Late Antiquity: Crisis and Transformation
Parts I–III

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Professor Noble is the author, coauthor, or editor of 10 books and has published more than 40 articles, chapters, and essays. His coauthored textbook, Western Civilization: The Continuing Experiment, is in its fifth edition. His research has concentrated on late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, focusing on the history of the city of Rome, the history of the papacy, and the age of Charlemagne.

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In 2008 Professor Noble received the Edmund P. Joyce, C.S.C., Award for Excellence in Teaching from the University of Notre Dame. In 1999 he was awarded the Alumni Distinguished Professor Award by the University of Virginia, that university’s highest award for teaching excellence, and a David Harrison III Award for outstanding undergraduate advising. Professor Noble has supervised 11 doctoral dissertations; his Ph.D. students now teach at colleges and universities across the country.
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Late Antiquity: Crisis and Transformation

Scope:

Since the publication (1776–1787) of Edward Gibbon’s justly famous *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, knowledgeable people have believed that the Roman Empire suffered a long, debilitating decline that culminated in an agonizing death at the hands of barbarian savages. Gibbon suggested that ancient civilization succumbed to “barbarism and religion,” but that is no longer how serious historians view the period from about 200–750 A.D. Instead the period is viewed as one of intense dynamism, some of whose forces were destructive but more of whose forces were creative.

The western half of the Roman Empire ceased to exist after 476. But the eastern lived on for a millennium, albeit in a new geographical and political shape that we call Byzantium. Moreover, from the Pyrenees to the frontiers of China, a new faith and regime—Islam and the caliphate—emerged violently and unexpectedly.

We will discuss the barbarians, but we will take care to learn who they actually were and how we talk about them today. We will explore their long and complex relations with the Roman state. We will also try to understand how Rome’s former western provinces evolved into a series of barbarian kingdoms. Having situated those kingdoms on the map, we will look inside them to see what they were like, paying particular attention to how Roman they remained.

Nevertheless, the startling transformation of a particular institutional regime, the Roman Empire, cannot really be equated with the end of a civilization. This course will look at the late antique centuries with a rather different perspective from that of the traditional gloom-and-doom approach. We shall discern dramatic changes, but also remarkable continuities, especially in the lives of ordinary people. We shall watch the Roman Empire reinvent itself institutionally three times, displaying in the process great creativity and energy.

Religion will occupy us constantly: new Christian theologies, the rise of monasticism, the emergence of Orthodoxy, and the dramatic rise of Islam. We will ask what it was like to live in the late antique world. How did people earn their slender livings? How did the lives of rich and poor differ? What were the great cities—say, Rome and Constantinople—like? What did people in the dawning European, Byzantine, and Islamic worlds inherit from the Roman Empire, and how did they manage their inheritance?

In other words, those who speak of “late antiquity” address themes of growth, creativity, originality, and dynamism, not themes of decline and fall.
Lecture One
The World of Late Antiquity

Scope: No one knows just who coined the term “late antiquity.” The term gradually gained currency during the late 19th century among art historians who were trying to find a way to capture the essence of the new art forms that emerged between the high point of classical art and the maturation of medieval art. In 1971 Professor Peter Brown, now of Princeton University but then at Oxford, published an unpretentious book, The World of Late Antiquity. Nothing has been the same since. After briefly noting where the term came from, this first lecture will discuss what is at stake in talking about “late antiquity” instead of “the fall of the Roman Empire.” This lecture will also set the chronological and geographical terms for the course and will outline the major themes and issues that will appear in subsequent lectures. Essentially this lecture will provide a rare opportunity to see what all the buzzing in the historian’s hive has been about.

Outline

I. The “problem” of late antiquity has risen most acutely in the last generation.
   A. The origins of the term are obscure: It seems to have arisen in the late 19th century among art historians who were looking for a way to characterize the art that emerged after classical art began to decline and before medieval art emerged—roughly the period 300–600 A.D.
   B. In 1971 Peter Brown published The World of Late Antiquity, and nothing has been quite the same since.
   C. The problem of late antiquity has several dimensions.
      1. Why must one make a case for it?
      2. What are its chronological boundaries?
      3. In what respects is it “distinctive and quite decisive”?

II. We may begin with the traditional understandings against which upholders of the late antique model have struggled.
   A. Renaissance Humanists created the tripartite model of European civilization: ancient, medieval, modern.
      1. Medieval intellectuals thought in terms of long-term continuities.
      2. Renaissance thinkers came to believe that Rome had “fallen,” ushering in a Dark Age from which they were only beginning to recover.
   B. Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) set the standard with The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776–1787).
      1. Gibbon said, “It was among the ruins of the Capitol that I first conceived the idea of a work which has amused and exercised near twenty years of my life.”
      2. Gibbon had read Montesquieu’s Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence.
      3. Like many before and since, Gibbon believed that he lived in a decadent age and that Rome held lessons. Gibbon did not appeal to mere decadence, however; he offered specific interpretations, such as “immoderate greatness.”
      4. “Barbarism” and “religion” was Gibbon’s way of signaling external forces that weakened Rome.
      5. It is important to bear in mind that Gibbon’s Rome stretched from the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180 A.D.) to the fall of Constantinople to the Turks (1453 A.D.).
   C. Other historians preferred to speak of “the later Roman Empire,” which generally referred to the period from the 3rd century to the “fall” of Rome in 476.
      1. They acknowledged that the Roman Empire changed in dramatic ways, but they, too, tended to speak in tropes of decay, decline, etc.
      2. They also acknowledged that certain emperors—whom we shall discuss in later lectures—took bold but ultimately unsuccessful steps to arrest the decline.

III. What is at stake in talking about late antiquity?
   A. One obstacle to rethinking these centuries rests in conservative classics curricula. Authors who wrote after about 200 A.D. were neglected in the traditional understanding of classical antiquity.
   B. Historical study traditionally focused on politics, government, institutions, war, and diplomacy, whereas the late antique model tended to emphasize cultural phenomena.
   C. There is no question that the Western Roman Empire vanished, but are we content to equate the collapse of a particular institutional regime with a civilizational catastrophe?
D. Are we today as confident about and as impressed by empires as formerly?
E. If, as we shall see, Christianity was central to the world of late antiquity, are we content to see it as enervating and culturally inferior?
F. Were the barbarians Rome’s “murderers”?
G. How, exactly, did Rome interact with the barbarians?
H. Do the barbarians represent, destructively, the end of Roman civilization or, constructively, the beginnings of Europe?

IV. What about chronology?
A. A “short” view begins with the (universally recognized) crisis of the 3rd century A.D. and runs down to the end of the Western Empire in 476 A.D.
B. A really long view runs from the 3rd century A.D. to 1453 A.D.
C. Bowersock used the range 250–880 A.D., but in these lectures we will discuss the period from about 235 to 750 A.D.

V. What are the fundamental themes and issues that we shall consider?
A. What was the Roman Empire itself like? How did it work? How and why did it change? To what forces did it respond?
B. Who were the barbarians? What roles did they play in transforming the Roman world? What happens to a world, politically and culturally, when its ruling elite changes?
C. What accounts for the rise and eventual triumph of Christianity in the Roman world? Why did a particular Catholic form of Christianity gain prominence and authority? Who were Christianity’s leaders, and how did they lead? How did power and authority shift from secular to religious leaders?
D. What was Christian culture like? How did it relate to classical Greco-Roman culture? Was Christian culture inferior and enervating (a la Gibbon), or was it dynamic, creative, and original?
E. How did people of all ranks experience the changes of the period?
F. In 235 A.D. the Roman Empire extended from Britain to Mesopotamia. In 750 A.D. the Western Empire had turned into a series of kingdoms, the Eastern Empire had evolved into Byzantium, and a huge swathe of formerly Roman territory had become the Islamic caliphate.
G. How were there three “heirs” of Rome born in late antiquity, and what did they owe, in their developed form, to the Roman world that was their common tutor?

Suggested Reading:
Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar, eds. Interpreting Late Antiquity.
Brown, The World of Late Antiquity.

Questions to Consider:
1. How have historians’ understanding of the period of late antiquity changed over the years?
2. Are you inclined to think of historical change as abrupt and cataclysmic or as slow, unpredictable, and virtually invisible in the short term?
Lecture Two
The Crisis of the 3rd Century

Scope: Between 235 and 284 A.D., the Roman Empire plunged into a crisis that was only ended by the emperors Diocletian and Constantine. These remarkable rulers, the subjects of the next two lectures, inaugurated the late antique period. To understand what they did and why, we need to understand the 3rd-century problems to which they responded. For the first time, Rome found its far-flung and extended frontiers threatened on several fronts simultaneously. Military problems exposed others. Armies could, and did, make and unmake emperors with alarming regularity; in such circumstances, the imperial office itself suffered a decline in prestige and authority. The economy of the Mediterranean world experienced acute and continuous inflation. Finally, there was a spiritual crisis: The literature of the period reveals unmistakable feelings of despair and uncertainty.

Outline

I. In this lecture we will turn to the crisis of the 3rd century and set the stage for the great achievements of the late antique world that began with the ascension of the emperor Diocletian.

II. A short reflection on terminology may be helpful.
   A. The Roman Empire as a congeries of territories ruled by the Romans grew consistently from 241 B.C. to 117 A.D.
   B. The Roman Empire as a specific kind of institutional regime began in 27 B.C. and lasted until 476 A.D. in the west and 1453 in the east.
   C. The regime inaugurated by Augustus Caesar in 27 B.C. is called “the Principate.” In this period, lasting to 235 A.D., the emperor was called “princeps” (“first citizen”).

III. The “crisis of the 3rd century” involved four interrelated problems, all of which seemed insurmountable at the time.
   A. In the first place, there was a military crisis: After a long period of relative peace, Rome was threatened simultaneously on the Mesopotamian, Black Sea, Danubian, and Rhine frontiers.
      1. The Severan dynasty had defeated the Parthians (who ruled from the Euphrates to the Indus), and this paved the way for the rise of the Sassanian dynasty in Persia, whose king (or shah) Shapur I constantly attacked in Mesopotamia from 241 to 273 A.D.
      2. The European frontiers were pressured by newly formed confederations among the Germanic peoples. The Danube was pressed 238–269 A.D.; northern Italy was attacked 259–271 A.D.; and Gaul was raided 253–277 A.D.
   B. In the second place, there was a political crisis: Between 235 and 284 A.D., there were 26 legitimate emperors, 3 more-or-less legitimate subordinates, and 41 usurpers.
      1. The average reign was 30 months; the longest reign was 15 years. Only two emperors died natural deaths; two died in captivity.
      2. The emperors were mainly military men at the head of armies recruited locally.
      3. Emperors ruled too briefly and locally to manage the empire as a whole.
      4. There was no orderly process for making emperors.
      5. The senate, allegedly the emperor’s partner in the Principate, was marginalized by the “barracks emperors.”
      6. All or parts of Egypt, Palmyra, Gaul, and Spain enjoyed periods of local autonomy.
   C. In the third place, there was an economic crisis.
      1. There was a monetary crisis amounting to precipitous inflation caused in part by constantly debased coinage: A modius (a Roman bushel) of wheat cost 0.5 denarius in 200 A.D. and 300 denarii in 300 A.D.
      2. The military crisis disrupted agricultural and mineral production.
      3. Population may have been declining overall, or people may have been fleeing exposed frontiers and settling in cities, where they had little hope of productive livelihoods.
   D. In the fourth place, there was a cultural, moral, or spiritual crisis.
      1. Scholars have noted an “ascetic impulse,” a tendency for people to opt out.
      2. The predominant philosophical current, Neoplatonism, tended to disdain the whole created world.
      3. Temple petitions and prayers from Egypt are poignant and revealing: “What is to become of me?” “Will I be sold?” “Shall I have wages?”
      4. Everywhere there was a dramatic decline in public building due, in part, to economic shortages and to “evergetism.”
      5. There was, overall, a lack of distinguished literature.
6. In an effort to restore the *pax deorum*, two emperors, Decius and Valerian, brutally persecuted all who refused to make sacrifices to the gods.

IV. At the dawn of late antiquity, the Roman Empire was in a perilous condition.

A. Whatever one thinks of Edward Gibbon’s characterization of the situation in 180 A.D., everything had changed for the worse.

B. No one could have predicted that Rome was about to raise up two rulers, Diocletian and Constantine, who would reign for a half century, address all aspects of the 3rd-century crisis, profess absolute faith in the traditional Roman way of life, and, in the end, dramatically change the Roman world forever.

**Suggested Reading:**
Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*.
Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chaps. 1–12.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Thinking about Rome’s challenges in the 3rd century, which ones seem to you the most serious?
2. Do you see parallels between Rome’s crisis and the crises of more modern states?
Lecture Three
The New Empire of Diocletian

Scope: Diocles (later named Diocletian) rose through the army and was chosen emperor by a council of generals in 284 A.D. After dealing with potential rivals, he attempted to secure peace with Persia, always Rome’s greatest foe, and to pacify the long Danube frontier. Diocletian then turned to a program of reform. He created the tetrarchy (meaning “rule by four”): Diocletian took a colleague, and each emperor took a junior associate. The introduction of shared rule was aimed at more orderly imperial successions and easier local decision making. Diocletian began a thoroughgoing reform of the size and structure of the army. Had he done nothing else, Diocletian would have changed forever the shape of the Roman Empire. Diocletian also enacted fundamental changes in the government of the empire, vastly expanding its size and scope. In addition, he introduced economic policies designed to address the worst aspects of the 3rd century’s economic malaise. Finally, Diocletian launched the last, and fiercest, persecution of Christianity.

Outline
I. Diocletian, who reigned from 284 to 305 A.D., instituted a vast array of largely successful reforms, but his background and early career suggested he would be just another “barracks emperor.”
   A. Diocles was born c. 236 in Salona on the Dalmatian coast as a freedman or the son of one. Given his humble background, he had little education.
   B. Diocles entered the army in 270 and rose meteorically, becoming Duke of Moesia.
   C. In 282 the legions made Carus emperor. He favored Diocles, making him a high-ranking officer in 282 and consul in 283.
   D. In about 283 Carus was killed by lightning.
      1. Carus’s son Numerian was murdered, and then Diocles killed the murderer.
   E. Diocletian marched west and defeated Carinus in 285, securing control of the empire.

II. Among Diocletian’s earliest reforms were strategic and political measures.
   A. In 285 Diocletian named Maximian, an old comrade-in-arms, caesar and sent him to Gaul.
      1. Maximian defeated Gallic bandits.
      2. Maximian appointed Carausius to secure the coast against pirates, but Carausius declared himself emperor of the Imperium Britanniarum.
   B. Diocletian then named Maximian augustus; dual emperorship was a novelty.
      1. Maximian struggled against Carausius.
      2. Diocletian made a truce with Persia, tried to secure the Danube frontier, and faced revolts in Syria and Egypt.
   C. In 293 at Milan, Diocletian decided that each augustus would adopt a subordinate caesar.
      1. Diocletian named Galerius and Maximian named Constantius, and thus was inaugurated the tetrarchy (the “rule by four”).
      2. Both caesars married daughters of the augustuses.
      3. The basic idea was for the caesars to succeed and then adopt caesars of their own.
      4. Each man had a distinct territory.
         a. Diocletian had Asia, Syria, and Egypt, with a capital at Nicomedia.
         b. Maximian had Italy and North Africa, with a capital at Milan.
         c. Galerius had the Danube frontier and Greece, with a capital at Salonica.
         d. Constantius had Spain, Gaul, and Britain, with a capital at Trier.
      5. The underlying concept held that there was one undivided empire.
      6. Diocletian had attempted to address the unstable successions of the 3rd century and to provide more localized imperial rule.

III. Diocletian also introduced far-reaching military reforms.
   A. Some 3rd-century emperors had already begun to revise the old “preclusive” system: Fixed frontiers had worked well when there were few threats.
      1. Elastic defense moved many troops to major cities behind the frontiers and equipped infantry with significant cavalry detachments. During the “crisis” this system tended to multiply military dissension.
      2. Frontier provinces were exposed and terribly ravaged.
B. Diocletian developed a sophisticated system of defense-in-depth.
   1. Garrisons of low-paid and modestly trained troops were stationed in forts along the frontiers.
   2. The main armies were located in or near major cities behind the frontiers.
   3. Exposed frontier provinces were better defended and in turn defended interior provinces.
C. Overall the military expanded from c. 300,000 to c. 500,000 men.

IV. Diocletian also introduced significant political and institutional reforms.
   A. Fewer than 50 provinces were divided to make more than 100; provinces were grouped into 12 dioceses, and
      dioceses were grouped into 4 prefectures.
   B. Senators were virtually excluded from high offices, and civil and military authority was sharply differentiated.
   C. Provincial governors were assigned more tasks, and if military men were often rather crude, the new governing
      hierarchy was made up of educated, sophisticated, and effective men.
   D. The augustuses and caesars adopted Persian-style trappings of imperial rule.
      1. The Principate became the Dominate (from Dominus, “lord and master”).
      2. The aura and prestige of the emperors was restored and even enhanced.

V. In order to pay for his vastly expanded military and civil regime, Diocletian introduced economic reforms.
   A. He tried to stabilize the currency and undertook a massive census of people and resources, with the aim of
      regularizing the flow of taxes and effecting stable budgeting.
   B. Diocletian could not get control of inflation, and in 301 he introduced the desperate Edict of Maximum Prices,
      which regulated prices, wages, and the cost of services on some 1,400 named items.
   C. Compulsion and governmental intrusion became routine features of the late antique world.
   D. Rome's economy became a “command economy.”

VI. The “Great Persecution” is probably Diocletian’s most remembered policy.
   A. Diocletian was totally committed to Rome’s traditional gods.
   B. A sacrifice on behalf of the troops at Antioch in 299 supposedly failed because of the presence of Christians in the
      army.
   C. In 303 Diocletian issued an edict requiring all people to make a sacrifice in public.
   D. The aim was not to extirpate Christianity or any other religion but to restore the pax deorum.

VII. On balance …
   A. Diocletian established peace on all frontiers, put an end to civil wars, stabilized the government, and arrested
      economic decline.
   B. Diocletian had turned the Roman Empire into a great armed camp that intruded on and demanded more of its
      citizens than ever before.
   C. Astonishingly, Diocletian retired to his palace at Split in 305 and lived on, possibly to 316.

Suggested Reading:
Rees, Diocletian and the Tetrarchy.
Williams, Diocletian and the Roman Recovery.

Questions to Consider:
1. From what he did and what he tried to do, what sense do you have of Diocletian as a man?
2. What aspects of the 3rd-century crisis did Diocletian address most effectively? Least effectively?
Lecture Four
Constantine’s Roman Revolution

Scope: Despite Diocletian’s aspirations, the succession of Constantine was neither smooth nor quick. Once seated firmly in power, Constantine adjusted the tetrarchical system to accommodate his sons in a more traditional dynastic regime. Even while he was trying to secure his office, Constantine extended the military and political reforms of Diocletian. He continued reshaping the army and began dividing the civil and military responsibilities of the great imperial administrators. Constantine gave the empire a stable currency and a new capital at Byzantium, which he renamed after himself: Constantinople. Constantine gradually put an end to the Great Persecution and then took a surprising step: he legalized Christianity. Over the years Constantine himself embraced the new faith.

Outline
I. Diocletian’s retirement provoked an almost unimaginably complicated succession crisis that was not resolved until Constantine secured the imperial office.
   A. Initially it appeared that the tetrarchy would continue to function.
      1. Constantius succeeded in the west and chose Severus as caesar, bypassing a son of Maximian.
      2. In the east Galerius succeeded and chose Maximinus Daia as caesar.
   B. Young Constantine, who had been more or less a hostage at Diocletian’s court, fled to his father Constantius, who was then in Britain.
      1. Constantius died in 306, and the troops elevated his son to succeed him.
   C. Severus had died in 307, and Constantine defeated and killed Maximian in 308.
   D. At the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine defeated Maxentius and became supreme ruler in the west.
   E. In the east Licinius alone succeeded Galerius and Maximinus Daia, and he ruled until Constantine defeated him in 324.
   F. Constantine elevated his sons as caesars: Constantine II in 317, Constantius II in 323, and Constans in 333.
   G. Constantine effectively substituted a dynastic system for the tetrarchical one, but the constant battles of the 3rd century did not recur.
II. Constantine continued the reforms initiated by Diocletian.
   A. Constantine added a few wrinkles to Diocletian’s military reforms.
      1. He regularized the mobile field armies.
      2. He created many new army units.
      3. He recruited many more barbarians into the regular army.
      4. He began to use treaties (foedera) as a regular way of raising frontier troops (federati).
      5. He instituted two new military offices—the master of the horse and the master of the foot—in each prefecture.
   B. Constantine finally managed to stabilize the currency. He issued a new gold solidus struck at 72 coins to the pound. This remained the money of account in the Mediterranean world for centuries.
   C. Constantine raised taxes and continued to expand the imperial bureaucracy.
   D. Constantine substantially expanded the number and functions of the officers of the imperial government. (We will discuss them in a later lecture.)
   E. Constantine established a new capital for the Eastern Empire at Byzantium, which he renamed for himself: Constantinople (“Constantine’s polis”).
III. In one fundamental respect, Constantine broke with Diocletian: He legalized, patronized, and eventually embraced Christianity.
   A. Persecutions had been sporadic between 305 and 311 when Galerius, on his deathbed, urged an end to them.
   B. In 313 at Milan, Licinius and Constantine issued an edict that outlawed persecution, conferred legal status on all religions, and restored some church properties seized during the persecutions.
   C. Constantine proceeded very cautiously on his path to Christianity.
      1. His mother Helena was Christian, but he himself was raised at the pagan court of Diocletian.
      2. Before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, he saw a cross in the sky with the words In hoc signo vinces (“In this sign you will conquer”).

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3. There was no purge of pagans. He had pagan philosophers at his court, retained *Sol Invictus* (“the unconquered Sun”) on his coins, and referred ambiguously to “the highest god” on his triumphal arch.

4. He was baptized on his deathbed.

**D. Constantine involved the imperial regime in the affairs of the church.**

1. He involved himself in doctrinal quarrels.
   a. The Council of Arles in 314 condemned the Donatists.
   b. The Council of Nicaea in 325 condemned the Arians.

2. Constantine granted significant privileges and tax exemptions to churches and to members of the clergy.

3. Constantine had Christian bishops as advisers and began to draw them into his ruling apparatus.


**IV. A balance sheet on Constantine and on Diocletian would bring some important concepts into focus.**

A. The tetrarchical and dynastic systems were in precarious balance, but stability reigned.

B. The frontiers were stable and generally peaceful.

C. The imperial office was more dignified and prestigious but also more remote.

D. The imperial administration was massively overhauled. It was more effective but also larger and more intrusive.

E. The military establishment was vastly larger and substantially reorganized.

F. The economy was proceeding toward a fragile stability.

G. The empire had embraced Christianity, but the implications of this step were not yet clear.

**V. When Constantine died in 337, he bequeathed an empire that Augustus Caesar would not have recognized. Neither willed nor suspected by anyone, the late antique world had dawned.**

**Suggested Reading:**

Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*.

Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Where did Constantine continue and even expand the work of Diocletian, and where did he innovate?

2. How do you think it is possible to understand Constantine’s embrace of Christianity?
Lecture Five

The House of Constantine, 337–363

Scope: When Constantine died he was succeeded by three of his sons, with one of them—Constantius II—finally securing sole rule until his own death in 361. For a further two years, the succession passed to Constantine’s nephew Julian. The 4th-century empire continued in many respects on the path traced by Diocletian and Constantine. We will begin by studying the continuing development of the imperial office and government. Then we will turn to foreign relations and investigate the impact of earlier military reforms on Rome’s dangerous and exposed frontiers. After a brief look at continuing economic challenges, we will turn to religious affairs. Religious controversy played a significant role in these decades. Constantine’s sons professed Arianism, a form of Christianity later deemed heretical. Julian, in his turn, attempted for the last time in Roman history to restore the pagan cults to their formerly privileged position.

Outline

I. Given the dramatic changes introduced by Diocletian and Constantine, one fundamental theme for this lecture will be, how had the issues of the 3rd century been addressed?
   A. Did the reforms hold up?
   B. What can we discover about the imperial office, foreign relations, the economy, and religious problems?

II. Constantine’s succession sheds light on both the imperial office and political issues.
   A. From 324 to May 337, Constantine ruled as sole augustus with three sons as caesars.
      1. Shortly before he died, Constantine named his nephew Dalmatius as caesar.
      2. Constantius II and the Constantinople garrison refused to recognize Dalmatius.
   B. In September 337, three sons named themselves augustuses.
   C. By 340 Constantine II had been shoved aside—Constans now ruled the Western and Constantius the Eastern Empire.
      1. Fiscal and administrative mismanagement plus charges of homosexuality led a Frankish officer, Magnentius, to rise up against Constats in 350.
      2. Constantius named his nephew Gallus as caesar and sent him to Antioch to deal with the East while he went west.
      3. In 351 at Mursa, Constantius defeated Magnentius with 54,000 casualties.
      4. Gallus ruled so badly that Constantius deposed him.
   D. From 354 to 361, Constantius II ruled as sole augustus.
      1. In 355 Constantius named his cousin Julian as the caesar for Gaul (among their family members, only Julian and Gallus had survived the bloodbath of 337).
      2. Constantius named Julian as his sole successor shortly before his death in 361. Julian ruled alone until he was killed by the Persians in 363.
   E. Constantine’s dynasty was gone. Dynastic principles had trumped Diocletian’s tetrarchy, but it seemed that some sense of shared rule might continue.

III. Foreign relations did not complicate the situation or spawn new challenges.
   A. Constans dealt successfully with the Rhine frontier and went to Britain (the last emperor to do so) to shore up the defenses there.
   B. Constantius dealt effectively with the Alemans, a barbarian people who had aided Magnentius.
   C. Constantius achieved no successes but suffered no losses against the Persians.
   D. Julian, perhaps the greatest general of the family, defeated the Alemans near Strasburg, defeated the Franks, increased the channel fleet from 200 to 600 ships, and rebuilt 45 cities that had been damaged in barbarian incursions.
   E. In 362 Julian announced that he would no longer pay subsidies to the Persians, and in 363 he won a great victory over them, only to be killed accidentally in a skirmish afterward.
   F. The empire neither gained nor lost any territory under Constantine’s successors. The frontiers remained secure.

IV. Economic activity reveals little gain or loss.
   A. The basic reforms of Diocletian and Constantine were left in place (although the price edict proved unenforceable).
B. To pay for the expanded military, defend the frontiers, and deal with the usurper Magnentius, the emperors had to raise taxes continually.

C. Constans and Gallus were both profligate and deeply unpopular.

D. Julian was fiscally austere and popular with the people. His restraint might have made him unpopular with the soldiers, but his victories ensured his popularity.

V. Religious issues were intensely complicated.

A. Jews, Donatists, Manichaeans, and pagans were often harassed, faced with forced conversions, and subjected to financial penalties.

B. Without specific encouragement, Christianity began to spread outside the empire, especially to Arabs, Ethiopians, and Goths.
   1. Ulfilas, a Goth who studied at Constantinople, was consecrated a bishop and returned to his own people.
   2. He translated the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament into Gothic (only fragments survive today).
   3. He professed Arian Christianity and tragically converted his people to what had been and would again become a heresy.

C. Whereas Constans was militantly Catholic, Constantius II was Arian.
   1. Although condemned at Nicaea in 325, Arianism gained ground in many eastern cities under Constantius.
   2. Several barbarian peoples embraced Arianism.

D. Under Julian "the Apostate," there was a pagan reaction.
   1. He was probably raised as an Arian but remained very discreet about his personal beliefs until 361.
   2. He was taught by several Greek tutors.
   3. In 361 Julian grew his beard, declared that the gods could be worshipped again, opened and repaired temples, restored sacrifices and celebrations, appointed pagan priests, forbade Christians to teach in public, and stopped all privileges for Christians.
   4. Julian did not persecute Christians, but his tolerant attitude annoyed them.
   5. His model was the "philosopher emperor" Marcus Aurelius.
   6. Later Christian writers vilified Julian, but he was immensely popular in his time.

VI. Apart from Julian’s religious and cultural experiments, continuity was the hallmark of the age.

A. The expansion and refinement of the palace administration continued apace.

B. Constantius II gave Constantinople a full set of urban institutions and amenities.

C. The empire continued to be well governed and fortunately faced no serious foreign threats.

Suggested Reading:
Bowersock, Julian the Apostate.
Williams, Later Roman Empire, pp. 70–84 (or Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, chaps. 19–24).

Questions to Consider:
1. How did the family of Constantine maintain the reforms of Constantine and Diocletian?
2. What do you make of the pagan reaction of Julian? Why do you suppose it was a failure?
Lecture Six
The End of a Unified Empire

Scope: After Julian died fighting the Persians in 363, the succession passed to a new family with, once again, roots in the army. Valentinian I ruled effectively and shared rule with his brother Valens. The Persian and Rhine frontiers were threatened, but the Danube region constituted the great threat. The Visigoths crossed the river in 376 and defeated Valens at the Battle of Adrianople. In 378 the great soldier Theodosius was named emperor and sent to the east to pacify the situation. He worked hard to settle the Goths in the Balkans, made peace with Persia, and put down rebellions. Theodosius was pious and militantly Catholic. His legislation made Catholicism Rome’s state religion and intertwined church and state even more than before. When he died the Roman world was largely at peace, reasonably prosperous, and well governed. However, Theodosius’s sons Arcadius and Honorius were bitter rivals and, after them, the empire never again enjoyed unified rule, policies, or objectives.

Outline

I. During the next five decades, the Roman Empire experienced one crisis after another but also raised up one of late antiquity’s greatest rulers.
   A. The immediate situation on Julian’s death was dire. Julian had named no heir, so the army elevated Jovian, who came from a low-born but nevertheless distinguished military family.
      1. Jovian’s first task was to get his army home, so he negotiated a 30-year truce with Persia and ceded a good deal of territory, to the permanent ruin of his reputation.
      2. On his way back from Mesopotamia he died, perhaps by poisoning.
   B. In a repeat of what happened in 284, a council of generals elevated Valentinian I.
      1. The army pressed for a co-ruler, so Valentinian elevated his brother Valens.
      2. The empire was divided as it was previously between Constantius and Constans (Valentinian ruled in the west and Valens in the east).
      3. During an illness in 367, Valentinian made his son Gratian (aged eight) a second augustus for the west.

II. The reign of Valentinian was generally successful.
   A. He pacified the Rhine frontier, and his deputies secured Britain.
   B. He was frugal like Julian.
   C. Provincial and urban elites disliked him because he promoted men of modest background to high offices.
   D. In religious policy he was generally tolerant.
   E. When Valentinian died in a fit of rage while negotiating with barbarians along the Danube, a faction of soldiers elevated Valentinian II (aged four). He “ruled” in Italy while his brother Gratian was in Gaul.

III. The rule of Valens in the east was a disaster.
   A. Valens briefly faced a usurper, Procopius, who was an associate of Jovian.
      1. Procopius had sought the assistance of the Goths, who sent him 3,000 men.
      2. This marked the first time that barbarian soldiers played a role in internal Roman politics.
   B. Valens rightly feared pressure along the Danube.
      1. He campaigned successfully beyond the Danube in 369 and made peace with Athanaric, a major Gothic leader.
      2. The Goths were now split into a pagan group (under the recently defeated Athanaric) and a Christian group (under Fritigern).
   C. Pressure from the Huns led Athanaric to retreat with his people into the Carpathians, while Fritigern approached the Danube and requested permission to enter the empire.
      1. Valens was in Antioch seeking to deal with the Persian situation when the Gothic envoys reached him.
      2. Valens’s immediate reaction was positive: He was Arian, and perhaps these Arian Goths could be recruited to secure the Danube frontier.
   D. Between 376 and 378, many more Goths than anticipated crossed the river.
   E. Valens marched north with a modest force and was defeated at Adrianople in 378. Some have seen this defeat as the beginning of the end for the Western Empire. Others see it as the beginning of yet another transformation.

IV. After the defeat of Valens at Adrianople, Gratian named Theodosius as augustus for the Eastern Empire.
   A. Theodosius was a Spaniard, an outstanding soldier from an old, wealthy, military family.
B. When Gratian was murdered in 383, Theodosius effectively ruled the Western Empire through a series of barbarian generals.

C. By 392 the nonentity Valentinian II was dead, probably murdered.

D. Until his death in 395, Theodosius ruled the empire alone; he was the last man to do so.

E. On his death he was succeeded by his sons: Arcadius in the east and Honorius in the west.
   1. They were capable men but also bitter rivals.
   2. Roman east and west were clearly drifting apart. In theory there was still one empire with shared rule (as under Diocletian), but the theory was threadbare.

V. The reign of Theodosius was remarkably successful given the challenges he faced.
   A. Theodosius made peace with Persia and faced no problems in the east. This left him free to deal with other areas.
   B. His first task was to shore up the shattered Danube frontier.
      1. He rebuilt the Roman army and severely penalized those who tried to escape service.
      2. He made peace with Athanaric and settled the Goths in the Balkans under their own law and leaders.
      3. The Goths agreed to defend the frontier in return for land and a subsidy.
   C. The rebel Magnus Maximus was declared augustus by his troops in Britain, and he engineered the murder of Gratian.
      1. Theodosius marched west and killed Magnus in 388.
      2. Arbogast, one of the generals through whom Theodosius had been ruling Gaul, murdered Valentinian II and tried to elevate his own dependent augustus.
      3. Theodosius marched west again and defeated Arbogast at the Frigidus River in a terrible slaughter reminiscent of Mursa.
   D. Religious strife occupied Theodosius constantly.
      1. Theodosius was from an old Catholic family, and he was personally pious.
      2. Between 378 and 380, he passed a series of laws that effectively made Catholicism Rome’s state religion. Arianism was outlawed.
      3. The newfound power of the Catholic Church resulted in four conflicts with the powerful Bishop Ambrose of Milan.
         a. Gratian ordered the Altar of Victory removed from Rome’s senate house. The pagan elite objected, Ambrose opposed them, and Theodosius was embroiled in the controversy.
         b. Ambrose opposed the Arian Valentinian so forcefully that he severely damaged his prestige and authority.
         d. In Thessalonika, Theodosius turned his troops on rioters after the arrest of a popular chariot racer, and Ambrose forced him to do public penance.

VI. With the reign of Theodosius, we find ourselves fully in the world of late antiquity.
   A. The new regime of Diocletian and Constantine was fully in place.
   B. Barbarians were now settled en masse inside the empire.
   C. Most great military officers were barbarians.
   D. The empire had thrown its full weight behind the Catholic Church.

Suggested Reading:
Lenski, *Failure of Empire*.
Williams and Friell, *Theodosius*.

Questions to Consider:
1. How would you evaluate the Battle of Adrianople, in light of its antecedents and consequences?
2. What does Theodosius’s reign reveal about the evolving relationship between the imperial administration and the Catholic Church?
Lecture Seven
Ruling the Roman Empire—The Imperial Center

Scope: After discussing the kinds of sources that permit us to study Rome’s government, we will turn to an account of one of the most impressive regimes ever created. First we will look at the powers, duties, and responsibilities of the emperors themselves, along with the basic ideas that sustained the imperial regime. Then we will turn to the people who advised the emperor and the nature of the offices they held. This lecture will conclude with some reflections on the resources and challenges of the imperial government.

Outline

I. How do we actually know about the Roman government?
   A. Tidbits are scattered throughout narrative histories, private letters, and ecclesiastical documents.
   B. Panegyrics, speeches delivered in the emperor’s presence, tip us off to policies but are hard to evaluate.
   C. The greatest source is the law codes: the Theodosian Code, compiled by Theodosius II, and the Corpus Iuris Civilis, compiled by Justinian.
      1. All materials in the codes bear the names of the issuing emperor, so we can fix dates precisely.
      2. The codes contain decrees; judgments by emperors of cases on appeal; rescripts, the emperor’s answers to queries and petitions; and edicts, general statements to the populace as a whole.

II. The system revolved around the emperor, so we will start with him.
   A. In theory the emperor was absolute: Anyone could appeal to him; no one could appeal from him.
      1. Everything was called “sacred.”
      2. Panegyrics and other treatises articulate expected virtues to cultivate (moderation, clemency, frugality, accountability, willingness to obey laws) and vices to be avoided (cruelty, capriciousness, unpredictability, inaccessibility).
   B. How did one become emperor?
      1. After Constantine, the dynastic principle reigned supreme except in 363 and 364.
      2. Often the army voiced its opinion, but instead of choosing their own generals, as in the 3rd century, the soldiers selected among the imperial family.
   C. There were severe limitations on the emperor’s practical ability to govern.
      1. Time and distance were constant obstacles.
      2. It was impossible for emperors to know all their subordinates, who had brief tenures of office and tended to change constantly.
      3. Corruption was a constant problem in its specifically Roman forms: venality and patronage.
      4. All signs point to poor and uneven record keeping.
   D. Who advised the emperor?
      1. The senate (and after 340, two senates) had been marginalized and excluded from most offices.
      2. The Consistory was critical. It consisted of the following.
         a. Ex officio members such as the praepositus sacri cubiculi, the magister officiorum, the comites sacrarum largitionum, the comites rei privatae, the quaestor sacri palatii, and the notarii.
         b. Military officers such as the comites domesticorum, the comites excubitorum, and the magistri militum praesentales—all military units deputed to imperial service and stationed near the capital.
         c. Any praetorian prefect who happened to be in residence.
         d. Imperial relatives, close friends and associates, trusted ex-officeholders, and, increasingly, bishops.
   E. We know about the official hierarchy from law codes and from the Notitia Dignitatum, a list of all civilian and military ranks compiled in the early 5th century.
      1. The praepositus sacri cubiculi ran the household and oversaw eunuchs, cooks, pages, and keepers of the wardrobe.
      2. The magister officiorum headed the palace administration, supervised the scrinia (the secretaries) for petitions, received reports from embassies, maintained the cursus publicus, and supervised the palace guard and the arms manufacturers.
3. The *comes sacrarum largitionum* received direct (head and land) and indirect (tolls and customs) taxes sent to the court, collected taxes in metal (gold and silver) for army donatives, and supervised the state mints, mines, and quarries.
4. The *comes rei privatae* supervised imperial properties, collecting rents, proceeds from sales, and various revenues (e.g., from the sale of agricultural products).
5. The *quaestor sacri palatii* drafted legislation and provided legal advice.
6. Under the *primicerius notariorum*, the *notarii* issued codicils of appointment (in theory to all offices), maintained the *Notitia Dignitatum*, and often served on special ad hoc tasks.

**F.** Our sources rarely permit us to watch these people at work.
1. All indications are that the system functioned smoothly.
2. Under the Principate the officers were few and amateur.
3. Under the Dominate the number of officers grew dramatically, and their reach expanded as well. Under Theodosius, the *comes sacrarum largitionum* had a staff of 446.

**Suggested Reading:**

*Jones, The Late Roman Empire.*

*Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World.*

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What parallels can you draw between the Roman administration and modern government (e.g., the American government)?
2. Thinking about venality and patronage in the Roman system, was this a plus or a minus overall? Do these Roman “vices” have modern parallels?
Lecture Eight
Ruling the Roman Empire—The Provinces

Scope: Having looked at central institutions in the previous lecture, we will turn here to the vast administrative hierarchy by means of which Rome managed a state extending from the north of Britain to Mesopotamia. In fact that administration was a neatly serried hierarchy of interlocking branches and bureaus. We will explore what kinds of men Rome attracted to its service, how they were prepared for service, and how they were rewarded. This lecture will conclude with some reflections on how effective Rome’s government actually was.

Outline

I. Having looked in our last lecture at the central government, the place where policy was formulated, we turn now to the vast apparatus that implemented policy at the regional and local levels.

II. First let us look at the overall structure of the imperial administration.
   A. The *Notitia Dignitatum* lists 114 provinces, each under a governor. Provincial governors had judicial, administrative, and financial responsibilities; they also supervised city governments and public works projects.
   B. The provinces were arrayed under 12 and later 14 dioceses. Dioceses were under the command of vicars, who supervised governors and heard appeals from provincial courts.
   C. The dioceses were organized under four prefectures.
      1. The praetorian prefects were the greatest civilian officers of the government.
      2. The prefects heard appeals next below the emperor, supervised the vicars and governors, set local budgets and levied taxes accordingly, and secured urban food supplies.
   D. Rome and Constantinople were special cases standing outside the regular hierarchy.
      1. Each city had an urban prefect who possessed most of the roles of a praetorian prefect.
      2. The urban prefects in addition oversaw administration of their two cities; saw to the supplies of bread, meat, oil, and wine; supervised aqueducts; maintained statues and public buildings; and provided public games and entertainments.

III. Now let us look a little closer at the officers of the government.
   A. Every major office had, typically, three subordinates plus a writing office.
   B. Technically all were “soldiers.” They were called *milites* and received grain and fodder allotments like soldiers.
   C. Lower officers wore heavy, military-style cloaks (*chlamys*) and a belt of office (*cingulum*).
   D. The praetorian prefect wore a flame-colored cloak with gold stripes, a deep purple tunic, and a crimson belt (it was a capital offense for an ordinary person to wear purple).
   E. The urban prefect wore a toga with purple bands and red shoes with black straps.

IV. Additional perspectives on officers of the government are both interesting and helpful.
   A. There was fairly rapid turnover. Praetorian prefects served three to four years, urban prefects and provincial governors one to two years, others for varying periods.
   B. Brief tenures were aimed at checking concentrations of power and emphasizing the emperor’s role.
   C. The emperors used *notarii* and *agentes in rebus* as “spies” to check up on local officials.
   D. Promotion was based on seniority, family connections, and patronage.
   E. Corruption and venality were rampant but actually understood and accepted.
   F. The middle and lower ranks of the system were usually filled by men with legal training who served for lengthy periods and hoped for promotion.
   G. In all there were probably 30,000–40,000 men, which meant that the system provided ample opportunities for social mobility.
   H. It is hard to call the system “bureaucratic.”
      1. Everyone was, notionally, a *comes* (companion) or *amicus* (friend) of the emperor. In other words they were not professional civil servants.
      2. There were no specific standards of training or professionalization, no official autonomy, and no sense of being “apolitical.”
V. This vast and impressive system was designed essentially to secure peace and order and to generate the tax revenues necessary to maintain a military establishment that could protect the empire.

A. In later lectures we will see what happened as the empire lost land and revenue.

B. We will see what happened when local elites no longer believed that Rome could provide peace and order.

C. We will also see that models of Roman administration survived the fragmentation of the empire itself.

Suggested Reading:

Jones, *The Late Roman Empire.*

Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire.*

Questions to Consider:

1. Suppose that you were given the opportunity to create a governmental structure for a realm the size of Rome’s. What aspects of Rome’s system would you retain, and what modifications would you introduce?

2. What strengths and/or weaknesses do you perceive in the Roman system of government?
Lecture Nine
The Barbarians—Ethnicity and Identity

Scope: Previous lectures have mentioned barbarians often. These were people, usually Germanic but sometimes Slavic or Celtic, who lived east of the Rhine and north of the Danube. Who were these people? What were they like? What kinds of relations had they sustained with Rome? People usually think in terms of barbarian “tribes.” We shall therefore investigate the nature of the bonds that tied these groups together. What can we say about the profusion of peoples—Goths, Franks, Saxons, Lombards, Vandals, and many more—who populate real and imagined images of the late Roman world? One of the most familiar of all historical images pertains to the “barbarian invasions,” and this lecture will conclude by showing that the image is badly out of focus.

Outline

I. Several fundamental issues are at stake in discussing the barbarians.
   A. Who, exactly, are we talking about?
   B. How do we study barbarians?
   C. What do we know about barbarians?
   D. How, at least in the Western Roman Empire, do we get from the provinces of an empire to a series of kingdoms?
   E. What connections, if any, exist between the barbarian kingdoms and the states of later Europe?

II. First, then, who were the barbarians?
   A. *Hoi barbaroi* was a Greek term originally applied to non-Greek speakers and then gradually applied to *xenoi* (foreigners) more generally—usually with negative connotations. The Romans took over this term (*barbari* in Latin) and applied it to those who lived beyond the frontiers and who were assumed to be inferior.
   B. Another term in use is “Germans” (*Germani* in Latin): Julius Caesar appears to have been the first to use this term for some of the peoples he met. The word recurs occasionally in late antiquity and then vanishes until the Humanists revived it.
      1. Romans spoke more often of Germania than of Germans, but they never used this term exclusively for the lands between the Rhine and the Vistula.
      2. Romans were as likely to speak of Celts and Scythians.
      3. No premodern people called themselves German.
      4. The peoples with whom we shall be concerned spoke what philologists call Germanic languages.

III. All of the barbarian peoples were preliterate, so how do we study them?
   A. We can and must use Roman sources, but only with precautions.
      1. The first problem is the Roman inclination to *interpretatio Romana*.
      2. A second problem is the changeless view of the “other”: people who are savages because they live in a harsh climate; people who are large and strong but cruel and uncultured; people who all have long hair and beards, who wear trousers, who are filthy, drunken, and murderous; people who are ungoverned and ungovernable.
   B. Roman sources present us with what can be called the “Tacitus problem.”
   C. Few Mediterranean peoples had any actual encounters with Germania or Germans, although Rome did have long commercial and diplomatic relations with them.
   D. Histories of the barbarians began to be written between the mid-6th and the 8th centuries: Jordanes (Goths, c. 550), Gregory of Tours (Franks, c. 570–593), Bede (Anglo-Saxons, c. 730), and Paul the Deacon (Lombards, 790s).
      1. They tended to join barbarian history with biblical and Roman history.
      2. They tended to turn the past into history, to treat legend as fact.
   E. Language can be helpful but must also be approached with caution. Personal and place names can be revealing, but language does not reveal racial or ethnic identity.
   F. Archaeology is the fastest growing field of research.
      1. For many decades work was rooted in 19th-century racial and ethnic ideas, which received new and unfortunate emphasis from the Nazis.
      2. Some believed that they could identify “culture provinces” that were stable, exclusive, and identifiable from artifacts.
      3. Gradually race was seen to be artificial, and scholars turned to ethnicity.
G. The prevailing view, although controversial in details, hews to the model of “ethnogenesis.” This model tries to explain how the various peoples with whom the Romans interacted came into being.

