Please complete these exercises at home before you come to the class for which they are assigned; these exercises are not graded, but they are very helpful in introducing you to new departures in this class, and by doing them you will take away quite a bit more from the lecture in question.

Electronic devices

Regarding electronic devices (such as laptops, cell phones, etc.), please be respectful of your peers and your instructor and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to class.

Important dates

M 9/21: source assignment 1 due in class
M 10/19: source assignment 2 due in class
F 11/13: all topics for the exhibition projects must be approved no later than this date
F 11/20: museum project due no later than this date
M 11/23: source assignment 3 due in class
M 12/14: exhibition project due at noon

Medieval events at CUA

The Center for Medieval and Byzantine Studies at Catholic University in Washington DC maintains a strong and varied series of public lectures. As of this writing their autumn schedule is not yet online, but as it comes out I will keep the class posted of any events that look relevant to our topic. All the details, when available, will be posted at: mbs.cua.edu.



Medieval events at Dumbarton Oaks

The Dumbarton Oaks Museum and research library also runs a series of public events during the academic year, many of them on topics of interest to students in this class. Like CUA, however, the autumn schedule at Dumbarton Oaks isn't yet online. I'll keep you posted as information becomes available, and you can check too at: doaks.org/news. Remember too that the Dumbarton Oaks Museum fulfills one iteration of our museum project.

The Mason Diversity Statement

This course adheres in all respects to the Mason Diversity Statement: "George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected. The reflection of Mason's commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach. Acknowledging that the attainment of diversity and inclusion are dynamic and continuous processes, and that the larger societal setting has an evolving socio-cultural understanding of diversity and inclusion, Mason seeks to continuously improve its environment. To this end, the University promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment regarding diversity. The aim is to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group and organization, and to make improvements as needed."

