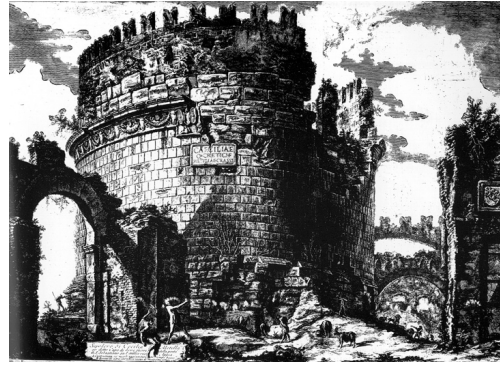


History 635
Fall of the Roman Empire
Autumn 2015
M 7:20-10
Innovation Hall 336

Sam Collins
scolline@gmu.edu
Robinson B377B
Office Hours: M 12-2 and by appointment



Description and goals

In the fifth and sixth centuries AD the Roman Empire ceased to exist as a political and military entity in Western Europe and changed markedly in the east. What exactly happened to empire in these years and why is a problem that has occupied historians since the beginning of the modern practice of historical study. In this course we will try to take stock of the changes undergone by the empire in both east and west, and, more importantly, examine the many explanatory schemes historians have put forward to explain the striking events of the Roman Empire's final years. Readings will cover a broad stretch of chronology, from Edward Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776) to the present, with particular emphasis on the field of late antique studies and its critics.

Required books

Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (abridged ed., Penguin, 9780140437645)
Heather, Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe (Oxford UP, 2012, 9780199892266)
Brown, The World of Late Antiquity: A.D. 150- 750 (Norton, 1971, 9780393958034)
O'Donnell, The Ruin of the Roman Empire (Harper-Collins, 2009, 9780060787417)
Halsall, Worlds of Arthur (Oxford UP, 2014, 9780198700845)
Ward-Perkins, The Fall of Rome: And the End of Civilization (Oxford UP, 2005, 9780192807281)

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

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."

Grading

Weekly informal response essays: 25%

Two formal essay(s): 25% each

class participation: 25%

Definitions: The **informal essays** vary slightly in form from week to week but are typically 1-3pp. summaries and analyses of the theses, arguments, and methodologies of the works under consideration.

There are two options for the **formal essays**.

Either:

1) **Two essays**, each 12 pp. in length. Students will write close analyses of an aspect of the work of one or more historians, with topics set by me and generally drawn from material considered in seminar. There are four due dates for these essays, and you may choose among them according to your schedule and preferences. Everyone may write more than two essays but I will count only your highest three grades when calculating your final grade for the seminar.

Due dates:

first essay: M 10/5 by 7pm

second essay: M 10/26 by 7pm

third essay: M 11/23 by 7pm

fourth essay: M 12/14 by 7pm

Or:

2) **Seminar paper**. Due at the end of the term, this essay should be 25pp. in length and consider in detail an important aspect of our period and its modern interpretation. Topics will be developed in advance with the assistance of the instructor. Seminar papers will most often be in the form of an historiographic essay that analyzes a debate in the secondary literature or the work of one or more historians who have shaped the analysis of our period. Requirements for the seminar paper: 1) Topics must be approved by me no later than 10/21, with 2) an annotated bibliography due no later than 10/28. 3) Rough drafts are due at the Thanksgiving holiday and final drafts are due no later than 12/14.

Class participation is a subjective measure of your contributions to the seminar. This score reflects not how much you talk, but how constructively you contribute to the discussion, and the degree to which your contributions reflect a thorough and detailed reflection on the material under consideration.

Expectations

The course is designed as an investigation of the waning and reshaping of Roman power in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries as an historiographic problem. That is, we will concentrate our attention on how different historians from Gibbon to the present have described, assessed, and explained the events of these centuries. Each week you will be expected to address these wider

questions in reference to the work or works then under consideration. For each reading be sure to be able to answer: What, succinctly, is the main argument? What is the primary evidence for this argument? What limitations does the evidence pose? What methodology does the author employ in assessing this evidence? To what extent does the argument of this work agree with or differ from other works we have read in this class? How would you situate the work in historiographic context, that is, in reference to larger trends or intellectual positions in the field as a whole?

The problem of background knowledge: Because late Roman history is not often taught to American undergraduates, or is taught only in the most cursory way, we all come to this course with differing levels of familiarity with the main people and events of the period. Still, being able to interact with the work of historians of the later empire requires general fluency with the subjects of their scholarship. Thus each student in the seminar will have to teach himself or herself a good deal about the basic chronology and core players of our period. There are a variety of ways to do this. My recommendation is that everyone should read one or more good overviews of the period. As a one-volume solution I recommend S. Mitchell, A History of the Later Roman Empire (Blackwell, 2nd edition, 2014); Averil Cameron, The Later Roman Empire (Harvard UP, 1993) and The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity (London, 1993) are an equally attractive pair. Also tempting: D.S. Potter, The Roman Empire at Bay (London, 2004) is excellent, but stops at the death of Theodosius I and so must be supplemented with Cameron's Mediterranean World or parts of Mitchell. Another, more expensive but excellent, solution: S. Johnson, Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity (Oxford UP, 2012).