H. An excerpt from Jordanes and a Turkish inscription provide examples of two models of ethnogenesis, but late antiquity actually presents three broad models.
   1. A royal, warrior family attracted followers. The traditions of this family became the tradition of a “people.” The tradition traced origins to a distant, named, divine ancestor who led the people from a homeland, won victories, and then settled somewhere on Roman soil. Leaders had to defeat opponents and make accommodation with the Romans.
   2. The Huns of Attila drew on charismatic leadership of central Asian steppe peoples (also Alans and Avars). These polyethnic collectivities were even more diverse than those of the first model. The groups retained laws, customs, and language, but they were also more ephemeral.
   3. Decentralized peoples—Alemans, Bavarians, Slavs—showed a weaker sense of communal identity, lacked strong rulers, and tended to be dominated by others.

I. Essentially, barbarian peoples evolved from concrete historical processes that were variously remembered in later times. Consequently, we cannot speak of long-term “barbarian invasions” as coherent processes involving Romans and definite tribes.

IV. What kinds of things do we actually know?
   A. Barbarians were basically small communities of farmers and herders; they were free people organized in nuclear families; and status depended on wealth and military prowess.
   B. Households were organized into clans, which might be agnatic or cognatic.
   C. People shared common legends and cultural traditions (e.g., dress, hairstyles, religious practices, diet, weapons, battle tactics, pottery, jewelry, crafts, language, and law).
   D. People were not nomadic, so their movements demand specific explanations.
   E. Communities appear to have been regulated by councils of elders over whom a headman of some kind exercised authority.
   F. Leaders (thiudans, rhix, reiks, and kuning) were perhaps once hereditary, sacral rulers but were increasingly supplanted by aristocratic warriors surrounded by sworn companions.
   G. Peoples generally had many subgroups. The “Franks” were a confederation of Chamavi, Chattuari, Bructeri, Amsivarii, and others.
   H. Raiding and plundering was a way of life but was usually localized.

V. The world beyond Rome’s northern frontiers was kaleidoscopic and volatile.

Suggested Reading:
Goffart, Barbarian Tides.
Halsall, Barbarian Migrations.
Noble, From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms.

Questions to Consider:
1. How do race, ethnicity, and identity differ from one another, and what value does each term have when discussing historical peoples?
2. Why is it wrong, or at any rate misleading, to speak of “barbarian invasions”?
Lecture Ten
Rome and the Barbarians

Scope: The Roman Empire was not invaded by a single barbarian enemy in one coherent process. Moreover, the barbarians were not migratory or nomadic. In practical terms this means that to understand the long, complex process that resulted in Rome’s former western provinces being turned into barbarian kingdoms, we would have to explore in detail every encounter between Romans and barbarians. This is impossible. Therefore, this lecture will take up one reasonably detailed case study, that of the Visigoths. We will trace this people from the time when Constantine first made a treaty with them (c. 325) to their settlement in southern Gaul (c. 418) under their own kings who were in service to Rome. We shall assess the relative significance of Roman policy and barbarian aspirations in an attempt to understand what actually happened and why.

Outline

I. In this lecture we will use Rome’s relations with the Visigoths as a case study, but a few preliminary points will help to establish the context.
   A. Rome had long had extensive relations with the peoples of Germania and had made a first treaty with the Visigoths in 325, so we cannot speak of sudden, startling events.
   B. Various bands of Goths (Ostrogoths along the Black Sea and Visigoths along the Danube) had been familiar to the Romans for a long time.
   C. Rome’s encounter with the Visigoths in the 370s was precipitated by the unexpected appearance of the Huns, who attacked the Ostrogoths in the 350s and pressured the Visigoths soon thereafter.
   D. We saw in an earlier lecture that the Visigoths, fearing the Huns, requested permission to enter the empire in 376.
      1. More Visigoths than expected crossed the Danube, the local officials mistreated them terribly, and they revolted.
      2. Valens marched north with inadequate forces and suffered a humiliating defeat.
      3. Theodosius patiently pacified the tense situation.

II. To set the stage, let us turn to the Western Empire after the death of Theodosius, when Stilicho was in control.
   A. Stilicho, the son of a Vandal father and a Roman mother, had risen through the ranks.
      1. Theodosius made him master of the foot in 391.
      2. In 384 Stilicho married Theodosius’s niece Serena; Theodosius entrusted the empire and his two sons to him.
      3. Stilicho married his daughters Maria and Thermantia to Honorius, the son of Theodosius and western augustus; he also betrothed his son Eucherius to Honorius’s half-sister Galla Placidia.
   B. Stilicho’s great crisis came in dealing with the Visigoths.
      1. He needed to replace the western troops who had fallen at the Frigidus River, and to do so he recruited along the Rhine because he did not trust the Visigothic king, Alaric.
      2. The eastern (Arcadius) and western (Honorius/Stilicho) courts did not trust each other, and each tried to use Alaric against the other.
   C. In 401 Alaric headed for Italy just as Stilicho headed for Noricum to deal with Alans and Vandals who were raiding in that vicinity.
   D. In 402 Alaric and Stilicho fought three indecisive battles. Alaric withdrew to Illyricum, and Stilicho moved the western court to Ravenna.
   E. In 406 a conglomeration of peoples under Radagaisus attacked northern Italy, and on the last day of that year the Alans, Sueves, and Vandals crossed the frozen Rhine and pillaged many Gallic towns.
   F. Stilicho continued to try to use Alaric to press a claim to Illyricum and even blockaded all western harbors against eastern ships—in effect, a hostile act against Honorius’s brother Arcadius.
   G. In 408 Alaric approached Rome and was paid a massive bounty (5,000 lbs. gold, 30,000 lbs. silver, 3,000 skins dyed purple, 4,000 silk robes, and 3,000 lbs. pepper).
   H. Throughout 409 Honorius continued to refuse Alaric a military title, and when he approached Rome again the senate named him master of the soldiers (i.e., master of both horses and foot) but refused to assign him and his people North Africa.
I. Negotiations with Alaric failed again, and in 410 Alaric and his men sacked Rome.
   1. The gates were opened by a Christian woman of senatorial rank.
   2. The apostolic churches were spared, and people were permitted to seek asylum in them. There was no slaughter of the population.

III. What happened after Alaric had taken the city of Rome?
   A. Alaric marched south but could not acquire ships to cross to Africa.
   B. Alaric then died suddenly, and his brother Atawulf took command and married Galla Placidia.
   C. In 411–412 Atawulf marched the Visigoths into southern Gaul and tried to get a shadow emperor who would support them.
   D. Atawulf was killed in a feud in 415, and Wallia took over.
   E. The Visigoths finally obtained a treaty in 418 that required that they suppress brigands in Gaul, guard the western coast against pirates, and fight alongside the Romans in Spain against the Alans, Sueves, and Vandals.
   F. There was now a recognized barbarian army on Roman soil, centered on Toulouse.
   G. All in all, it is hard to view this process as a barbarian invasion, and in the next lectures we will see that other peoples had similar experiences.

Suggested Reading:
Heather, Goths and Romans.
Wolfram, The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples.

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare and contrast Visigothic aspirations and Roman policies vis-à-vis the Visigoths.
2. Try to imagine how differently things might have turned out if the Visigoths had been accorded a treaty in the 390s, in 401, or even in 408.
Scope: Having settled the Visigoths in Gaul, we shall now look more closely at their kingdom and at that kingdom’s continuing relations with the Roman Empire. We shall also look at two further kingdoms that were erected inside Rome’s Gallic provinces: those of the Burgundians and of the Franks. Eventually, as the 5th century wore on, the powerful Franks overwhelmed the Visigoths and Burgundians and created the most successful and long-lived of all the barbarian kingdoms. We will pay attention to the degree to which these kingdoms reveal their Roman roots and the kinds of relations they maintained with the Roman government.

Outline

I. The Visigothic army that was settled in Gaul in 418 gradually evolved into a kingdom that served as a loyal Roman ally for decades.
   A. Visigothic troops served in Spain against the Vandals in 418, 422, and 446.
   B. The Visigoths attempted to seize Narbonne and attacked Arles.
      1. Narbonne provided an outlet to the Mediterranean and opened a secure route to Spain at the eastern end of the Pyrenees.
      2. Arles was the seat of the western prefecture, and attacks on the city were not aimed at conquest as much as at adjusting the terms of the treaty.
   C. Gothic expansion and the development of their kingdom resulted from a series of larger developments.
      1. The Franks and Burgundians were expanding in the north and east.
      2. The Roman master of the soldiers, Aetius, used the Huns against the Burgundians in particular.
      3. When the Huns reached their apogee under Attila after 440, Aetius reversed his tactics.
      4. The Huns were defeated on the Catalaunian Field in 451, and Attila retreated to the Hungarian Plain.
   D. The Visigoths became major players in the west after Attila’s death in 453.
      1. In 466 Euric murdered his brother Theodoric II, became king, and initiated a major expansion of the kingdom.
      2. Between 471 and 476, Euric seized control of most of southern Gaul.
      3. The Visigoths could not prevent Burgundian or Frankish expansion.
   E. The Visigoths had played a key role in ending direct Roman rule in the west, but it is difficult to see that this was ever their intention.

II. The Visigothic kingdom was a “sub-Roman” state of considerable ability and promise.
   A. There are controversies about how the Visigoths were actually settled in Gaul.
      1. Some argue that they were assigned lands, while others argue that they were allocated a share of tax revenues.
      2. At least some Goths definitely received lands, but there was no massive expropriation of the local population.
      3. Provincial populations had in any case seen their material resources go to pay for the army since at least the reign of Diocletian.
   B. Southern Gaul was relatively peaceful and prosperous.
      1. More than 300 villas have been excavated, some with beautiful mosaics.
      2. Rich, beautiful, technically proficient sculpture testifies to a high level of culture.
      3. There was a flourishing literary culture.
   C. Gallo-Romans served in the Visigothic government.
      1. That the locals made their peace with the Goths is seen in a description of King Theodoric II penned by Sidonius Apollinaris.
      2. Local elites gradually shifted from looking to the imperial court for civilian promotions to serving in the Visigoths’ military forces.
   D. The Visigoths were Arian Christians but carried out no anti-Catholic policies and permitted the Catholic bishops to hold church councils.
   E. Despite efforts to promote peace and harmony, the Visigoths were in the end no match for the Franks, who dealt them a devastating defeat at Vouillé in 507, largely confining them to Spain after that.
III. The second people to find accommodation in Gaul were the Burgundians.
   A. Many legends surround the Burgundians, and their early history is obscure.
   B. Roman writers mentioned Burgundians as early as the 1st century; Valentinian I enlisted their aid against the Alemans in 369; and they played an obscure and shifting role in the politics of Gaul and the Rhineland in the early 5th century.
   C. The Burgundians received a treaty and settlement in Savoy in 443.
   D. In some ways the Burgundians acted like the Visigoths: They remained loyal to Rome but looked out for their own interests, too.
   E. Burgundian leaders were generally Catholic.
   F. King Gundobad was named master of the soldiers in 472, gradually unified his people, and issued a prominent law code.
   G. The Burgundians were allied with the Franks for some decades but were finally conquered by them in 533–534.

IV. The people who would become the most powerful and durable, the Franks, emerged very slowly.
   A. Roman sources first mention “Franks” c. 250, and it is clear that they were a confederation of peoples living near the lower Rhine.
   B. Later Frankish sources relate two interesting stories about Frankish origins, both of which make the Trojan King Priam their founding father.
      1. In the 4th and early 5th centuries, the story may have arisen in diplomatic circles to suggest fraternal bonds with the Romans.
      2. By the 7th and 8th centuries, the stories were probably meant to suggest a kind of historical parity with the (by then) vanished Romans.
   C. In the middle decades of the 5th century, the Merovingian dynasty emerged, probably in the region of Thuringia.
   D. The greatest early Frankish king was Clovis.
      1. The basic narrative of his reign depends primarily on Gregory of Tours, who began writing 60 years after Clovis died, and on two letters to him—one from Bishop Remigius of Reims and another from Bishop Avitus of Vienne.
      2. Gregory’s picture is the familiar one: Clovis defeated the last of the Roman rulers of the north c. 486 and married the Catholic Burgundian Chlotild.
      3. Clovis and thousands of his followers received baptism from Remigius c. 496.
      4. In 507 Clovis led a “crusade” against the heretical Goths.
      5. Almost every aspect of this story is open to question. For example, Clovis’s conversion probably followed his victory over the Goths, and his campaign against the Goths was traditional politics in sub-Roman Gaul.
      6. Emperor Anastasius named Clovis patrician, and Clovis acted like an emperor in public ceremonies.

V. As the 6th century dawned, virtually all of Gaul was in the hands of the Franks.
   A. They had defeated the Visigoths and then the Burgundians.
   B. They maintained close connections with the Roman government in Constantinople.
   C. They were Catholic and aligned with both the church and the local elites.
   D. Rome’s need for manpower and constant Hunnic pressure had precipitated a dramatic transformation.

Suggested Reading:
Wolfram, The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples, chaps. 6 and 12.

Questions to Consider:
1. What are the most striking characteristics of Sidonius’s description of Theodoric II? Is it an entirely flattering portrayal? Do you detect any tones of irony or sarcasm?
2. What essential factors contributed to the success and/or failure of the early Gallic kingdoms?
Lecture Twelve
Barbarian Kingdoms—Spain and North Africa

Scope: In 406 the Alans, Sueves, and Vandals crossed the frozen Rhine, rampaged across Gaul, and settled Spain. In 507 the Franks defeated the Visigoths and drove them into Spain. The Vandals soon departed for North Africa, where they built a kingdom that lasted for a century. The Sueves defeated the Alans, only to be defeated in turn by the Visigoths, who created a kingdom that lasted until it was overrun by Muslims in 711. The primary focus of this lecture will rest on the Visigoths (down to about 600) and Vandals. We will look at these kingdoms on their own terms and make comparisons with Frankish Gaul in an effort to understand why some kingdoms were successful while others were not. Continuing relations between Rome and these kingdoms will be a regular theme, too.

Outline

I. The Iberian peninsula was one of Rome’s oldest and richest provincial regions. Its fate mattered deeply in the transformation of the ancient world.
   A. Spain’s late antique history unfolded in stages.
   B. The Alans, Sueves, and Vandals crossed the Rhine in 406 and then headed for Spain.
   C. Initially the Romans refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of these new settlements and used the Visigoths against the newcomers.
   D. Gradually the Romans accommodated the Sueves, but then the Visigoths expanded to control most of the peninsula.
   E. After 507 the Visigoths were largely confined to Spain.

II. The Sueves entered Spain in 409 and rapidly took over a wide swathe of territory.
   A. The Sueves were (unintentionally) assisted when the Visigoths, according to the terms of their treaty with Rome, defeated the Alans and one group of Vandals.
   B. The Suevic kings Rechila and Rechiarius continued Suevic expansion until they had taken over virtually the entire peninsula except for Terraconensis.
   C. Emboldened by their recent successes, the Sueves invaded Terraconensis in 455, and the emperor sent the Visigoths against them.

III. The Visigothic kingdom in Spain went through several distinct stages.
   A. From 418 to 455, the Visigoths were occasionally active in Spain.
   B. In 455 and just after, the Visigoths conquered all but the west and northwest (which remained in Suevic hands).
   C. The kingdom itself suffered from several severe challenges.
      1. It was hard to recapture earlier prestige after the devastating defeat at Vouillé.
      2. The death of Alaric II at Vouillé left the Visigoths without a recognized king, and political and social instability reigned for almost a century.
      3. Franks, Ostrogoths from Italy, and the Romans of Justinian all meddled in Spain.
      4. Until King Reccared opted for Catholicism in 587, the Arian Goths were viewed with suspicion and hostility by the Hispano-Roman population.
   D. Iberia produced impressive law books, beautiful churches, stunning works of art, an admirable collection of Christian writings, and an important series of church councils.

IV. The Vandal kingdom in North Africa is in some ways the outlier among the early Germanic kingdoms.
   A. The Hasding Vandals (the Visigoths defeated the Siling Vandals) crossed into Africa under King Gaiseric in 429.
   B. By 430 the Vandals had taken Hippo.
   C. In 440 the Vandal fleet ravaged Sicily (a crucial food source for Rome) and other islands in the western Mediterranean.
      1. Valentinian III betrothed his daughter Eudokia to Gaiseric’s son Huneric.
      2. When Valentinian was overthrown in 455, the Vandals attacked Rome, subjecting it to a more severe sack than the Visigoths had done in 410.
   D. The imperial government resolved to destroy the Vandals.
      1. Expeditions in 461 and 468 were disasters.
      2. Justinian sent his great general Belisarius and adequate forces in 532–534, and the Vandal kingdom succumbed.
3. The one kingdom in all the west that refused to “play ball” with the Romans was eventually destroyed by the Romans themselves.

E. The Vandals had serious problems in Africa.
   1. They could not control the Berber tribesmen.
   2. Their massive expropriations of Romans ruined the chance for peaceful accommodation.
   3. The Vandals were militant and persecuting Arians, which further diminished chances for peace.
   4. From the 490s the Vandals were under the thumb of the Ostrogoth King Theodoric, which damaged the prestige of the rulers.
   5. King Hilderic broke the Gothic connection, realigned with Constantinople, recalled Catholic exiles, and held a church council.

V. We may sum up provisionally the first phase of Rome’s transformation.
   A. A need for manpower led the Romans to improvise by settling large, coherent groups within their frontiers.
   B. In different ways and under differing circumstances, Visigoths, Burgundians, Franks, and Sueves honored their treaties with Rome.
   C. Religious division was a problem everywhere, except among the Franks.
   D. Each of the post-Roman kingdoms maintained relations of some kind with Constantinople through the 6th century.
   E. Cultural life does not suggest that civilization collapsed in the 6th century.

Suggested Reading:
Thompson, The Goths in Spain.
Wolfram, The Roman Empire and Its Germanic Peoples, chap. 7.

Questions to Consider:
1. To what principal factors would you attribute the successes and failures of the early Spanish kingdoms?
2. In what fundamental ways were the Vandals different from the other barbarian peoples whom you have encountered so far?
Lecture Thirteen
Barbarian Kingdoms—Italy

Scope: After the collapse of Roman imperial authority in Italy, the government in Constantinople sent the Ostrogoths to Italy to restore order. Under their great king Theodoric, the Ostrogoths created a remarkable kingdom that might well have had a bright future. When Theodoric died his successors battled among themselves and provided Constantinople with a pretext to intervene. After 20 years of brutal warfare, the Ostrogoths were defeated but Italy was devastated. Into the breach stepped the Lombards in 568. They reigned there until the Charlemagne defeated them in 774. By the time the former Roman world had become recognizably medieval, only one of the dozen or so barbarian kingdoms survived: that of the Franks.

Outline

I. Having worked our way around the periphery, we come now to the Roman Empire’s heartland: Italy.
   A. Although attacked and crossed by many peoples, the Ostrogoths founded the first barbarian kingdom in Italy.
   B. After the tragic failure of the Ostrogothic kingdom, the Lombards entered Italy and created a kingdom that lasted for two centuries.

II. The Ostrogoths were a people who coalesced around the leader Valamer after the collapse of the Huns, who had held them in subjection for some decades.
   A. Some of the peoples who formed the Ostrogoths had lived in southern Russia, the Ukraine, and along the Black Sea from, probably, the late 3rd century.
      1. The Huns attacked the Ostrogoths around 350, precipitating, eventually, the Visigothic push across the Danube in 376.
      2. The Ostrogoths pressed into the Danube basin when the Visigoths crossed into the empire but generally lived under Hunnic domination.
   B. Valamer fell in battle against the Gepids, but his leadership passed in turn to his son Theodemer and then to Theodoric.
   C. Under pressure from the Gepids, Heruls, and Avars, the Ostrogoths crossed into imperial territory in 473.
      1. Two groups of Goths fell to battling one another, and each tried to get recognition from the emperor.
      2. Theodoric won out but could not get an eastern settlement from Emperor Zeno, who sent him to Italy in 488.
   D. Theodoric entered Italy in 489 and struggled for four years to gain the upper hand.
   E. Theodoric had spent a decade at Constantinople as a hostage, was well educated, had been named to several impressive offices and titles, and was adopted by Zeno.

III. The regime of Theodoric in Italy was on the whole successful and promising.
   A. In 497 Theodoric was formally recognized by Emperor Anastasius, perhaps as master of the soldiers.
   B. He brought peace, order, and tremendous security to Italy—something unknown there for decades.
   C. He engaged in a massive program of public works in Ravenna, Rome, and elsewhere.
   D. Theodoric restored the grain supply and the corn dole in Rome after a long disruption because of the Vandal conquest of Africa.
   E. Theodoric drew the senate into his government. One of our key sources for Ostrogothic Italy is the Variae of Cassiodorus, a noble Roman senator who served Theodoric three times in key public offices and kept his official documents.
   F. Theodoric formed marriage alliances all over the west with Visigoths, Burgundians, Franks, and Vandals.
   G. The Ostrogoths were Arians but were not militant.

IV. Theodoric had no sons, and when he died many Goths refused to accept the rule of his daughter Amalasuntha.
   A. From 526 to 534, Amalasuntha ruled as regent for her son Athalaric. who was perceived to be too Roman in his leanings.
   B. When Athalaric died in 534, Amalasuntha ruled briefly as queen, but she was compelled to marry Theodohad.
   C. When Theodohad was declared king, he exiled his wife (who was then strangled).
   D. The fall of Amalasuntha provided Justinian with a pretext to invade Italy.
   E. Justinian “won” the Gothic war, but it subjected Italy to 20 years of brutal warfare and devastation.
The end of the Ostrogothic kingdom resulted from a disastrous shift in Roman policy.

Justinian defeated the Ostrogoths but was unable to reestablish peace and order in Italy. This fraught situation provided an opening for the Lombards.

The Lombards were another confederation of people who in the late 5th century were living in what is now lower Austria. The confederation included Sueves, Heruls, Gepids, Bavarians, Bulgars, Avars, Saxons, Goths, Thuringians, and Romanized Pannonians.

In c. 507–508 they defeated the Heruls and then moved across the Danube and settled in Noricum and Pannonia. There was no effective Roman force in the west to oppose them.

In c. 546–547 they obtained a treaty and fought for 20 years against the Gepids under their kings Audoin and Alboin.

In 568–569 Alboin led the Lombards into Italy, where they soon took the major northern cities. Pavia held out until 572 and then became the capital of the Lombard kingdom.

1. Alboin was murdered in 572, probably with the connivance of his wife Rosamund. (Alboin had murdered her father, the Gepid king.)
2. The Lombards chose Clef as their king, but he was murdered in 574.
3. For 10 years the Lombards had no kings.
4. Aggressive dukes moved south and created vast duchies in Spoleto and Benevento.

The Lombard kings of the 7th and 8th centuries were often highly accomplished rulers and developed a sophisticated legal culture. Nevertheless, they faced a series of challenges.

The kings could never get control of the southern dukes.

The Roman administration in Constantinople never accepted the Lombards, and their local officials in Ravenna were a constant challenge.

The Lombards were Arian until around 680 and had uneasy relations with the local population and constant antagonism from the popes.

In efforts to control the southern dukes, the Lombards had to cross papal territory in central Italy, and eventually the popes asked the Franks to help them.

1. Pippin III campaigned twice against the Lombards in 755 and 756, forcing them to cede lands to the papacy.
2. After the Lombards reneged on their promises, Charlemagne conquered them in 774.

In the end only the Franks had a long-lived dynasty, were Catholic, were stronger than all their neighbors, and got on well with the Roman authorities.

Suggested Reading:
Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy*.
Christie, *The Lombards*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare the Ostrogothic kingdom with the other barbarian kingdoms we have studied. What were its relative advantages and disadvantages? What were its strengths and weaknesses?
2. The Lombard kingdom lasted for just over two centuries but finally failed. Why? What might the Lombards have done to ensure long-term success?
Lecture Fourteen
The Eastern Empire in the 5th Century

Scope: The long reign of Theodosius II saw a great codification of Roman law, military successes in the Balkans, and continuing religious strife. The great Council of Chalcedon settled theological quarrels among the orthodox, but its formulations were rejected by Rome’s eastern provinces. Theodosius was followed by a series of rather nondescript military men who maintained the Danube frontier against repeated attacks by the fearsome Huns. The 5th century also witnessed the rising prominence of court eunuchs and of the women of the imperial house.

Outline

I. In the last few lectures, we have been in the Roman Empire constantly, but we have not been looking at the empire itself. In this lecture we will turn specifically to the Eastern Empire.

A. It should be recalled that when Theodosius died in 395 he divided the empire between his sons Arcadius and Honorius.

B. The brothers were fierce rivals, and that rivalry had disastrous consequences.

II. Four themes will help us to organize our thoughts on the Roman east.

A. First, let us look at the imperial succession.

1. When Theodosius died in Italy, he left his 17-year-old son, Arcadius, as augustus in the Eastern Empire.
   a. He was under the domination of the master of offices, Rufinus, and the eunuch chamberlain, Eutropius.
   b. Eutropius persuaded Arcadius to marry Aelia Eudoxia, the daughter of the Frankish officer Bauto.
   c. The first in a long line of powerful women in the Eastern Empire, she produced five children.

2. Arcadius died in 408, leaving a seven-year-old son, Theodosius II.
   a. Theodosius II was made augustus at age one. He was well educated, bookish, pious, and not at all political.
   b. Theodosius II issued the Theodosian Code and built Constantinople’s vast landward walls.
   c. As a boy and young man, he was under the influence of his two-years-older sister, Pulcheria. He made her augusta in 414.

3. Theodosius II died in 450 without a male heir. Marcian (an obscure courtier and soldier) was selected to marry Pulcheria, giving him thereby the legitimacy of a connection to the Theodosian house.
   a. When Marcian died the senate passed over his son-in-law and appointed another military man, Leo.
   b. Leo was acclaimed by his troops in Germanic fashion and was crowned by the patriarch of Constantinople.
   c. Leo chafed under the Roman general Aspar’s influence and turned to the Isaurian Zeno, to whom he married his daughter Ariadne.

4. In 474 a baby son of Zeno and Ariadne was accepted as successor, but he died suddenly and Zeno himself became augustus.

5. On Zeno’s death his widow Ariadne got the 60-year-old Anastasius accepted, and she married him to strengthen his position.

B. The Eastern Empire experienced new or disruptive political forces.

1. Generals were highly influential.

2. Palace eunuchs gained power and influence for the first time. They rarely maintained their positions for long and were roundly hated.

3. Imperial officers and members of the senatorial aristocracy were more prominent than ever before.

4. The women of the imperial family were intelligent and resourceful.

C. Foreign policy and war saw both old and new developments.

1. The Persian frontier was, fortunately, peaceful most of the time.

2. The emperors were free to concentrate on the Balkans.
   a. The Huns began plundering, crossing the Danube in 405–408, 422, and 434.
   b. The ambitious Attila became king in 434 and demanded a doubling of the tribute from 350 to 700 pounds of gold.
   c. The Huns claimed the Romans broke their agreements and raided in 440, 441, 442, and 447.
   d. Marcian was immensely lucky and got to reduce taxes significantly.

3. The Goths were another serious Balkan threat.
   a. The Visigoths moved west between 408 and 412.
   b. For a time the Ostrogoths were seen as useful because they shared a common foe with the Romans: the Huns.
4. As the Ostrogoths departed the Balkan frontier region, the Bulgars moved in and defeated local armies in 493, 499, and 502.

D. Constant religious strife created a number of problems.
   1. The problem of Arianism wound down for the Eastern Empire because almost all Arians were in the west.
   2. Theologians in Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople had fierce disputes on basic issues of Christology.
      a. Key problems surrounded the Monophysites, who emphasized Christ’s divine nature, the Nestorians, who emphasized his human nature, and the orthodox (or Chalcedonians) who emphasized both simultaneously.
      b. Large areas of the Eastern Empire rejected the Chalcedonian formulation and were more or less permanently disaffected.
      c. Emperors struggled ineffectively for more than two centuries to find a theological formula that would reconcile all parties.

III. In sum, the situation in the east was complex and precarious.
   A. How important was the emperor? Some had been great, some ineffective, some nonentities.
   B. Shifting groups of nobles, eunuchs, military men, and imperial women contested for influence.
   C. The empire seemed little interested in the west and had minimal influence there, had a tense stalemate along the Danube, and was perhaps vulnerable to renewed trouble with Persia.
   D. Religious problems threatened relations with old, rich provinces.

Suggested Reading:
Holm, Theodosian Empresses.
Williams, Later Roman Empire, p. 101–124.

Questions to Consider:
1. Construct a balance sheet for the Eastern Empire: What were its key strengths and weaknesses? How promising were its prospects as the 6th century dawned?
2. Can you think of ways to account for the seemingly powerful position of women in the Eastern Empire?
Lecture Fifteen
The End of the Western Empire

Scope: The long reign of Valentinian III marked the beginning of the end. Valentinian was dominated by his mother, Galla Placidia, and by military men. One of the latter, Aetius, struggled mightily to maintain some semblance of Roman authority in Italy and Gaul, but he was able to do so only by means of a shifting set of alliances with various barbarian peoples. With the Western Empire reduced to parts of Gaul and Italy, the tax base dwindled and institutional structures collapsed. In 476 a barbarian general, Odovacer, deposed Romulus Augustulus and sent the imperial insignia to Constantinople, declaring that the west no longer needed an emperor. Rome indeed ended not with a bang but with a whimper. And the west would be without an emperor until Charlemagne was crowned in 800.

Outline

I. Now we finally come to the “fall” of the Roman Empire.
   A. We must bear in mind that no matter how fragile the Eastern Empire appeared, it was still a “going concern” and would remain one until 1453.
   B. As we shall see, the fall of the Western Empire was pretty much a nonevent.

II. In analyzing the fall of the Western Empire, we shall follow three basic themes.
   A. The imperial succession was more complex than in the Eastern Empire.
      1. Theodosius’s son Honorius was under the thumb of Stilicho until his death in 408.
      2. After 408 Honorius was under the control of the patrician Constantius.
         a. Constantius married Galla Placidia (Honorius’s sister) in 418; she had been married (forcibly) to the Visigoth Atawulf.
         b. Constantius was named augustus in 421.
      3. Honorius died in 423 without male heirs. In 424 Theodosius recognized Valentinian III (born in 419 to Galla and Constantius) as caesar and in 425 as augustus.
      4. Appearances can be deceiving: Theodosius II really had no influence in the west, and the court was dominated by Galla Placidia, while Aetius, the master of the soldiers, dominated the army and the Gallic nobility.
      5. After the collapse of the Huns, Galla decided to try to get along without Aetius, and stupidly—as it seems in retrospect—had him murdered in 454.
      6. In 455 a loyal follower of Aetius murdered Valentinian III.
      7. The murderers of Valentinian put forward Petronius Maximus, a wealthy senator who married Valentinian’s widow, Licinia.
         a. Ricimer named a series of relative nonentities as emperors until his death in 472.
         b. It is interesting that—still—no barbarian claimed the imperial office.
   B. The territory of the Western Empire continued to shrink.
      1. Britain was effectively abandoned in 410, but Stilicho had begun pulling troops out of Britain in 407.
      2. Northern Gaul, increasingly under Frankish domination, was effectively abandoned.
      3. As the 5th century wore on, Roman control in Spain became a dead letter.
      4. After the Vandal conquest, the situation in North Africa was tenuous.
      5. Aetius had held things together with his shifting alliance with and against the Huns, but the collapse of the Huns cost him his life.
   C. The financial and institutional structure of the Western Empire succumbed.
      1. There were for all practical purposes no longer any tax revenues from Britain, northern Gaul, Spain, and Africa.
      2. Italy and Sicily continued to “enjoy” old tax exemptions.
      3. The rural elites, especially in Gaul, were largely disaffected and began to throw in their lot with the barbarians.
      4. Traditional urban institutions were weakened.
      5. The Roman Senate was weak and imperiled.
      6. The state itself had no military capability.

III. The end when it came was a whimper, not a bang.
   A. Ricimer’s last appointment, Olybrius, died almost immediately, and Leo sent Julius Nepos.
   B. Julius appointed Orestes as military commander, and he rebelled.
   C. Orestes named his son Romulus Augustulus as emperor, but troops led by Odovacer rebelled against Orestes and took control.
D. Odovacer deposed Romulus on September 4, 476, and sent the imperial insignia to Constantinople, saying that the west no longer needed an emperor.

E. The west would not again have an emperor until Charlemagne was crowned in Rome on Christmas in 800.

Suggested Reading:
Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*.
Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome*.

Questions to Consider:
1. From the 450s to the 470s, the Western Empire kept shrinking in various ways. How? Why?
2. How significant, really, was the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476?
Lecture Sixteen

The Age of Justinian, 527–565

Scope: The 5th century was difficult for both halves of the Roman Empire. While Roman rule would never be restored in the west, the Eastern Empire raised up the remarkable ruler Justinian, one of the greatest of all Rome’s emperors. This lecture focuses on Justinian’s relentless efforts to reform Rome’s government. One of the most important results of those efforts was the Corpus Iuris Civilis, the most significant codification of Roman law and perhaps the most influential collection of law ever assembled. Justinian secured peace with Persia and embarked on a series of campaigns in the west, reconquering North Africa and Italy and establishing a beachhead in Spain. Although these reconquests proved ephemeral, they signify Rome’s determination to put right the wrongs of the previous generations. Like his predecessors, Justinian found that religious peace was beyond his grasp. He tried to find theological formulas that would reconcile contending groups. In 532 Justinian faced riots that nearly brought down his regime. In 542 Justinian’s realm experienced the worst outbreak of plague in a millennium.

Outline

I. Justinian was unquestionably Rome’s greatest ruler after Constantine, but his reign was preceded by two transitional ones.
   A. We met Anastasius in an earlier lecture.
      1. He secured the realm—making peace with Persia and holding his own in the Balkans.
      2. He reformed the small coinage, streamlined tax collection, and left a huge surplus in the treasury.
      3. He could not, however, obtain religious peace.
      4. When Acacius became Patriarch of Constantinople, he and Zeno wanted to find a way to reconcile the Monophysites.
   B. Justin seized the imperial office when Anastasius died.
      1. He was probably illiterate and was married to a barbarian who was a former slave.
      2. Conventionally pious, Justin condemned his predecessors and wrote to the pope to end the “Acacian Schism.”
      3. He promoted many men who had languished under the previous regime, among them his nephew Justinian.

II. Peter Sabbataeus, later styled Justinian, was born in the same Latin-speaking region of Illyricum as Justin. In 527 Justin adopted him and named him coemperor.
   A. Already under Justin, Justinian wrote to the pope about the schism; built a church dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul; learned a lot of theology; served as magistri militum praesentalis, which gave him access to the court; and put on spectacular games in 521 (20 lions, 30 leopards, 4,000 lbs. of gold).
      1. He was modest and religious: In Lent he lived on water and wild herbs pickled in salt and vinegar.
      2. He married Theodora, a former actress and prostitute whom he could not legally marry until Justin passed a law permitting it. Until her death in 548, she was his key adviser.
   B. Justinian’s long reign was dominated by military affairs, administrative reforms, and religious controversies. And there was a massive revolt and a devastating plague thrown in for good measure.

III. Let us look first at military affairs, where the results are decidedly mixed.
   A. In Persia, Shah Kavad had been ruling since 488, and he began to think about his succession.
      1. In 525 he asked Justin and Justinian to adopt his son Khusrau; they refused, and a war began.
      2. By September of 532, the war had ended on unfavorable terms for Rome: Rome gave up territory and paid 11,000 lbs. of gold.
   B. In Africa the results were more positive.
      1. We have seen that Hilderic was deposed by Gelimer; in 532 he appealed to Justinian.
      2. Virtually all the key advisers at court urged against war. (Remember that the war with Persia had just gone badly and expensively.)
      3. Justinian decided to go ahead; he sent Belisarius with 10,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. Belisarius won a quick and complete victory.
      4. In 534 legislation reintegrated Africa, with the functions of master of the soldiers and praetorian prefect combined in one man.
   C. Justinian’s war in Italy was a more complicated matter.
      1. We have seen how the murder of Amalasuntha provided Justinian with a pretext for intervention.
      2. Belisarius recaptured Rome in 536—the first time in 60 years that Rome was under imperial authority—but he was soon driven out.
3. The war took shifting courses, and Justinian sent a second force under Narses.
4. In 539 the Gothic king, Vitiges, persuaded Khusrau to open an eastern front.
5. In 540 Justinian decided to partition Italy, but Belisarius refused.
6. The war followed a tangled course for 11 years, until Narses won a great victory at Busta Gallorum in 551.
7. The “Pragmatic Sanction” of 554 put Italy under largely Greek speakers and military men.
8. The peninsula was devastated.

D. Spain represented a momentary interlude that is nevertheless revealing.
   1. Amid factional squabbling, one group invited the Romans to intervene.
   2. In 552 Justinian sent an army that established a beachhead in the southeast.
   3. The Romans could not advance inland, and the Visigothic factions used the Romans as a tool in their quarrels for a generation, further weakening the already fragile monarchy.

IV. All the while he was engaged in widespread military activities, Justinian was also engaged in reforms of many kinds.
   A. Some of Justinian’s opponents claimed that the “reforms” of the “emperor who never sleeps” were merely pretexts to raise money for his ill-conceived military schemes.
   B. Early in his reign, Justinian streamlined the imperial administration, tried to curtail the sale of offices, limited the public post, and amalgamated the civil and military administrations. (Here was a sharp departure from the regimes of Diocletian and Constantine.)
   C. In 528 Justinian appointed a commission to gather previous legal collections, novels, and jurisprudence.
      1. The Codex Justinianus was issued in April of 529.
      2. In December of 530, a council of 16 under Tribonian tackled (allegedly) 2,000 law books and 3,000,000 lines of text. The Digest was issued in December 533.
      3. A parallel commission produced the Institutes in November of 533: This changed the shape of legal education in the empire.
      4. All together this was the Corpus Iuris Civilis, the most influential law book in human history.
   
V. Early in his reign, Justinian began legislating on religion and morality.
   A. He persecuted Manichaeans and Samaritans, demanded that all pagans present themselves for instruction, forbade the keeping of brothels, limited grounds for divorce, and prosecuted homosexuals.
   B. Justinian built or rebuilt 33 churches, most spectacularly Hagia Sophia.
      1. Hagia Sophia was built between 532 and 537 on plans by Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus.
      2. The main floor of the church is 250 by 220 feet; the main arches are 70 feet high; and the dome is 180 feet from the floor, with 40-foot windows.
   C. In the Eastern Empire there were effectively two churches: one Monophysite and one Melkite.
      1. In c. 543–544 Justinian condemned the “Three Chapters”—some of the works of three writers approved at Chalcedon but especially offensive to Monophysites.
      2. This divided the eastern churches even more and caused a schism in the west when Pope Vigilius at first went along and then demurred.
      3. In 553 Justinian held an ecumenical council that both affirmed Chalcedon and condemned the Three Chapters. This council has always been controversial and did not achieve peace.

VI. Justinian faced two great crises: the Nika revolt and the bubonic plague of 542.
   A. Constantinople was large and fractious, with the Blue and Green factions always poised to make trouble.
      1. In 532 the crowds in the Hippodrome demanded the release of some prisoners. When the government refused, the crowds rioted.
      2. Justinian survived the revolt, but he needed money to pay his Persian subsidy, was in the middle of his legal reforms, and was about to launch his war in Africa. It is remarkable that he survived and thrived.
   B. In 542 the Mediterranean world was devastated by bubonic plague—the first major outbreak since the time of the Peloponnesian Wars.
      1. Constantinople may have lost 230,000 people.
      2. The social, economic, and psychological shocks were enormous.

VII. The last years of Justinian’s reign were inauspicious.
   A. Earthquakes shook Constantinople in 554 and 557; the latter brought down Hagia Sophia’s dome.
   B. A shortage of bread prompted riots in 556, and a drought in 562 caused more rioting.
   C. In 562 there was a plot to murder Justinian.
   D. Legislation, reform, and military activity were at a standstill.
E. Justinian had made no provisions for the succession.
F. The Eastern Empire might itself have collapsed, but instead it drew strength from Justinian’s reforms and persevered.

**Suggested Reading:**
Browning, *Justinian and Theodora*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Justinian’s reign was marked by successes, failures, and crises. Does he strike you as a great ruler?
2. What do you think of the persistent religious strife in the Eastern Empire? Was it inevitably intractable? Can you imagine a policy, especially perhaps one that was not tried, that might have resolved the controversies?
Lecture Seventeen
The Christianization of the Roman World

Scope: How did an obscure religious sect from a small, insignificant province emerge, grow, and spread all over the Roman world? The question has fascinated people for almost two millennia. In this lecture we will look at the attractiveness of basic Christian teachings, at the slow but steady emergence of a Christian church (a structure no other ancient religion possessed), and at some of the ways in which early Christians defined themselves and differentiated themselves from their pagan and Jewish contemporaries. The lecture will conclude by revisiting the legislation and conversion of Constantine in order to bring those crucial developments into sharper focus and to set the stage for the new faith’s success among the Roman elite.

Outline

I. The most remarkable development during Roman imperial times was the triumph of Christianity.
   A. Christianity had serious competitors and had to forge a distinctive identity and effective institutions.
   B. Christianity produced a culture that was in many ways the defining feature of late antiquity.
   C. The process of Christianization is complex: One might contrast “adhesion” and “conversion.” Christianization pertains to a whole complex of processes—social, political, ideological, institutional, religious—that captures a broader sense of what was happening at the time.

II. Christianity emerged and spread in a world with old, deeply rooted religious traditions and practices.
   A. Mithraism was an Iranian cult that flourished in the 2nd and 3rd centuries; over 400 cult centers are known.
   B. Gnosticism was a movement whose origins are complicated and contested, and Christian writers treated Gnosticism as either a heresy or a form of paganism.
   C. Manichaeanism was widespread and prominent. It may be regarded as a highly developed Gnosticism or as rooted in ancient practices.
   D. Judaism was the primal competitor: Perhaps 10 percent of the empire’s population in Christ’s time was Jewish, and they were actively proselytizing.
      1. The Romans were generally tolerant of Judaism, although less so after 313.
      2. Christian attitudes were derived from Saint Paul, who had taught that Christianity and Judaism could not coexist.

III. Christianity arose in a world with old, deep pagan traditions.
   A. Ta patria represented the religious rituals of the civic cults that were part of everyone’s inheritance.
   B. The ordinary events of life were attended by religious rites: birth, death, marriage, war, peace, planting, and harvesting.
   C. Civil celebrations and official calendars were infused with religious ideas.
   D. Conversion involved, therefore, much more than a change of intellectual allegiance.

IV. There were pagan critiques of Christianity.
   A. Pliny dismissed Christianity as a superstitious novelty.
   B. Medical and scientific writers dismissed as absurd the Christian (and Jewish) idea of creation ex nihilo (“out of nothing”).
   C. Celsus was Christianity’s sharpest and most serious critic.
      1. He said the idea of the incarnation was scandalous and shameful, that the resurrection of the dead was physically impossible, that the claim for one god was extravagant, and that a common criminal who lived recently could not be a god.
      2. Celsus obviously took the trouble to learn a good deal about Christianity, as his mocking refutation shows.

V. Amid their critics and competitors, Christian writers began to forge an identity for Christians.
   A. In the 2nd century, the Apologists stepped to the fore.
      1. Justin Martyr wrote several apologetic treatises. His Dialogue with Trypho the Jew attempted to differentiate between Christianity and Judaism, and in two Apologies he argued that Christian doctrines were compatible with Greek thought. He also taught the Theft Theory.
      2. Tertullian was the first Latin apologist.
   B. Many other writers could be cited, but they have certain things in common.
1. Some were obviously concerned to differentiate between Christianity and Judaism.
2. Some wished to emphasize similarities between Christianity and classical culture, while others rejected those similarities, asserting instead that Christianity was unique.

VI. Christians were also concerned to put their teachings on an authoritative basis.
   A. Christians began to find that they had rivals inside the Christian movement. Gradually some were labeled “heretics.”
   B. Irenaeus of Lyon wrote *Against Heresies* on two foundations.
      1. First he appealed to a definitive “canon” of scripture, the first to do so.
      2. Second he referred to “monarchical bishops,” and he identified bishops with their communities.
         b. The emerging church took on the administrative geography of the empire.
         c. The senior priest in a town was the “overseer,” the literal meaning of “bishop.”
         d. The metropolis (capital or “mother city”) of a province got a “metropolitan” bishop (in the Middle Ages, an “archbishop”).
         e. Cyprian of Carthage was the first to articulate the idea that the bishops descended from the apostles and retained the authority Christ had assigned to them.

VII. On the eve of the Constantinian revolution, Christianity had two things that no pagan cult ever possessed.
   A. There was an increasingly firm and recognized body of authoritative texts.
   B. There was a sophisticated administrative system.
   C. When Constantine legalized Christianity, embraced the faith, turned to a council of bishops to resolve a heresy, and patronized the church, he gave a powerful impetus to several strong currents that had been flowing for two centuries.

Suggested Reading:
Fox, *Pagans and Christians*.
Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*.

Questions to Consider:
1. In view of all its competitors and rivals, what distinctive features of Christianity permitted the new faith to succeed in the Roman world?
2. Why, in the context of the ancient world, was it important for Christianity to establish a definitive body of teachings and an authority structure to conserve and transmit those teachings?
Lecture Eighteen
Christianity and the Roman State

Scope: In earlier lectures we have learned that the increasingly prominent Christian church became progressively enmeshed in the public life of the Roman Empire. In this lecture we will look more closely at how the Roman state shifted from persecution to tolerance to promotion of Christianity. Then we will look at several key pieces of legislation that, taken together, built the church and the faith into the public and private life of the empire. We will conclude by constructing a balance sheet, so to speak, in an attempt to assess whether Christianity and the church gained from Rome’s weighty benevolence or lost from Rome’s interference.

Outline

I. We confront a remarkable historical irony: Minor Roman officials in an out-of-the-way province put a petty insurrectionist to death, and his followers triumphed in the Roman world. Two sets of background considerations will be helpful.

A. Let us first explore the earliest encounters between Christians and Rome.
   1. The story of Jesus, the Pharisees, and the Roman coins (Matthew 22:17–22) provides no hint of trouble.
   2. Jesus’s appearance before Pilate, one of very few tales told in all four gospels, is ambiguous and hard to interpret.
      a. The Gospels were written between c. 60–65 A.D. and 100 A.D., so some adjusting of the story may have taken place, not least shifting the blame to the Jews.
      b. There is no clear evidence that Pilate really saw Jesus as a threat.
      c. All accounts agree that after the crucifixion all of Jesus’s followers abandoned and denied him. It is hard to see the makings of a mass movement, much less of a threatening one.
   3. In his *Annals* Tacitus tells of Pomponia Graecina, a high-ranking woman who was accused of foreign superstition. He also reports violence against the Christian community in Rome in the time of Nero.
   4. Suetonius, in his *Life of Claudius*, says that Rome’s Jewish community was stirred up by Chrestus, and in his *Life of Nero* he says that punishments were inflicted on Christians for their novel superstitions.
   5. Later writers say that Domitian persecuted Christians ferociously.
   6. Late in the 1st century, Pliny wrote to Trajan indicating that he was uncertain about how to proceed against Christians, or even if he should do so.
   7. Eusebius, in his *History of the Church*, tells of persecutions down to his own day, but it is clear that these were sporadic and not the result of any consistent, coherent policy.

B. If Christianity had checkered and often poor relations with the Roman state down to Constantine, we might ask whether there were factors that contributed to Christianity’s spread and success.
   1. The *Pax Romana* provided a stable framework.
   2. Across the huge Roman Empire, there was a common primary language: Greek.
   3. Urban areas were numerous, populous, and relatively open.
   4. People on the whole were tolerant of religious views.

II. Across the 4th century, official Roman policy shifted from persecution to acceptance and then to promotion of Christianity.

A. We have discussed Constantine and his important initiatives.
B. The Arian Constantius II and the neopagan Julian complicated matters for a time.
C. The pious and opinionated Theodosius instituted major changes: Legislation between 378 and 380 effectively made Christianity in the form practiced by the bishop of Rome the state religion.
D. It is important to keep in mind that religion was part of the public order in antiquity and not something banished to the private realm.
   1. The emperor’s authority was all-encompassing.
   2. Barbarian kings inherited from their Roman predecessors the idea that the church was their special responsibility.
   3. Modern ideas of “separation of church and state” would have made no sense.

III. There can be no question that Christianity and the church benefitted from association with the Roman state. But drawing up a balance sheet is a tricky matter.

A. We might think of imperial benefactions such as church building.

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B. We might also think of beneficial legislation: For example, clergy were exempted from military service and most taxes, and Sundays were reserved from work.

C. Bishops became key imperial advisers and confidants.

D. Emperors also intervened controversially in doctrinal issues.
   1. Constantine was generally praised for calling the Council of Nicaea that condemned Arianism, but he had left the decision to the bishops themselves.
   2. Pulcheria collaborated with Pope Leo I to condemn Monophysitism.
   3. Anastasius and Justinian intervened on their own to try to find a compromise that would reconcile Chalcedonian and Monophysite Christians.

IV. The church borrowed a great deal indirectly from Rome.
   A. The administrative geography and terminology of the Roman state was adapted by the church.
   B. Roman law profoundly influenced the church’s emerging canon law (Ecclesia vivit lege Romana).
   C. Roman ideas of majesty and hierarchy were generally influential, but especially so in the case of the bishops of Rome.

Suggested Reading:
Barnes, Constantius and Athanasius.
Geffcken, The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism.

Questions to Consider:
1. Taking everything into account, do you think Christianity gained or lost by its relations with the Roman state?
2. What would you regard as the single most significant intervention of the Roman authorities in the affairs of the Christian church?
Lecture Nineteen
The Rise of the Roman Church

Scope: One of the most remarkable and durable achievements of late antiquity was the papacy’s rise to prominence and then to leadership in the Christian world. On what bases did the bishops of Rome, the popes, rest their claims to authority? How did they exercise authority? How did the popes interact with other church leaders and with the emperors? Who were some of the more interesting and significant popes?

Outline

I. The eventual prominence of the bishops of Rome is almost as surprising as the rise of Christianity itself.
   A. By what steps did Rome’s bishops achieve preeminence?
   B. On what bases did Rome’s bishops claim to possess and exercise authority?
   C. What, in fact, could Rome’s bishops do and not do?

II. Everything begins with Saint Peter.
   A. The fundamental text is Matthew 16:16–19. This “Petrine text” would be drawn upon for centuries (down to today).
      1. Attention to Peter is unparalleled.
         a. He was called first and is always named first.
         b. He invited Jesus to walk on water.
         c. Jesus got into Peter’s boat on the shore.
         d. Peter alone spoke at the Transfiguration.
         e. He asked Jesus, “Lord, if my brother betrays me…”
         f. He asked for an explanation of the thief in the night.
         g. He asked John to ask Jesus who would betray him.
         h. He speaks on behalf of all the apostles.
            i. The angel at Jesus’s tomb tells the women to report to Peter.
            j. The Lord’s appearance to Peter is mentioned by Paul.
      2. There are serious questions here: Was Peter’s leadership symbolic? Did it die with him? Could it be transmitted?
   B. From the 2nd century, the Roman community maintained a powerful sense of the memory and cult of Peter.
      1. The place of his martyrdom and burial was preserved.
      2. Places and relics associated with Peter were venerated.

III. To whom, or to what, might Peter’s “office” be transmitted?
   A. The Pauline and Catholic Epistles suggest a larger sense of community.
   B. The First Letter of Clement to Corinth expresses the idea that various Christian communities have responsibility for each other.
   C. When Ignatius of Antioch was on his way to Rome to be martyred, he wrote to six churches.
   D. When Polycarp was praying before his martyrdom, he referred to “the whole Catholic Church throughout the world.”
   E. Cyprian of Carthage said that the unity of the church had to be preserved at all costs.
   F. Clearly the church was not conceived as local, but what was it, and who had authority within it?
   G. There was a sense of the church as a larger whole: The idea of apostolic succession had taken hold, and there was some sense that Peter’s authority had been transmitted to the bishops of Rome.

IV. The actions and expressions of several early Roman bishops are revealing.
   A. The pontificate of Stephen I is revealing.
      1. During Decius’s persecution, some Spanish bishops had lapsed; one went to Rome to obtain rehabilitation. Other Spanish bishops appealed to Cyprian, who was angry but “excused” Stephen on grounds of ignorance.
      2. Stephen refused to be in communion with bishops who rebaptized persons who had lapsed during the persecution.
      3. Stephen was the first pope to try to impose his views in serious, contested circumstances.
   B. Julius I refused to side with Arianizing bishops who deposed others and said, portentously, that he should have been consulted in the first place.

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C. The Council of Serdica established that episcopal trials could be reviewed by Rome.

D. In 385 Siricius issued the first extant “decretal,” and he said that decretals become instantly the law of the church.

V. The 5th century was decisive in the elaboration of claims to papal authority.

A. Innocent I said that no decision was valid unless it had been submitted to Rome for judgment.

B. Pope Leo I “the Great” was the real architect of the “Petrine theory” of papal authority.
   1. We have 143 of his letters and 97 of his sermons, so we know his views in unusual detail.
   2. He gained wide authority over the churches of the Western Empire, aided by legislation of Valentinian III.
   3. He imposed his will on Chalcedon.
   4. He claimed again and again that the pope is the Vicar of Peter—that the authority Peter possessed is still possessed by his successors.

C. Pope Gelasius I made audacious claims.
   1. While Anastasius was struggling to find a compromise formula, Gelasius wrote to him to object to his interference in a dogmatic controversy.
   2. His famous letter said that the world was governed by the “power” (potestas) of kings and the “authority” (auctoritas) of priests. Kings rule mortal bodies, whereas priests rule immortal souls; therefore, the authority of priests is greater than the power of kings.
   3. Gelasius lacked the means to put his ideas into force, but they are revealing—and remarkable—just the same.

VI. Conciliar and imperial decisions were important as well.

A. At Nicaea Constantine’s key adviser, Hosius of Cordova, signed first, but later forged copies put the signatures of the pope’s representatives first.

B. At the Council of Constantinople I, the bishop of Constantinople was said to rank after the bishop of Rome because “New Rome” was second only to “Old Rome.”

C. At Thessalonica—as we have seen—Theodosius said all had to believe as the bishop of Rome believed.

D. At Chalcedon the decree of the Council of Constantinople I was affirmed, but Leo I objected strenuously.

E. Valentinian III said that the authority of the pope was based on Saint Peter, the majesty of Rome, and the holy council. Whatever the pope decrees has the force of law.

F. Nevertheless, Rome’s bishops always asserted that their authority rested on the Petrine text and apostolic succession.

VII. By the end of the 5th century, the papacy had gained enormous influence and prestige.

A. There was certain logic in operation: Christ founded one church and assigned its leadership to Peter; by apostolic succession each apostle transmitted his authority to his successors. The bishops of Rome are Peter’s successors, and as his vicars they inherit his full authority.

B. Papal authority was neither full nor universally accepted.
   1. The popes lacked coercive mechanisms.
   2. There was no consensus on whether the bishop of Rome had a primacy of honor or of authority.
   3. Papal relations with rulers were ambiguous in the extreme.

C. The rise of the papacy is one of the great, original, distinctive achievements of late antiquity.

Suggested Reading:
Schimmelpfennig, The Papacy, chaps. 1 and 2.

Questions to Consider:
1. What were the fundamental bases of the bishop of Rome’s claims to leadership in the church?
2. What were the most decisive steps in the papacy’s rise of leadership in the late antique church?
Lecture Twenty
The Call of the Desert—Monasticism

Scope: The Egyptian desert may not seem a promising launching pad for a vast movement whose consequences are with us still. Yet in the years around 300 A.D., a few leaders with a new vision of what the Christian life might entail attracted followers—eventually thousands and thousands of them. These were the monks, those who, ironically, lived alone together. Instead of engaging the world, as the church and its leaders did, monks fled the world. In seclusion and in prayer, while denying themselves all bodily comforts, monks—and eventually nuns, too—heard the call of the Gospel in a radical new way. This lecture will focus on the “Desert Fathers” and their first followers in other parts of the Mediterranean world.

Outline

I. The emergence of Christian monasticism in Egypt is one of late antiquity’s most dynamic and characteristic achievements. But how do we explain it?
   A. Asceticism is not uniquely Christian.
      1. Philosophical sects (e.g., Pythagorean brotherhoods) appeared in antiquity.
      2. Jewish communities such as the Essenes and the Qumrān groups displayed ascetic tendencies.
   B. Some think that solitaries fled persecutions—or perhaps tax collectors.
   C. Some see a conscious effort to live the vita apostolica: a life of communal renunciation and prayer.
   D. Some believe that Christianity got “too easy” after Constantine.
   E. Some look to the theology of Origen and his promotion of Adam’s personal state before the Fall.
   F. Perhaps there was a fundamental dichotomy in Christianity’s posture vis-à-vis the world: Embrace and change it, or flee it.
   G. Even if any one of these explanations captures a portion of the truth, monasticism as it developed was something unique.

II. Central to monasticism was asceticism. What does this mean?
   A. Ascesis/asceticism derives from the Greek askēsis, which means “exercise” or “training.” It implies therefore a disciplined, methodical way of life.
   B. Usually the discipline is defined negatively: A person gives up food, strong drink, sex, companionship, etc.
   C. Ascetics would have defined it positively as a disciplined means of transforming one’s life and relationship with God.
   D. Anachoresis—radical isolation—could be understood literally or metaphorically. Likewise the “desert” metaphors so prominent in monasticism can be understood as pertaining to a physical place or to the radical emptying of the self.

III. However isolated and disciplined they may have been, monks were not, as a rule, illiterate. Moreover, their way of life attracted a great deal of attention. Consequently the phenomenon is well attested.
   A. An anonymous author wrote History of the Monks of Egypt in the 390s.
   B. Palladius spent several years in Egypt and wrote his Lausiac History as the story of the “friends of God.”
   C. In the 4th and 5th centuries, someone began collecting the Apophthegmata Patrum (“Sayings of the Desert Fathers”—and mothers), and these alphabetical collections were reworked many times and translated into several languages.
   D. As we shall see, there were many monastic “rules.”
   E. Some particularly famous monks received biographies.
   F. Ecclesiastical historians and church legislation took occasional notice of monks.

IV. Traditionally the Egyptian Anthony is seen as the great founding father of monasticism.
   A. Around 270 he gave away all his possessions and adopted an ascetic life.
   B. For a time he studied with an old ascetic, so he cannot have been the true first.
   C. After a while Anthony went into the desert—literally.
   D. Anthony attracted large numbers of men and women at Nitria, west of the Nile delta, and at Scetis, 40 miles to the south. A later writer said there were 5,000 monks in all—an impressively large but suspiciously “round” number.
Most of what is known about Anthony comes from seven letters (now generally regarded as authentic) and from Athanasius’s *Life of Saint Anthony*.

1. Athanasius was the long-serving and controversial patriarch of Alexandria.
2. His *Life of Saint Anthony* undoubtedly contains many authentic details but was in part written to settle many of Athanasius’s accounts and to establish Anthony as a firmly anti-Arian figure.
3. The Greek text was quickly translated into Latin and circulated widely, popularizing the monastic life.

The earliest monastic experience therefore relates to the desert: *heremos* in Greek.

A. Hence the earliest form of monasticism is called “eremitic” (compare “hermit”) and stresses the solitary life.

B. Anthony was famous but by no means unique. There were many *appa* (later, more familiarly, *abba*—compare *abbot*—and also *amma*—mothers; that is, female leaders, more commonly called *abbesses* in the monastic tradition) in Egypt attracting followers and teaching them.

C. Palladius describes the communities at Nitria in his work.

Traditionally Pachomius is regarded as the founder of a new strain of monastic life.

A. Pachomius was a pagan who had been a Roman soldier. He left the army, became a Christian, studied with a hermit, began to attract followers, and then created a monastery at Tabennisi.

B. There are several “lives” of Pachomius surviving in different languages; he wrote some letters and possibly “Instructions”; and a later Latin version of his rule may owe a lot to him but is probably not by him, although the tradition has always attributed it to him.

C. Pachomius played a key role in forging the organized monastic life, but no source details why he felt called upon to do so.
   1. Some have suggested that he brought to monasticism the regimentation of the army barracks.
   2. Some suggest that the individualism of the eremitic communities was not to his taste.

D. He required monks to pray together at least twice daily, to eat together, to worship together, and to do assigned work to make the community (not each member) self-sufficient.

E. There were probably some 10,000 monks living at Tabennisi in the 4th century, gathered in a series of loosely associated communities.

F. The form of monasticism created by Pachomius is called “cenobitic,” from the Greek *koinos bios*, meaning “common life.”

G. With Pachomius we see the great paradox of monastic life, for a monastery is a place where many monks live alone together.

Although monasticism emerged in Egypt, it soon spread all over the late antique world.

**Suggested Reading:**

*Chitty, The Desert a City.*

*Dunn, The Emergence of Monasticism*, chaps. 1–4.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Bearing in mind the various “background” factors that may help to explain monasticism, what nevertheless seems different or distinctive about Christian monasticism?
2. How did Anthony and Pachomius differ? What did they have in common?
Lecture Twenty-One
Monasticism—Solitaries and Communities

Scope: Within a century of monasticism’s origins, monks and nuns could be found in large numbers in every corner of the Roman Empire. This lecture will begin by exploring how and why the monastic movement spread. We will also note the many different forms of monastic life that eventually emerged. In the east the more solitary form of monasticism generally prevailed, whereas in the west the communal form triumphed. The lecture will emphasize the greatest of the eastern monastic founders, Saint Basil, and the greatest of the western figures, Saint Benedict. We will also explore women’s contribution to monasticism.

Outline

I. Monasticism proved to be an immensely popular and powerful phenomenon in late antiquity, by no means reserved to Egypt.
   A. Several factors contributed to monasticism’s spread around the Mediterranean world and beyond.
      1. Monastic literature, such as the histories, biographies, and collections of sayings mentioned in the previous lecture, was widely circulated.
      2. Visitors to Egypt were numerous and often brought forms of Egyptian monasticism back to their homelands.
   B. There was no single form of monasticism in Egypt, so various forms of monasticism emerged in other areas. Broadly, one can say that in the east the eremitic pattern prevailed, and in the west the cenobitic.

II. Monasticism passed from Egypt to Palestine early and easily.
   A. Hilarion of Gaza came from a pagan family but was converted to Christianity in Alexandria.
      1. He spent some time in the desert with disciples of Anthony.
      2. By 306 he had settled in Gaza, where he practiced an extreme form of asceticism.
      3. Eventually he went traveling because he disliked acquiring followers.
   B. A more organized form of monastic life centers on the semilegendary figure of Chariton, who came from Anatolia and settled in caves outside Jerusalem. The group of caves where Chariton and his followers settled came to be called a lavra, a word meaning “street” or “alley.”
   C. The great monastic figures of Palestine were Euthymius and Sabas.
      1. Euthymius established a great lavra near Jerusalem, as did Sabas—Mar Saba, founded in 478.
      2. The lavra was a particular eastern adaptation of the eremitic and cenobitic forms of monasticism.
      3. Monks lived in individual cells but they worshiped together occasionally and followed the guidance of a common abbot.
   D. In the east, Syria presented a third pattern: extraordinarily rigorous asceticism.
      1. One monk wore chains so heavy he could only crawl, and another lived in a room with so low a ceiling that he always stooped.
      2. There were “dendrites,” monks who lived in trees.
      3. The greatest figure was Symeon, who began as an anchorite, became a cenobite, but was expelled by his community for excesses.

III. The great monastic founder in the east was Saint Basil, who was also prominent as one of the greatest church fathers.
   A. Basil was far from the first ascetic in the east, but he was the first serious organizer.
   B. In 357–358 he visited Egypt, spending time at Nitria and Scetis but he was most influenced by Pachomian communities.
   C. He lived a solitary life for a while but decided that a common life was better.
   D. He wrote “longer” and “shorter” rules, which were not detailed, coherent plans for a community but teaching manuals in question-and-answer format.
   E. Basil’s rule became normative in the Orthodox churches.

IV. Monasticism spread to the west in the later decades of the 4th century.
   A. Saint Martin of Tours was a former Roman soldier who established a hermitage at Ligugé, later becoming a disciple of Saint Hilary of Poitiers, an influential anti-Arian theologian.
      1. Life, the biography of Saint Martin by Sulpicius Severus, was immensely influential and popularized Martin’s ascetic life.

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2. Martin became bishop of Tours in 371 but was always sharply different from the elegant gentlemen bishops of Gaul.

B. John Cassian was born in the Balkans, traveled widely, lived in Egypt, and settled in southern Gaul.
   1. He wrote *Institutes* and *Conferences*, the former collections of rule-like documents and the latter short treatises of advice on aspects of the monastic life.
   2. Cassian’s preferences were eremitic, and he was not influential in this respect, but his *Conferences* were widely read and studied.

C. Saint Honoratus was a high-born Roman who, after his conversion, traveled to Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and then settled at Lérins, an island off the coast of Cannes.
   1. There Honoratus established a famous monastery that implemented the teachings of Cassian.
   2. The monastery became so famous and prestigious that many Gallic bishops were trained there and people came from far away—even Ireland.

V. Although eremitic monasticism appeared to be prospering in the west, it would be cenobitic monasticism that triumphed.
   A. Already Saint Augustine wrote a rule—the first western rule—that was moderate and well organized, striking a balance between human weakness and religious rigor.
   B. But the future belonged to Saint Benedict of Nursia.
      1. He came from a middling family, studied in Rome, but then went to Subiaco and finally on to Monte Cassino.
      2. Between 520 and 540, he prepared his *Rule*, an amazingly learned document based on the Bible and earlier rules.
      3. Arrayed in 73 chapters, the *Rule* stressed order, balance, and moderation.
         a. Its central vows—hence aims—were obedience, stability, and conversion.
         b. The *Rule* created strong community bonds through lengthy daily rounds of prayer, practical guidance for all contingencies, and work.
      4. Some see Benedict as a conscious alternative to Cassian, Lérins, and Egypt.
      5. It is somewhat ironic that Benedict’s became the western rule.
         a. Benedict and his *Rule* were promoted by Pope Gregory I in Book 1 of his *Dialogues*.
         b. Benedict’s *Rule* was eventually embraced by the Anglo-Saxons, who sent many missionaries to the continent.

VI. Thus far, our story has been about men. To what extent was monasticism attractive to women?
   A. Christianity’s attitude toward women was ambivalent.
      1. All regular ecclesiastical offices were barred to women (except for deaconesses, who were declining in significance).
      2. Monasticism offered holiness, prestige, and influence outside the institutional church.
   B. Some men went into the desert precisely to escape sexual temptation, but there was also a belief that rigorous asceticism could render men impervious to temptation and permit women to transcend gender: They either became “male” or lived the idea that gender was illusory and temporary.
   C. Pachomian communities may have begun as a way to accommodate the women of families whose men had become ascetics.
   D. In Rome and elsewhere, widows and young virgins vowed themselves to consecrated lives of chastity and renunciation.
      1. Some visited Egypt and Palestine.
      2. Some wanted to deepen their study and required male teachers; hence, in Rome, Saint Jerome acquired a group of aristocratic women pupils.
      3. Some women settled with Jerome in Bethlehem, and others settled elsewhere in the Holy Land.
   E. Gradually, various male apprehensions led to the “cloistering” of women.
      1. There were always (prejudicial) fears that women would tempt men and that, therefore, there could not be mixed communities.
      2. Some men were scandalized by wandering female ascetics.
      3. Saint Caesarius of Arles wrote a rule for nuns that effectively shut them up in a convent, and this became the prevailing norm in the West.

VII. Between 300 and 600, monasticism had produced communities of men and of women spreading from Ireland to Mesopotamia, had produced legislators and theologians, had produced spiritual writings of great beauty and influence, and had given the church many bishops.
Suggested Reading:
Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*.
Elm, *Virgins of God*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare eremitic and cenobitic forms of monasticism as lived experiences.
2. What accounts for the attraction of monasticism to women? How did women’s experiences differ from those of men?
Lecture Twenty-Two
The Church Fathers—Talking About God

Scope:  As Christianity gained freedom, and then stature, in the Roman world, serious intellectuals began to enter the church in significant numbers. We call these thinkers the “church fathers,” and their writings have remained influential to this day. Among the Greek fathers, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, and Saint John Chrysostom will be discussed in the next lecture. In this lecture we will look at prominent Greek writers to see how they passed the Bible through the crucible of Greek philosophy to create a vocabulary and structures of thought for the Christian faith. They invented Christian theology, a word that in the simplest sense means “God-talk.”

Outline

I. Before turning to the greatest of the late antique Christian writers, let’s remember that we have spoken of the Apologists and of monastic authors.
   A. The church fathers (from Latin patres) created the Patristic period.
      1. This period runs from the end of the Apologists in the mid-2nd century to John of Damascus in the mid-8th century.
      2. The greatest figures wrote between 350 and 450, with important contributions down to c. 600.
      3. It is legitimate to see this as the last great age of ancient literature, but the period is not usually seen this way, especially by classicists.
   B. We have already seen that the post-biblical period posed the acute problem of deciding what scriptures would be accepted as authentic.
   C. Once the “source” problem had been solved to most people’s satisfaction, huge questions remained as to what the scriptures meant.
      1. Christianity arose among Aramaic speakers who wrote and proselytized in Greek and then later in Latin.
      2. Christianity could not help but absorb Greek thought with the Greek language.
      3. Greek lacked certain ways of expressing things: For instance, the verb “to be” had no present participle, no way to say “being,” and Christian writers had to “invent” ousios.
      4. In Latin, Tertullian invented the words for “Trinity,” “sacrament,” and “person.”

II. Technical problems were not all that was at stake. Fundamental issues were involved.
   A. God had become incarnate—had been “enfleshed” (“et Verbum caro factum est”)—so how does one talk about or understand this crucial issue?
   B. The Bible spoke of God in various triadic formulations: How was one to understand them?
   C. How do these named beings relate to one another? Are they distinct? If so, how is monotheism preserved? Are they merely different manifestations of, ways of putting into words, one God? Was each of these “beings” divine in the same way? Did Christ only seem to be human? Did a particular human being only seem to be divine? If the divinity of these three beings, or persons, were somehow different, how did they relate to one another?

III. The first time these issues arose in a serious way was with Arius, who said that Christ was “unlike” the Father, that he was a created being—“the firstborn of all creation”—and that there was a time “when Christ was not.”
   A. In his Incarnation of the Word of God, Athanasius became the first proponent of the Nicene theory that Christ had a true body and also that he was “one in being with the father” (homoousious). Late antiquity paid less attention to the Holy Spirit.
   B. In Alexandria the tendency was to argue that Christ was the logos, the “wisdom of God”—hence in a way the same substance as the Father: logos and sarx (word and body) are fused in one being, Jesus Christ.
      1. There was a dangerous tendency here to downplay the humanity of Christ.
      2. The Council of Constantinople addressed this “balance.”
   C. Yet the Alexandrian school moved forward on logic of its own to put the emphasis on Christ’s divinity.
      1. Eutyches argued that Christ had only one, divine nature. He was the “founder” of Monophysitism.
      2. Monophysitism was vigorously opposed by Pope Leo and the Council of Chalcedon but survived in much of the east.
   D. If Alexandrian “Christology” is to be regarded as “high,” then “low” Christology emerged in Antioch, where Christ’s humanity was emphasized.
   E. People were struggling to come to terms with Trinitarian and Christological issues.
      1. Greek and Latin Catholics have always embraced the formulations of Chalcedon, but most of the east has not.
2. At bottom we are back to thesis, nature, essence; hypostasis (individuality/person or nature), ousia (nature, substance, being) and prosopon (subject, person, personality).

F. Talking about God is really, really hard.

Suggested Reading:
Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*.

Questions to Consider:
1. What advantages and disadvantages did the absorption of Greek thought and terminology provide to Christianity?
2. Why do Trinitarian and Christological issues make monotheism so difficult to define?
Lecture Twenty-Three
Patristic Portraits

Scope: One of the minor Latin church fathers, Vincentius of Lérins, reputedly said that if anyone tells you he has read everything Saint Augustine wrote, you know that person is a liar. Indeed, Augustine was the most prolific author in ancient Latin letters, pagan or Christian. In his long and colorful life, he became one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Christianity. This lecture will focus on Augustine, but it will include discussion of some of the Greek fathers encountered in the previous lecture, as well as towering Latin fathers such as Ambrose and Jerome.

Outline

I. The church fathers addressed many more issues than just the complicated matter of talking about God.
   A. Origen, born in Alexandria of Christian parents, was tremendously influential, particularly in setting biblical scholarship on paths it would follow for centuries.
      1. Origen produced the Hexapla Old Testament (Hebrew, Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, and four different Greek translations).
      2. Origen developed the “Threefold Method of Biblical Interpretation: Literal, Moral, and Allegorical.”
   B. We mentioned the Cappadocian Fathers in the previous lecture. Here we need to note that these prolific writers addressed a wide array of issues.
      1. They wrote biblical commentaries, saints’ lives, liturgies, poems, and letters. More than 300 of Basil’s letters survive, as do more than 250 of Gregory of Nazianzus’s letters.
      2. The letter collections reveal international communications among the great fathers.
   C. John Chrysostom (“the Golden Tongued”) had a pagan upbringing and was taught by the great scholar Libanius. He was baptized at 18.
      1. He wished to be a monk but had to take care of his aged mother, so he rose instead through the clerical ranks in Antioch and then became bishop of Constantinople in 398.
      2. He was a spectacularly gifted speaker and writer who wrote biblical commentaries, treatises on virginity and the priesthood, more than 240 letters, and a liturgy second only to Basil’s in influence.
      3. John opposed the wholesale allegorization of the scriptures that characterized the Alexandrian school and stressed the literal meaning, thus promoting the Antiochene school.
      4. John was especially concerned about moral reform, and he was often tactless in criticizing people’s behavior, especially that of the women around Empress Eudoxia.
   D. Turning to the Latin west, we come first to Saint Ambrose of Milan. He was born at Trier, the son of the praetorian prefect of Gaul, and served for a time as a lawyer and governor in northwestern Italy, with his seat at Milan. He was chosen bishop spontaneously by the people in 374, even though he was only a catechumen.
      1. Ambrose mediated Origen’s allegorical methods to the Latin west.
      2. Among his biblical commentaries, his Hexaëmeron, treating the six days of creation, was influential for centuries.
      4. He wrote beautiful poems and hymns, and his influence made hymns a regular part of the liturgy in the western church.
   E. Saint Jerome was born in northeastern Italy, studied in Rome, traveled in Gaul, became an ascetic, and joined for a time a rigorous community in Syria before visiting Constantinople and then returning to Rome, where he became secretary to Pope Damasus.
      1. We noted in an earlier lecture that Jerome became tutor and mentor to a group of aristocratic widows and virgins.
      2. Damasus prompted Jerome to work on what became the Vulgate (the Latin Bible).
      3. Jerome wrote theological treatises, biblical commentaries, and dozens of letters. His Latin style was long admired and imitated.
      4. He translated into Latin works of various Greek fathers.
      5. Jerome was the greatest scholar of all the church fathers.
II. The towering figure among the church fathers, and one of the most original and influential figures in the entire history of Christian thought, was Saint Augustine.

A. Augustine was born at Tagaste in North Africa of modest but ambitious parents who sacrificed a great deal to get him a good education, at first locally and then at Carthage.
   1. Augustine became a professor of rhetoric, first at Carthage, then at Rome, and later at Milan.
   2. In Milan he fell under the influence of Ambrose, and in 386 he embraced Christianity.

B. Augustine was the most prolific author in all of Latin letters, classical or Christian.

C. Shortly after returning to Africa, Augustine wrote his Confessions, a lengthy prayer addressed to God in which Augustine charted his intellectual and spiritual growth.

D. Three examples of how Augustine addressed specific issues will reveal something about his thought and methods.
   1. Having spent some years as a Manichee, he eventually wrote to refute them, and this led him to reflect on the problem of good and evil.
      a. Is the world torn between two primordial forces, good and evil?
      b. Is evil authentic and “something” that actually has an impact?
      c. No, Augustine said. God created everything good. Evil is therefore the absence of good, a deprivation of the good. It has no reality in and of itself.
   2. As a moral matter, the existence of evil is attributable to sin and free will.
   3. Augustine wrote against the Donatists, and this led him to reflect on the church and sacraments.
      a. Pelagians believed that people could take the first steps toward their salvation on their own initiative.
      b. On the contrary, Augustine said, humans are burdened from birth by the stain of Adam and can act only with the help of God’s grace.
      c. But, Augustine said, humans are endowed with free will and can choose to call upon God for help.

E. The pagan world and classical learning attracted Augustine’s attention many times, but his On Christian Teaching is especially revealing.
   1. Augustine proposes in this work to lay out a set of rules for understanding the scriptures.
   2. Augustine argues that the Bible is full of difficult and obscure language, contains tropes and metaphors, and exhibits many levels of meaning.
   3. To understand the Bible, therefore, one needs prodigious learning.
   4. But why does this matter? For Augustine the Bible charts the sure path to salvation. Classical education, therefore, is preparatory and no longer has any intrinsic value of its own. He uses the metaphor of “spoiling the Egyptians.”

F. Augustine’s greatest work was City of God, a massive theology of history.
   1. When the Goths sacked Rome in 410, people were shocked and outraged.
   2. Augustine took a different view: States had come and gone repeatedly through time; what happened to Rome was part of an old pattern.
   3. The danger, as Augustine saw it, was to depend too much on Rome itself or even to equate Rome with the church and to see Christian Rome as somehow part of God’s providential purposes.
   4. For Augustine, humans lived at some indeterminable point on a line that stretched from Creation to the Last Judgment. All events are ephemeral and inconsequential.

III. Let us take our leave of Augustine by remarking on the astonishing fact that he had rendered classical culture instrumental and Rome itself irrelevant.

Suggested Reading:
Brown, Augustine of Hippo.
Kelly, Golden Mouth.
———, Jerome.
McLynn, Ambrose of Milan.

Questions to Consider:
1. What intellectual interests and approaches did the church fathers share?
2. What is most striking to you about the emergence of these Christian intellectuals?
Lecture Twenty Four
“What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?”

Scope: Tertullian asked the famous question that appears in this lecture’s title. By looking at key figures from the period 400–600 A.D., we will watch as Christians colonized, so to speak, of all the great literary forms of classical antiquity. We will focus on great preachers such as Augustine and Caesarius, on great poets such as Sedulius and Prudentius, and on great schoolmasters such as Cassiodorus and Isidore. We will observe the substitution of a Christian education for Rome’s traditional secular one. The lecture will conclude with a discussion of the prolific and influential Pope Gregory the Great, who mused on the qualities of saints, the condition of ordinary Christians, and the duties of the clergy.

Outline

I. Whereas Augustine was agitated about Christianity’s often antagonistic relationship with classical culture, two centuries later the issue had vanished. The dominant culture was thoroughly Christian and the “classics” a fading memory. This is one of late antiquity’s greatest transformations.

A. We have seen that the church fathers substituted fundamental explorations in theology for the traditional speculations of secular philosophy.

B. Transformations in philosophy show the new directions of thought.
   1. Dionysius the Pseudo Areopagite was long considered (incorrectly) a disciple of Saint Paul. He wrote works in a Neoplatonic mode.
      a. The aim of all his work was to show how the whole created order would eventually attain union with God through processes of purification, illumination, and union.
      b. His work was profoundly influential for centuries and lay behind a millennium of mystical theology.
   2. Boethius was from a senatorial family, held the consulship in 510, saw his sons hold the consulship together in 522, and served as master of the offices in Theodoric’s regime at Ravenna—which brought a charge of treason down on him.
      a. He was interested in mathematics and logic and translated important works of Aristotle (for centuries the west’s only access to these works).
      b. Boethius discussed predestination and free will, good and evil, justice, and virtue (among other things).

C. History writing, an old and accomplished literary art in antiquity, is also revealing.
   1. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, who suffered under persecutors, was caught up in Arian politics but was befriended by Constantine and invented church history with his Ecclesiastical History in 10 books, the last 3 treating his own times.
      a. He begins with the times of Christ and marches through accounts of the martyrs (146 of them) who suffered for the faith and the bishops who built the church.
      b. His theme is the providential hand of God moving through human affairs.
   2. Paul Orosius was a young Spaniard who moved to Africa and was befriended by Augustine.
      a. When Augustine began his City of God, he commissioned Orosius to write a detailed, narrative counterpart.
      b. Orosius wrote Seven Books of History Against the Pagans, beginning with King Ninus of Assyria and coming down to his own times.
      c. His theme was that despite the rise and fall of great kingdoms and empires, one could discern the hand of God in human affairs and that the only history that mattered was providential.

D. The rise of Christian poetry marks yet another “takeover” of a major literary form.
   1. Sedulius was an obscure figure who set portions of the Bible to verse in his Paschal Song.
   2. The Spaniard Prudentius had a fine public career and then retired to write, among other things, poems. His Psychomachia, in hexameters, recounts an epic struggle between virtue and vice.

II. In crucial respects this remarkable cultural transformation was made possible by changes in education.

A. Traditional Roman education was elite and literary. It formed a class of men who governed the world and enjoyed their leisure. As their world passed away, so too did their education.
   1. Pupils began with a tutor at about the age of 7, then moved to a grammaticus at 12, and then to a rhetor at 15; “advanced” study in philosophy was possible.
   2. The basic curriculum is spelled out in Martianus Capella’s Marriage of Mercury and Philology: The Seven Liberal Arts.

B. Christianity, as a “religion of the book,” required learning, but for a long time it had no access to basic literary culture except through the pagan classics.
C. Crucial steps toward the medieval school were taken by Cassiodorus. He came from a senatorial family, served as quaestor in 507–511, consul in 541, master of the offices in 523–527, and praetorian prefect for Italy in 533–c. 540.  
1. He retired from public life during the Gothic wars and settled at a family estate near Squillace, which he called “Vivarium” (“Fish Ponds”).  
2. He desired to create a sort of institute for Christian studies at Vivarium.  
3. Cassiodorus’s works, plus the list of famous Christian authors begun by Saint Jerome and continued by others, became the basic bibliography for a millennium.

D. Isidore of Seville came from a noble family disrupted by the Justinianic wars in Spain. He was a major ecclesiastical statesman who presided over church councils and required the establishment of schools in every diocese.  
1. Isidore was immensely learned but not original.  
2. He wrote histories, polemical treatises against heretics and Jews, biblical commentaries, two books on ecclesiastical offices, and a continuation of Jerome’s On Illustrious Men.  
3. He is most famous for his Etymologies, an encyclopedic compendium of all knowledge based on Pliny the Elder and grounded in the assumption that the meanings of words reveal many truths.  
4. Isidore transmitted to the Middle Ages a vast amount of ancient learning, but he pruned away what was manifestly pagan.

III. The themes we have been pursuing in this lecture come together in Pope Gregory I “the Great.” Gregory was born into a senatorial family and served as prefect of Rome in 573 but retired and became a monk in his family house in Rome.

A. Gregory, who was ill most of his adult life, desired nothing more than to be a monk and to pursue his reading and writing.  

B. He had that remarkable Roman sense of duty, so when he was elected pope in 590, he did not object.  

C. Gregory was a prolific author.  
1. His Pastoral Rule was a how-to book for bishops. He wrote in the tradition of Cicero and Ambrose and was deeply imbued with a Christianized version of traditional Roman public ethics.  
2. Moralia on Job was basically a commentary on the book of Job that addressed the human condition generally and particularly the problems of justice and suffering.  
3. His Homilies on Ezekiel were deep reflections on his own times inspired by the book of Ezekiel.  
4. He wrote many biblical commentaries, always primarily in the allegorical mode. They were influential in the Middle Ages.  
5. His Dialogues were four books on the saints of Italy.  
6. His more than 860 letters reveal an extraordinarily conscientious man going about his required routines.

D. Gregory had a sense that the world was drawing to a close, but he sent missionaries to England.  

E. There is in Gregory a serenity that is missing in Augustine. Whereas Augustine sensed a still-living pagan tradition that threatened and challenged Christianity, Gregory saw only a Christian world that sometimes failed to live up to its own ideals.

Suggested Reading:  
Cochrane, Christianity and Classical Culture.  
Markus, The End of Ancient Christianity.

Questions to Consider:  
1. What parts of the classical tradition did Christian writers accept and reject?  
2. How did education change in late antiquity?
Lecture Twenty-Five
Graven Images—Christianity’s Visual Arts

Scope: Just as Christianity adopted and adapted antiquity’s literary arts, so too did Christians embrace the architecture and visual arts of the Roman world. It is ironic that Christianity should have done so. Once Christians decided to embrace the Hebrew scriptures alongside their own, they might have accepted the prohibition of “graven images.” For a long time, there were pointed statements about the propriety of the visual arts; then the arts proliferated. The earliest Christian arts were small, private, and abstract—images of crosses, doves, and fish, for example. After Christianity gained legal status in the empire, the arts exploded in a dazzling array of frescoes, mosaics, and sculptures. Christian patrons employed accomplished artists who achieved a degree of aesthetic and technical mastery over the new Christian subject matter.

Outline

I. Although the Christian arts of late antiquity are among that period’s most spectacular achievements, it was by no means inevitable that such arts would have appeared.

A. In Exodus:

   God spoke to Moses: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

B. This lecture will pursue the topic of Christianity’s visual arts under three headings.

   1. First we will explore some aspects of the emerging discourse about visual art. We will ask how people defended visual art and how they rejected it.
   2. We will then look at representative examples of both art and architecture.
   3. Finally we will look at some of the ways in which Christian artists reinterpreted classical forms and motifs.

C. At the end we will see that, just as in the literary arts, so too in the visual arts did late antique Christians adopt and adapt virtually every existing form and style.

II. Although the classical world produced art in great profusion, a powerful strain in Greek philosophy rejected figural representations as incapable of expressing ineffable realities, insisting that dross matter was unlike what it tried to represent.

A. The earliest Christian writers who expressed themselves on art took this same austere line.

   1. Origen said that in instructing the young, one should teach them to hate images and idols.
   2. Justin Martyr was alarmed by the anthropomorphism of statues that were “soulless” and “dead.”

B. At the time of the Reformation, some people interpreted these texts to mean that early Christianity was aniconic.

C. Eusebius is an interesting and revealing figure.

   1. Eusebius complained about pagan images, the matter of which they were made, and the impossibility of an image’s being equivalent to what it seeks to portray.
   2. In his Life of Constantine, however, Eusebius mentions without comment a statue of the Good Shepherd and another of Daniel in the lion’s den.

D. Eusebius seems to have been making the point that symbolic art, pointing to realities beyond itself, was acceptable.

E. The dawning 4th century does not seem to have been a hospitable environment for Christian art.

III. As late antiquity unfolded, a basic set of justifications for Christian art emerged and have, in the Catholic and Orthodox worlds, retained validity to this day.

A. Basil, drawing an analogy with imperial images, said that an act or reverence performed before an image was not directed to that image (as if to a pagan idol) but instead to the person represented.

B. Gregory of Nyssa said that he could not stop weeping whenever he gazed upon an image of Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac. Images could evoke salutary emotions. Gregory was the first to equate verbal eloquence and the visual arts.

C. By the 7th century, a series of writers defended images of Christ as depictions of the man who walked upon the earth and whose full humanity authorized images, albeit not of his incorporeal divinity.

D. Another series of writers defended images because God himself had commanded certain images to be made, referring to the angels on the Ark of the Covenant, to Moses and the brazen serpent, and to the images Solomon put in the temple.
E. Yet another argument comes from Pope Gregory I, who criticized a bishop for destroying images, saying that images were for the illiterate what books were for the literate.

IV. The defense of images provoked objections.
   A. Many writers held to a strict interpretation of the Exodus prohibition.
   B. Epiphanius of Salamis said that images of the apostles dishonored them and that the images themselves represented only the presumption and ignorance of the painters. The indeterminacy of images would be a constant theme.
   C. Others said that while crosses are permissible, all other images violate the transcendence of God.
   D. Augustine, who was overall indifferent to images, said that images were evidence of human weakness, of their inability to worship “in spirit and in truth.” He complained of people who read the Bible and make for themselves mental pictures of the people discussed there. He also said pictures could be confusing, as when Jesus, Peter, and Paul were depicted together.

V. Let us turn now to the art whose existence was acknowledged by all these writers, whether they approved of it or not.
   A. The earliest Christian art—dating to the 2nd and 3rd centuries—was purely symbolic.
      1. We find fish, often in crude outlines incised into grave slabs.
      2. Another common symbol was the Chi-Rho (ΧΡ), usually intertwined. These are the first two letters of the word “Christ.” The symbol appears on rings, lamps, coins, and grave slabs.
      3. Yet another symbol was a fish with a basket of loaves, representing the miracle of the loaves and fishes, when Jesus fed thousands.
      4. Finally, we might point to the Good Shepherd. This image appeared in catacomb paintings, on grave slabs, and by the 3rd and 4th centuries in free-standing sculptures.
   B. With the “Constantinian revolution” came dramatic changes.
      1. People, especially elites, were accustomed to beautifully decorated public spaces.
      2. The imperial family and then the nobility became great patrons of art and architecture—indeed, they seem to have competed with each other.
      3. Richer patrons meant that more accomplished artists could be drawn into the service of the church.
      4. In frescoes and mosaics, as well as in large- and small-scale sculpture, Christian art became visible.
   C. The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, a prefect of Rome who died in 359, shows several key developments taking shape.
      1. The façade of the sarcophagus has 10 discrete compartments sculpted with grace, beauty, and great technical proficiency.
      2. The aura is late classical, but the subject matter is thoroughly Christian.
      3. The top row, from left to right, shows the sacrifice of Isaac, Peter taken prisoner, Christ enthroned between Peter and Paul, and then, in two successive compartments, Christ before Pilate. The lower row, again from left to right, shows the misery of Job, the Fall of man (in Eden), Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on an ass, Daniel in the lion’s den, and Paul being led to his martyrdom.
      4. These kinds of historical/biblical scenes became common in Christian art.
      5. The biblical theology here is “typological.” For example, the sacrifice of Isaac foreshadows that of Christ.
   D. A closer look at the images of Christ on the sarcophagus reveals a representation that was common for a time but that gradually disappeared.
   E. By the 5th century, in Rome and elsewhere, Christ begins to appear in the more familiar representation.
      1. Good examples are the magnificent mosaics in Saints Cosmas and Damian and in the Lateran Basilica.
      2. Here Christ is an erect figure, an adult, and bearded, with long, flowing, dark hair. He is garbed like a bishop.
   F. The two mosaics also point to an emerging art form: the icon.
      1. In Greek eikon simply means “image,” but gradually a particular art form emerged that scholars call “icons” to differentiate them from historical/biblical images.
      2. Figures are presented frontally and out of all time and space.
      3. There are massive controversies over the origins of the icon, but quite apart from its “look,” there is the matter of its function.

VI. Christian architecture requires comment.
   A. Emperors and aristocrats were great patrons of building projects. This is worth keeping in mind given the expense of these undertakings.
B. The basic Roman (and Greek) public building was the rectangular basilica, and numerous Christian churches adapted the basilican plan.

1. Whereas the apse of a secular basilica might have held an imperial statue and the apse of a temple a cult statue, the Christian basilica gave over the apsidal region to the altar and clergy.

2. Whereas in a classical basilica dignitaries might have made a long, solemn walk down the nave to meet the ruler, in a Christian basilica clergy and people processed down those naves to celebrate their liturgies and the bring forward their offerings.

VII. Once again, we see that in late antiquity much changed and much remained the same.

Suggested Reading:
Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph*.
Mathews, *Clash of Gods*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Do you find the arguments for or against Christian visual arts more persuasive?
2. How do art and architecture reveal the themes of continuity and change in late antiquity?
Lecture Twenty-Six

The Universal in the Local—Cities

Scope: Thinking about the ancient world immediately conjures up visions of that world’s great cities. Reality and irony attends those visions. Cities were culturally and governmentally dominant in antiquity. At the same time, only about 10–15 percent of people in antiquity lived in cities. In this lecture we shall look at cities in general, large and small, central and remote. How were cities organized and governed? What were cities for in late antiquity? What kinds of people lived in them? What did those people do every day? What did cities look like? What amenities did they provide? How do changes in the fabric of urban life help us to understand changes in the late antique world?

Outline

I. To think of the ancient world is to think of cities. Cities remained crucial in late antiquity but also changed dramatically. And it must be remembered that cities accounted for no more than 10–15 percent of the overall population.

   A. Written evidence consists of scattered references in narrative sources, administrative sources (e.g., Notitia Galliarum and the Theodosian Code), letters, and sermons.

   B. There were significant regional variations.
      1. The northern zone from the Balkans to Britain was the first to deurbanize.
      2. The middle zone of Italy, southern Gaul, and Spain saw continuity and stability, but major, well-known centers such as Rome, Ravenna, Milan, and Arles may be deceptive.
      3. The southern zone, mainly North Africa, was stable until the Vandal conquest but declined thereafter and was devastated by the Muslim conquest.
      4. The eastern zone of Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Palestine had uneven experiences: Anatolia collapsed in the 6th century; Syria and Palestine recovered from Persian conquests after 603; and Mesopotamia was very uneven as a frontier zone between contending parties.

   C. What is known about the size of cities?
      1. In the 4th century, Alexandria’s population was about 250,000, Antioch’s 150,000–200,000, and Lyons’ 50,000.
      2. Hermopolis in Egypt had a population of about 25,000 and Oxyrynchus 15,000–20,000; the average in Egypt appears to have been about 16,000.

   D. How many cities were there?
      1. The east and west were very different (as were the north and south).
      2. Notitia Galliarum names 115 cities; North Africa had 500 bishoprics (but not every bishop was in a town, nor did every town have a bishop); under Justinian there were more than 1,000 in the east, but one 6th-century source names 5,627.

II. Certain characteristics of cities were pretty constant, although they varied in scale.

   A. The physical “look” of cities was fairly uniform.
      1. Most got walls in the 3rd or 4th century, owing to constant military pressures.
      2. Cities had, or else emperors installed, a basic “kit” of Roman amenities as a powerful ideological statement: forum, baths, circus, theater, and temples.
      3. Large cities got aqueducts, drainage/sewer systems, and paved streets.
      4. Christianity slowly changed the topography of cities.

   B. Some generalizations are possible about urban populations.
      1. Apart from very large cities, populations tended to be fairly homogeneous.
      2. The social classes were fairly constant: small numbers of imperial aristocrats (elevated locals or persons sent in) who monopolized offices until the 5th century, local landowning curiales, traders and artisans, day laborers, and slaves.
      3. There was always a demimonde of beggars, entertainers, prostitutes, and transients.

   C. What were cities for?
      1. They were centers of administration for a huge empire; the empire itself can be thought of as a vast network of cities.
      2. Cities had direct and indirect military significance.
      3. Cities were markets of local, regional, or even imperial significance.
      4. Cities were centers of culture: schools, secular and religious festivals, and the elite’s residences.
III. City government is an interesting feature of late antiquity.

A. One aspect of Roman genius was to leave cities with a great deal of local autonomy.
   1. Romans rarely governed cities directly and cooperated with local elites.
   2. Romans benefitted from the competitive nature of local elites (evergetism).

B. Crucial to a city was its council (called an ordo, curia, or boulé).
   1. Councilors were pulled in for life based on property qualifications.
   2. Councilors wore white togas, were often honored with statues or images, and enjoyed fiscal and legal immunities.
   3. Exemptions from council service were granted for old age, infirmity, military service, holding an imperial office, being clergy, and being a teacher—in all, rarely.
   4. As service became burdensome relative to moral and material rewards, Romans found it harder to draw people to serve.

C. Councils provided municipal service (fire brigades, police, and night watches), hired teachers and doctors, saw to food supply, maintained drains and sewers, regulated weights and measures, maintained baths (fuel costs were enormous), and saw to upkeep of public buildings.

D. As the state needed more tax revenue and provided less secure defense, elites began fleeing council service.
   1. Rome began to introduce officials from outside, who were resented.
   2. A government of Rome-aligned curiales changed to one of locally aligned “notables.”
   3. Powerful landowners less often lived in towns and consolidated power locally, without reference to Rome or Constantinople.

E. Bishops represented something new: They took over charitable services and construction.

IV. What changed in the urban life of late antiquity?

A. Bonds between centers and cities were weakened. Here was one key “end” of the ancient world.

B. Local elites were more locally than “Romanly” dominant.

C. The rise of the clergy and their blending with the old local elites created new bases for power and influence. This was a second “end” of the ancient world.

D. The decline of the traditional urban/Roman/imperial elite created the conditions for a new kind of culture that was essentially Christian. Here was a third “end” of the ancient world.

Suggested Reading:
Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals*.
Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*.

Questions to Consider:
1. In what essential ways did cities change across late antiquity?
2. Do you detect signs of decay and decline or of growth and transformation?
Lecture Twenty-Seven
Rome and Constantinople

Scope: Rome, “the eternal city,” the “world’s theater,” is perennially fascinating. Constantinople, today’s Istanbul, is mysterious. This lecture will explore the cityscapes of two of the world’s greatest cities. Where Rome is concerned, we shall look at a time of challenge, shrinkage, and decay. Where Constantinople is concerned, we shall watch as a great city comes into being. In both cases we will attend to population, occupations, cultural attainments, and architectural monuments. Because of the chance survival of remarkable “notices” from both cities, we’ll amuse and instruct ourselves as we compare and contrast everything from bakeries to fountains to statues.

Outline

I. Although Alexandria, Antioch, and other cities were and remained important, Rome and Constantinople were late antiquity’s great cities par excellence.

II. Rome’s physical layout experienced several major changes.
   A. Aurelian built a circuit of walls that were the greatest fortifications in the world up to that time.
   B. Diocletian added the last major bath complex, which could accommodate 3,000 people.
   C. In the forum region, the basilica of Maxentius and the Arch of Constantine were the last major constructions.
   D. Aristocratic residences continued to be built into the 5th century on the Esquiline, Aventine, and Caelian Hills.
   E. The most dramatic development was the construction of huge Christian churches.
      1. In the 5th century, popes began to sponsor huge churches.
      2. By 400 there were 18 “title churches”; by 500 there were 26. These were part of the santa Romana ecclesia that provided, by delegation, for the pope’s oversight of Rome’s Christian community.
      3. By 630 there were some 17 monasteries in the city.
      4. There were also 56 Christian catacombs with 200 miles of galleries.

III. The Notitia Romae provides a snapshot of the city.
   A. There were 29 great streets, 424 housing quarters, 1,790 individual houses, 46,602 tenements, and 14 secular regions (and 7 ecclesiastical ones) for administration.
   B. The city had 12 general markets, 2 meat markets, 254 bakeries, and 2,300 shops for olive oil.
   C. There were 290 grain warehouses/distribution centers.
   D. There were 19 aqueducts, 15 fountains, 1,302 cisterns/tanks, 144 latrines, 11 major bath houses, and 856 small bath houses.
   E. There were 10 secular basilicas and numerous covered porticoes.
   F. The city had 29 libraries and 45 major temples.
   G. There were 23 equestrian statues, 80 gold statues of gods, 84 ivory statues of gods, 3,785 other statues, 6 obelisks, and 36 marble arches.
   H. There were two race courses: The Circus Maximus could seat 385,000.
   I. There were 2 large and 4 small amphitheaters (the Colosseum was the largest, with a seating capacity of 87,000), 3 theaters, 1 odeum, 1 stadium, 2 pools for mock sea battles (called “naumachia”), 5 large parks, and 46 bordellos.
   J. Finally, there were 16 cemeteries on roads leading out of the city.

IV. Rome’s population was largely varied.
   A. From Augustus to Constantine, the population probably numbered 1,000,000.
      1. From about 450 to the Gothic wars, the population had dropped to 500,000–600,000.
      2. After the Gothic wars, the population may have been as low as 30,000–40,000 but was probably more like 80,000.
   B. There were many slaves; 40,000 joined Alaric in his siege of Rome in 408. Slaves worked in bath houses, maintained aqueducts, and did menial urban service jobs.
   C. There was a middle class that varied tremendously in wealth. These people tended to be organized into guilds.
   D. The state long provided for the urban population.
      1. There were monthly grain distributions under Augustus, and Aurelian changed this to bread: six half-pound loaves per week.
      2. The 3rd century saw oil and meat distributions.

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3. Rome’s aqueducts brought in 1,000,000 cubic meters of water per day—the same as in 1968.
4. There were various entertainments, but gladiatorial shows, battles with live animals, and theater spectacles dwindled under Christian opposition.

V. Constantinople had a rather different history.
   A. Constantinople was an old Greek colony—Byzantium—that had been founded in 660 B.C. but had never been prominent.
      1. Licinius saw the strategic significance of the site, and when Constantine defeated him, he resolved to build a new city there.
      2. Constantine hewed to Hellenistic tradition and named the city after himself.
      3. The city received a senate, an urban prefect, and a full set of amenities by 359.
      4. The city had about 400,000 residents by the late 4th century and probably 600,000 in Justinian’s time.
   B. Building the city was a long process, as it largely had to be built from scratch.
      1. Constantine created the landward walls and made the city four times larger.
      2. Constantius II added sea walls with 188 towers, and Theodosius II moved the walls out, expanding the city by one-third.
      3. Over the course of the 4th and 5th centuries, a huge palace complex was constructed.
      4. Constantine built churches: Hagia Eirene (burned down in the Nika Riots in 532), Holy Apostles (his burial place), and Hagia Sophia (rebuilt by Justinian).
   C. The Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae provides a snapshot of the city.

VI. One can easily see that the two great cities differ in many respects, largely owing to the fact that one was old and the other new.

Suggested Reading:
Downey, *Constantinople in the Age of Justinian*.
Lançon, *Rome in Late Antiquity*.

Questions to Consider:
1. How do Rome and Constantinople seem most alike? Most different?
2. How did Christianity change the shape of Rome and Constantinople?
Lecture Twenty-Eight
Visigothic Spain and Merovingian Gaul

Scope: The great survivors among the earliest barbarian kingdoms were those of the Franks in Gaul and of the Visigoths in Spain. In an earlier lecture, we charted their histories in the 5th and 6th centuries as the kingdoms of the Burgundians, Alans, Sueves, Vandals, and Ostrogoths failed for varying reasons. In this lecture we will begin with the Visigothic kingdom. Despite many resources and achievements, the Visigoths were plagued by political disunity and dynastic discontinuity. Eventually Spain fell to Berber and Arab invaders in 711, whose conquest inaugurated many centuries during which most of Spain was part of the Islamic world. The Frankish kingdom in Gaul under the Merovingian dynasty of kings had a very different experience. Sometimes divided, sometimes unified, the Merovingian kingdoms had political, institutional, economic, intellectual, and religious resources. They laid the firm foundations on which the Carolingian dynasty, Charlemagne’s family, built after their takeover in 751.

Outline

I. We left the barbarian west in the 6th century amid a series of disasters and failures.
   A. Justinian’s regime put an end to the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy and the Vandal kingdom in Africa.
   B. The Frankish king, Clovis, defeated the Visigoths at Vouillé and confined them largely to Spain.
   C. Inside Spain, the Visigoths defeated the remaining Vandals and also the Sueves.
   D. We therefore pick up the thread with the Visigoths in Spain and the Franks, with their Merovingian kings, in Gaul.

II. In the early 6th century, the Visigoths (as we noted) had some serious problems, but they managed to address some of them creatively as the century wore on.
   A. Their defeat at Vouillé cost them a king and much prestige and pride.
   B. Meddling in Spain by Ostrogoths and Romans was distracting.
   C. Arianism was a bar to assimilation and integration.
   D. A measure of stability was achieved by King Leovigild.
      1. He nearly unified the peninsula and made Toledo the capital.
      2. He was a charismatic leader with a profound sense of royal dignity: He wore royal garb, sat on a throne, and issued coins with his own image.
      3. He began the process of converting to Catholicism, but this provoked an Arian reaction, abetted by nobles who resented the growth in royal power.
   E. King Reccared created promising conditions for assimilation.
      1. He converted to Catholicism, and then at the Third Council of Toledo he brought along the Gothic leadership.
      2. Over the course of the 7th century, the Councils of Toledo—17 in all—became the only truly national institution.
   F. Later kings took other positive steps.
      1. They required free subjects to swear oaths of fidelity to the king.
      2. Recceswinth issued a law book in 12 sections—like Rome’s original “Twelve Tables” and perhaps in imitation of Justinian.

III. Try as they might, the kings and bishops could not maintain the integrity of the kingdom.
   A. One king after another was deposed—sometimes murdered.
      1. The nobility tended to ignore the church’s strictures and to pursue their own interests.
      2. Kings tried to preserve a “public” army, but nobles tended to establish control over their own private followings.
   B. On the death of King Witiza in 710, there was yet another brief civil war, but this came at a terrible time.
      1. In 710 a small North African band under Tariq ibn Ziyad—a Berber client of the governor of Ifriqiya—reconnoitered Spain, and in 711 a large force under Tariq crossed to Spain.
      2. King Roderick was in the north fighting Basques, and as he marched south his forces dwindled.
      3. Roderick was defeated in one great battle, and his forces melted away.
      4. The invaders took Toledo, killed many nobles—probably to prevent anyone from becoming king—and began the systematic conquest of Spain.
   C. It is easy to make the “fall” of Spain look inevitable, but the kingdom had positives: The church was wealthy, learned, and accomplished, and Spain had been one of Rome’s oldest, richest provinces.
IV. In certain respects, almost as if by default, the baton passed to the Franks and to their Merovingian dynasty of kings.

A. We discussed Clovis, who unified the lands of Gaul, allied with the church, embraced Catholicism, defeated the Goths, and adopted many trappings of Roman-style rule.

B. Clovis also divided his realm among his four sons, which made most of the 6th century one long battle among his sons and grandsons.

C. Despite some evident Roman continuities, there were also changes.
   1. The great Roman fiscal apparatus vanished—but it had been vanishing since 406.
   2. In Roman times the south of Gaul controlled the north, but now the reverse was true.

V. As one turns the corner into the 7th century, there are two ways of telling the story.

A. The rois fainéants—some mentally deficient, some children—declined into decrepitude, while the Arnulfing-Pippinid (Carolingian) family gradually seized power.

B. Today’s prevailing view is that the Merovingians continued to matter a great deal, and the kingdom as whole worked well and coherently. We will take this view.

VI. In 613 after some gruesome battles, Chlothar II of Neustria was accepted as king of all three Frankish kingdoms (Neustria, Austrasia, and Burgundy). From 628 to 638, Chlothar’s son Dagobert maintained the situation.

A. All subsequent Merovingians were his descendants.

B. Burgundy never again had kings.

C. Neustrians sometimes ruled Austrasia, but Austrasia never had kings for more than two reigns in succession.

D. Nobles became accustomed to palaces that were ruled by mayors of the palace.

E. Many nobles spent time at the palace as adolescents, and young men and served there as adults in various ceremonial offices.
   1. This created a transregional aristocratic culture of largely shared values and outlook.
   2. This also meant that queens and mayors could rule effectively with minor or incapacitated kings.

F. The letters of Bishop Desiderius of Cahors reveal another side of the story—networking.
   1. Desiderius and his two brothers, along with Audoin of Rouen, Eligius of Noyon, Paul of Verdun, and Sulpicius of Bourges had all been at court together, stayed in touch, and became influential religious officers around the kingdom.
   2. Kings and mayors, in turn, had decisive influence in choosing bishops.

G. Great nobles also founded monasteries, many of which became rich and prestigious and played key roles in Christianizing the countryside.

VII. In the last decades of the 7th century, the system began to collapse.

A. In the late 650s in Neustria, Mayor Ebroïn and Queen Balthild tried to secure the situation for Balthild’s minor son.

B. It appears that they took a very narrow view of which aristocrats would be received at court, appointed to key positions, and favored in any way.

C. By 680 Ebroïn had fallen, Balthild was in a convent, and opinion in Neustria was badly divided between those who favored Ebroïn’s successors and those who preferred to turn to Austrasia and Pippin II.

D. Pippin II was the son of Ansegisel and Bega, who were, respectively, the son and daughter of Arnulf of Metz and Pippin of Landen. These are the ancestors of the Carolingian family.
   1. In 680 he made an attempt to secure his position in Neustria but failed.
   2. In 687 at Tertry, he won a victory and secured his control.

E. Pippin died in 714, leaving his wife Plectrude, minor grandsons, and a son Charles by another wife.
   1. One faction of Neustrians allied with the Frisians against the Austrasians.
   2. Plectrude tried to rally support for her grandsons.

F. Charles escaped from captivity, rallied the Austrasians, defeated the Frisians and then the Neustrians, and seated himself firmly in power.

G. The Carolingian family had been rich, powerful, and well connected for a century before Charles, but their rise was not so much inevitable as the result of bad decisions by Ebroïn and Balthild.
   1. Charles now remade the Frankish world around his family, and for long periods he ruled without a king but did not seek the royal title.
   2. Only in 751 did his son Pippin III—Charlemagne’s father—become king of the Franks.
VIII. Let us take stock of the Frankish world and ask why it turned out so differently from the Visigothic world.

A. The palace was the locus of the king, queen, mayors, and nobles in Francia but not in Spain.

B. Monarchy in Francia was respected as a legitimizer of all other rights, powers, and dignities.

C. The church was effectively incorporated in Francia, whereas in Spain it tried heroically (but in the end feebly) to defend the monarchy.

D. In Francia the idea of public authority was preserved, but it shifted from being fiscal and juridical to cultural. The “public” gradually vanished in Spain.

E. By the early 8th century, Visigothic Spain was gone and Frankish Gaul had shifted from its late antique roots and become “medieval.”

Suggested Reading:
Collins, *The Visigoths in Spain.*

Questions to Consider:
1. Compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of Visigothic Spain and Merovingian Gaul.
2. How Roman were Spain and Gaul between 500 and 700?
Lecture Twenty-Nine
Celt and Saxon in the British Isles

Scope: Rome made a shallow imprint on Britain. After the Romans left in 410, Roman traces grew dim and the local population succumbed to the gradual incursions of the Anglo-Saxons. This was the age of King Arthur, whose heroic—albeit legendary—feats failed to thwart the newcomers. The Anglo-Saxons built a series of kingdoms that laid the foundations for the later England. Once the Anglo-Saxons accepted Christianity, they participated in and contributed to the Christian culture of an emerging Europe. The Anglo-Saxons did not rule the Welsh to the west or the Picts (Scots) to the north, and they exerted little influence over the Irish. The Irish, however, influenced the Anglo-Saxons profoundly. The British Isles provide an interesting example of how peoples who were little if at all influenced by the Romans were drawn into the orbit of European civilization by one of the great legacies of the Roman world: the Catholic Church.

Outline

I. Britain and Ireland provide two interesting examples of areas that were, respectively, moderately and never influenced by the Romans but that nevertheless came to share in the legacy of the late antique world.
   A. The Romans conquered Britain in the 1st century but did not make as deep an imprint as they did in other areas.
      1. Britain was fairly often the scene of rebellions and suffered attacks from raiders on a regular basis.
      2. Britain was expensive relative to Rome’s gains from the island.
      3. After the disastrous Rhine breach of 406/7, Rome pulled its field armies out of Britain, effectively (but not officially) abandoning the island to its fate.
   B. Ireland was never conquered by Rome, and archaeology reveals no evidence of Roman settlement.

II. The period after the Roman withdrawal from Britain is difficult to understand in detail.
   A. Faced with Pictish and Irish raids, the British appealed to the “Romans” in Gaul.
   B. Saxon raiders had long been a menace in the northern seas, and it looks as though Aetius may have attempted to use the Saxons against the raiders by the terms of a treaty—a policy consistent with his other actions in Gaul.
   C. Gradually more and more Saxons began settling in Britain.
   D. Bede tells a rather smooth tale of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes settling Britain.
      1. It is true that the peoples who settled in Britain between c. 450 and c. 600 came from northern Germany and southern Denmark.
      2. They did not come as coherent, discrete groups.
   E. No one any longer believes that the Anglo-Saxons gradually pushed the British to the west, into the “Celtic fringe.”
   F. The Anglo-Saxons were militarily dominant, so their language (Old English) and customs prevailed.

III. Three basic issues dominate the early history of Anglo-Saxon England: the formation of the kingdoms, the Christianization of the country, and England’s relations with the continent.
   A. Source materials for the political history of England are not substantial before the 9th century, but some basic trends can be discerned.
      1. By the early 7th century, the following kingdoms seem to have been in place: Northumbria (an amalgamation of Bernicia and Deira), Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Sussex, Wessex, and Kent.
      2. Kent was the most important kingdom c. 600 but gradually waned, and leadership passed briefly to East Anglia, then to Northumbria, and then to Mercia.
      3. Successful kingdoms were those that had room to expand, ambitious rulers, and (relatively) long-lived dynasties.
   B. The Christianization of England was a complex process.
      1. Bede blamed the British for not trying to convert the Saxons, but this is unfair.
      2. Pope Gregory I sent Augustine and companions to England, to Kent, in 597.
      3. In the early 7th century, additional Roman missionaries spread the faith into Northumbria, whose king, Edwin, was receptive.
      4. In 663 representatives of Roman and Irish Christianity met at Whitby, and the decision was made to adopt Roman church customs.
C. Gradually England joined and made decisive contributions to the continental world.
   1. Many Anglo-Saxons went to Rome and established firm connections.
   2. England’s monastic schools attained a high degree of sophistication.
   3. Missionaries such as Willibrord and Boniface worked in Frisia and central Germany, and Alcuin became Charlemagne’s key adviser.

D. By the time the Vikings came, England had joined Europe, especially through the agency of the church, and had absorbed the late antique heritage.

IV. Ireland’s is a very different story on some levels, but also eerily similar on others.

A. Ireland’s political geography was distinctive and confusing.
   1. By 700 the “pentarchy” was basically in place: Ulster, Connacht, Meath, Munster, and Leinster. Yet Ireland had perhaps 50 to 100 tuatha—small kingdoms, each under a rí.
   2. Gradually within each region there emerged a dominant family that achieved a “high kingship.”
   3. By the 8th century, the Uí Néill family, with the northern and southern branches alternating, had achieved a dominant position.
   4. Kingship was the dominant institution, but it was weaker than on the continent or even in England.
   5. The society was hierarchical, with kings, lords, freemen, half-free, and slaves.

B. The Christianization of Ireland is shrouded in myth and mystery.
   1. Patrick was a Briton, the son of a town councilor and deacon, who was raised as a Christian and captured by Irish pirates at age 16.
      a. Patrick began to take his faith seriously while in captivity and preached among the northern Irish.
      b. He escaped, trained for the priesthood in Britain, and returned to Ireland to spend the rest of his life there.
      c. He called himself “Bishop of the Irish,” and tradition accorded him a see at Armagh.
   2. By the 7th century, it seems that virtually every tuath had a bishop, so their sees had to be very small; Irish bishops were not the great figures that their continental and even English contemporaries were.
   3. Crucial was the development of monasteries, with the greatest of them attributed to founding saints: Brigit at Kildare; Ciarán at Clonmacnoise; Comgall at Bangor; Columba at Derry, Durrow, and Iona; Kevin at Glandalough; Carthach at Lismore.
   4. Monasteries developed formidable schools with great Latin learning and biblical studies.
   5. The Irish tradition of peregrinatio (pilgrimage, more or less) led many to depart their native regions for other monasteries and even to cross to the continent.

V. The 7th and 8th centuries in the British Isles, therefore, saw what has been called a “second Romanization.”

   A. This time it was Roman Christianity, not imperial legions, that did the hard, slow work.
   B. As the Middle Ages were dawning, the late antique heritage was absorbed and adapted in the British Isles.

Suggested Reading:
Charles-Edwards, Early Christian Ireland.
Dark, Britain and the End of the Roman Empire.
Kirby, The Earliest English Kings.

Questions to Consider:
1. How do Britain and Ireland differ from the kingdoms of the continent?
2. In what ways are Britain and Ireland alike and unalike?
Lecture Thirty
The Birth of Byzantium

Scope: In the two centuries after Justinian’s death, the Eastern Empire changed in fundamental ways, creating in the process a new kind of regime that has always been called “Byzantine.” We will track changes in several key areas. In foreign policy, the empire gradually came to ignore the west, focusing instead on the Balkans and Anatolia (Turkey). In the early 7th century, Byzantium warred, often successfully, with Slavs, Bulgars, and Persians. With the dramatic rise of the Arabs and Islam, Byzantium fell into centuries of struggle in the east. The new military and diplomatic situation prompted Byzantium’s rulers to transform the empire’s institutions. All the while the religious side of Byzantium was taking on increasingly distinctive characteristics: Greek Orthodoxy was emerging. But through it all there was an irony: We see Byzantium as new and distinctive; they saw it as Rome—right until its conquest by the Turks in 1453.

Outline

I. Although there is a venerable tendency to call the Eastern Roman Empire “Byzantine” from the founding of Constantinople by Constantine, it is better to reserve the term for the 7th and 8th centuries, when a distinctive new regime appeared in the Roman east.
   A. We left the east in 565 on the death of Justinian, whose long reign had been marked by both triumph and tragedy.
   B. Rome’s fortunes after Justinian took a roller-coaster ride whose destination was only becoming clear in the early 8th century.
   C. In this lecture we will look at three main areas of challenge and response that together signal the emergence of something new.
      1. There were dramatic changes in the geographical shape of the empire.
      2. Cultural, especially religious, issues proved to be as contentious as ever.
      3. Institutional changes that finally replaced Diocletian’s system with a new one began to emerge.

II. Justinian reconquered parts of the west, shored up the Balkans, and secured a 50-year peace with Persia—all of which unraveled shortly after his death.
   A. Justinian, having no direct heirs, was succeeded by his nephew Justin II, who immediately embarked on a disastrous foreign policy.
      1. He abandoned Justinian’s agreements with the Avars and Persians, and the immediate consequence was that various Slavic peoples began to raid and settle in the Balkans.
      2. The Lombards abandoned their Pannonian settlements and invaded Italy in 568–569.
      4. In 572 Justin refused the annual tribute to Persia, and he actually attacked but was violently repulsed and lost much territory.
   B. Justin lost his mind in 574, and his wife, Sophia, held the state together for four years, aided by General Tiberius, whose succession she arranged in 578.
      1. Tiberius restored the treaty with the Avars, hoping once again to use them against the Slavs.
      2. The Avars sensed weakness and took the great city of Sirmium in 582, and more Slavs entered the Balkans.
   C. Maurice’s reign was a disaster.
      1. His policy along the Danube was weak and vacillating, permitting further Avar and Slav incursions.
      2. This weakness provoked a mutiny of the troops, who replaced him with Phocas.
   D. Phocas’s reign was another disaster.
      1. He opened his reign with the brutal murders of Maurice and his family and then carried out a series of judicial murders that provoked a series of conspiracies and persecutions.
      2. He faced renewed attacks from Persia, and what little remained of the Balkan defenses collapsed.
      3. In 608 Heraclius, the exarch of Carthage, began a slow progress to Constantinople that resulted in Phocas’s overthrow.
   E. Heraclius was a remarkable ruler and came to the throne at a difficult moment.
      1. The church helped by making its treasure and revenue available for the recruitment of troops, and Heraclius began training new, fast, light, mounted archers.
      2. Heraclius then attacked in Armenia in 622 to isolate Asia Minor, which prompted the Persians to ally with the Avars for a joint siege of Constantinople in 626.
4. Whereas Heraclius looked forward to a long peace in the east, he faced the unexpected and rapid eruption of the Muslims into Palestine and Syria in 634–636.

F. After Heraclius a series of relatively weak rulers struggled to maintain the Roman Empire in some shape.

III. Religious peace continued to prove elusive for the Romans.
A. After Justinian’s abortive attempt to pacify the Monophysites at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 553, his successors proved to be ardent Chalcedonians who aggressively persecuted the Monophysites.
B. With Heraclius’s victory over the Persians and (temporary) recovery of his eastern provinces, some religious settlement seemed desirable.
   1. Working with Patriarch Sergius, Heraclius formulated Monoenergism, which conceded that Christ had both divine and human natures but asserted that he had only one “energy.”
   2. This action provoked howls of protest, so in 638 he issued his Ekthesis, implementing Monothelitism (Christ had only one “will”), and forbade further discussion of the topic.
C. Heraclius’s immediate successors abandoned Monothelitism but could not get religious peace because Pope Martin I and Maximus the Confessor objected fundamentally to the emperor’s right to speak on doctrinal issues.
   1. Martin was arrested, brought to Constantinople, tried for treason, brutalized, and died in exile in the Chersonese.
   2. Maximus fled to North Africa and then to Rome, where he waged constant theological combat against the regime.
D. In 680 Constantine IV held the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, and it strongly affirmed Chalcedonian teaching.

IV. During these tangled years, there were also signs of critical institutional changes.
A. The empresses Sophia and Martina (wife and widow of Heraclius) proved immensely capable in holding things down during their husbands’ incapacitation and in securing the succession.
B. Rome’s rulers began to style themselves Basileus ton Romaion, “Emperor of the Romans,” but they used Greek, and Greek culture and language were becoming dominant in the “Roman” world.
C. The last decades of the 7th century witnessed the beginnings of what would become a fundamental recasting of the Diocletianic system of many small provinces supervised by a vast imperial hierarchy.

V. In view of its dramatically reduced size, brittle but decidedly “orthodox” religious posture, and newly emerging administrative changes, one can legitimately call this regime Byzantine, so as to distinguish it from its predecessor.
A. We must remember that no one ever called himself Byzantine.
B. The Byzantines always and only called themselves Romans: Romaioi.

Suggested Reading:
Haldon, Byzantium in the Seventh Century.
Kaegi, Heraclius.

Questions to Consider:
1. When do you think it is possible to speak of “Byzantium”?
2. What were the Eastern Empire’s greatest challenges in the 7th century?
Lecture Thirty-One
Byzantium—Crisis and Recovery

Scope: In the early 8th century, in perilous times, a new dynasty of rulers came to the throne in Byzantium. They shored up the empire’s defenses, continued and extended the military and institutional reforms of the preceding decades, and put the economy on surer footing. These emperors also launched “iconoclasm”—in the narrow sense an attack on Christian figural art, but in a broader sense an intensification of the distinctive traits of Orthodoxy. At the end of the 8th century, Byzantium was ruled by a remarkable woman, Irene.

Outline

I. It is hard to imagine how threatened the Byzantine Empire was in 717 when Leo III assumed the purple.
   A. Leo had been a supporter of Justinian II and had been named strategos of the Anatolikon theme.
   B. When Justinian died Leo entered Constantinople and was acclaimed emperor. He immediately faced an Arab siege of the city (which he defeated) and then went on the offensive against the Arabs in Asia Minor.
   C. In part Leo’s successes were due to an alliance with the Khazars, a Turkic-speaking people living in the northern Caucasus with whom the Byzantines had occasionally allied against the Persians, Avars, and Arabs.
   D. Having risen to the purple from the Anatolikon theme himself, Leo divided the themes into smaller units to diminish the threat of similar uprisings.
   E. In 726 (or possibly as late as 741), Leo issued the Ecloga, a revision of Justinian’s Code that was intended to be a practical handbook of Roman law.

II. Leo will forever be remembered for the outbreak of iconoclasm.
   A. In 726 Leo began agitating against icons, and in 730 he convened a Silention (a meeting of the emperor’s closest advisers), where he formally condemned icons.
   B. Scholars have offered a vast array of interpretations of Byzantine iconoclasm. However, the sources are all late and hostile and, on close reading, provide a simpler explanation.
      1. Byzantium had been suffering repeated military setbacks.
      2. In 726 a volcanic eruption on the island of Thera sent tidal waves and clouds of ash over much of the empire. Pious people believed that God was punishing the empire.
      3. Leo was conventionally pious and believed that icons violated the prohibition in Exodus against “graven images.” Several eastern bishops supported Leo’s position.
      4. In fact icons had been attaining greater prominence in the spiritual life of Byzantium across the 7th century.
   C. Leo dismissed Patriarch Germanus and quarreled with several popes but did not persecute “iconodules” and took few actual iconoclastic steps on his own.
   D. One key factor here (and we will see more) is that the Byzantine, Orthodox east was prepared to go its own way.

III. Constantine V was a successful and popular ruler.
   A. Although he had been named coemperor by his father Leo III in 720 (at the age of 2), he faced opposition from his relative Artabasdos, whom he defeated in 743.
   B. He is a hard figure to know because all the sources are late and hostile, owing to his iconoclasm.
   C. Changes in the Arab world (a dynastic battle 748–750) provided opportunities that Constantine seized in 746 and 752.
   D. In 763 and 773, Constantine won great victories against the Bulgars.
   E. Constantine raised taxes but moderated the increases by seizing property from the church—and he provided a measure of peace and security.
   F. By Constantine’s reign the theme system was fully operational.
      1. Whereas themes had once meant armies responsible for a particular region, now themes were fully administrative districts under strategoi, who were both civil and military leaders.
      2. Peasant soldiers were settled on vacant or reconquered land in return for military service; they had to provide their own weapons and horses.
      3. This represented a massive reorganization of the Diocletianic-Constantinian “defense-in-depth” strategy, and it worked well.
      4. The great officers of former imperial times were abolished or drastically reduced in significance.
G. Faced with Italian and papal opposition to his religious and tax policies, Leo III had already transferred the church provinces of southern Italy and Illyricum to the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople.

H. In terms of religious policy (always a Roman imperial concern), Constantine was more radical than his father.
   1. Constantine was a confirmed iconoclast.
   2. In the decades since Leo’s first objections to images, Saint John of Damascus had written massive theological treatises in defense of icons.
   3. Constantine took up the challenge and turned the icon controversy into a new Christological battle.
   4. Constantine also moved aggressively against the monastic order.

IV. When Constantine died in 775, the empire was in better shape than it had been since Heraclius’s defeat of the Persians.
   A. His son Leo IV succeeded without difficulty.
   B. Leo’s reign started out very promisingly in military terms, but he died of a fever in 780, leaving a remarkable and resourceful wife, Irene, and a nine-year-old son, Constantine VI.

V. The remarkable regency and then reign of Irene brings our discussion to a close.
   A. Let us first imagine the situation when Irene assumed the regency for her son Constantine.
      1. Her husband had five brothers or half-brothers who had a claim on the throne.
      2. The Arabs and Bulgars were fearsome foes.
      3. The Orthodox Church was separated from all Christian communions because of iconoclasm.
      4. All of the bishops of the empire had been appointed under iconoclastic emperors.
      5. Irene was personally an iconodule.
      6. As a woman Irene had no military experience, and the military was ferociously loyal to the Isaurian dynasty and was iconoclastic, because that had been the policy for half a century.
   B. Irene’s armies won early victories against the Slavs and Arabs. She negotiated a truce with the Arabs.
   C. Irene negotiated a marriage alliance with Charlemagne whereby her son Constantine would marry Charles’s daughter Rotrud.
   D. Irene carefully appointed loyal men in key offices and carefully engineered the appointment of the layman Tarasius as patriarch.
   E. Irene wished to restore icons to their former place of honor in the Byzantine world. Convened by Tarasius, the Second Council of Nicaea restored the veneration of icons, avoided condemning the previous Isaurian emperors, and discreetly reintegrated the iconoclast clergy.
   F. Until her deposition by disaffected military officers in 802, Irene ruled as Basileus, the only woman in Byzantine (or Roman) history to do so.

VI. Let us sum up the Byzantine Empire at the end of the 8th century.
   A. Geographically it was reduced to the eastern portion of Greece and western Asia Minor.
   B. Institutionally it was little like the Roman Empire that had preceded it.
   C. Culturally it was thoroughly Greek.
   D. Religiously it was Orthodox in ways that differentiated it from the Latin church in the west.

VII. As in the barbarian west, the late antique heritage had been adopted, adapted, and transformed. Once more, the curtain had been brought down on the world of late antiquity.

Suggested Reading:
Garland, Byzantine Empresses, chaps. 1–4.
Noble, Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians, chaps. 1–3.

Questions to Consider:
1. On what was Byzantium’s 8th-century recovery based?
2. Why do you think iconoclasm emerged?
Lecture Thirty-Two
Muhammad and the Rise of Islam

Scope: The rise of Islam and of the Arabs is the most remarkable development of the late antique world. An attentive observer of the late antique scene would almost certainly have predicted that the west would continue to exist as a series of barbarian kingdoms and that the east would retain some kind of a “Roman” regime. No one could have predicted that a brilliant, charismatic religious leader would galvanize the Arabs into a force of worldwide, historical proportions. This lecture will begin with a discussion of Arabia before Muhammad in order to demonstrate how the Arabs shifted from quiescent to dominant. Then the lecture will turn to Muhammad himself, to his life, and to his essential teachings.

Outline

I. One might well have predicted that the eastern and western portions of the Roman Empire would persist through late antiquity and on into the Middle Ages, albeit in some changed form.
   A. The rise, spread, and eventual triumph of Christianity was a surprising development in late antiquity and had a decisive impact on the Roman world.
   B. The rise, spread, and triumph of Islam was yet another astonishing development in this tumultuous age.

II. It is not easy to imagine that a world-shaking religious phenomenon would have arisen in Arabia.
   A. The Arabian Peninsula was large, complex, and turbulent.
      1. There was no central government in Arabia.
      2. Society was organized into tribes and clans that were largely egalitarian, although each tribe had a chief (“sharif” or “sayyid”).
      3. Towns such as Mecca and Yathrib (later Medina) had significant merchant populations, but most people, desert Bedouins, were pastoralists.
      4. People spoke a mutually intelligible form of Arabic, and there was some sense of a common past and group identity.
   B. Arabia had never been conquered by its powerful neighbors, the Roman and Persian Empires.
      1. Various Roman and Persian client polities had exercised some influence.
      2. There were fairly long-standing commercial relations.
   C. There were clusters of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian communities in Arabia, but their history is extremely hard to grasp.

III. Although Islam is a “religion of the book,” oral tradition played a huge role in early times in transmitting information about Muhammad.
   A. The best histories were not written until the 8th and 9th centuries, and by then tradition had hardened.
   B. The Qur’an may survive in a 7th century manuscript, but the consensus view is that the received text took shape a century or two after Muhammad’s death.
   C. By the 9th century, there were collections relating the Hadith, or sayings, of the Prophet and Sunna, or good practice—Muhammad’s own customs.
   D. These materials undoubtedly contain authentic, early material, but it is hard to sift.

IV. The life and career of Muhammad seem pretty clear in broad outline.
   A. Muhammad was born in Mecca in the 570s into a modest clan of the Quraysh tribe.
   B. Muhammad was orphaned early and raised by his uncle Abu Talib.
   C. As a young man, Muhammad entered the caravan trade, working for a wealthy widow, Khadija, whom he eventually married.
   D. At about the age of 40, Muhammad began retreating to Mount Hira, where he received revelations from Allah communicated by the angel Gabriel.
   E. Initially Muhammad won only a few followers, and the Meccan elite were actively hostile to him and to his teachings.
   F. In 619 Khadija and Abu Talib died, and Muhammad had no protection; the new leader of his clan opposed him.
   G. The citizens of Yathrib approached him in 620 and asked him to come to their city and negotiate their intense political strife.
H. After establishing his right to be in Mecca and winning followers there, Muhammad returned to Medina, where he died in 632.

V. What did Muhammad teach?
   A. He believed that he had been commanded to “recite” a divine revelation; in other words, the Qur’an, the record of his revelations, is not his interpretation of teaching but the very words of Allah.
   B. The central idea was that one must make “the surrender” (al-Islam) to Allah of the totality of one’s life and will.
   C. The Muslim—literally “the one who has surrendered”—joins a completely new kind of community, the umma Muslima.
   D. Muhammad’s idea of God was utterly monotheistic, transcendent, omniscient, omnipotent, and yet real and personal.
   E. The faith can be summarized in terms of the Five Pillars:
      1. The profession of faith.
      2. Prayer—five times daily facing Mecca (initially Jerusalem) and in community at noon on Fridays if possible.
      3. Fasting from sunup to sundown for the month of Ramadan.
      4. Alms—10 percent of one’s income for the benefit of other, less fortunate members of the umma.
      5. Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once on one’s lifetime.
   F. The basic teachings were presented in the Qur’an, a text organized into 114 suras (or chapters); in all it is about two-thirds as long as the Christian New Testament.
   G. Islam was a faith of orthopraxy more than of orthodoxy.
   H. There was no clergy—apart from imams, who were prayer leaders—no hierarchy, and no creed.

VI. Scholars can identify influences of Christianity and Judaism, although devout Muslims deny any such influences.
   A. The central tenets of the faith and the focus on community are like the Decalogue.
   B. Early sections of the Qur’an show Muhammad working out his differences with Christianity, Judaism, and Arabian polytheism.
   C. The powerful sense of a day of judgment, fasting, and prayer in the direction of a holy city are clear borrowings.
   D. The emphasis on self-renunciation and the needs of the community are reminiscent of Christian asceticism.

VII. A new faith had been announced to the world. Muhammad was evidently charismatic and effective. The key question was, what would happen next?

Suggested Reading:
Kennedy, The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphas.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Muhammad compare with other great religious leaders?
2. What similarities and differences do you see among Islam, Christianity, and Judaism?
Lecture Thirty-Three  
The Rise of the Caliphate

Scope: Muhammad, according to Islamic belief, was the last prophet of God and could have no direct successor. After 632 many people in Arabia who had joined Muhammad renounced their allegiance. Some of Muhammad’s closest associates rounded up the renegades and then fashioned a military machine that swept across Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and North Africa. By the early 8th century, parts of Persia and central Asia had been overrun. Spain had fallen, and raiders penetrated into central Gaul. Constantinople had been besieged twice. This lecture will chart these conquests and offer some explanations for their meteoric success. Then the lecture will turn to the leaders called “caliphs.” The first caliphs were relatives of Muhammad, but in 661 Mu’awiya, a general based in Syria, seized control and moved the capital of the caliphate to Damascus. This began the Umayyad dynasty. Despite successes, the Umayyads were unpopular, and in 750 “frontiersmen” fomented a palace revolution. They moved the capital to Baghdad and inaugurated a new regime that was ethnically diverse and religiously devout.

Outline

I. Muhammad’s death brought a crisis: What next?
   A. Muhammad had no male heirs, and he had not arranged for the succession.
   B. Right away in 632 there were troubles in Medina.
      1. The Ansar, “helpers” of the Prophet (and early Medinan converts), were happy with Islam but not with Quraysh leadership.
      2. Nevertheless Meccan elites chose Abu-Bakr as khalifat Allah (deputy of God on earth; commonly “caliph”) or sometimes Amir al-mu’minin (commander of the faithful).
      3. Abu-Bakr was elderly, loyal to Muhammad, an early convert, one of the first muhajirun (companions of the Prophet who first went to Medina in the hijra), and possessed an excellent knowledge of the tribes of Arabia.
   C. There were also troubles in Arabia.
      1. Many Arabs fell away almost immediately, claiming that their allegiance to Muhammad was personal.
      2. Some also objected to Quraysh and Medinan leadership.
      3. Sources call them ridda, “apostates.”
      4. A key decision was made: Being a Muslim meant acknowledging the new regime and paying taxes to Medina; force was legitimate.
      5. In the Ridda War, 632–634, Abu-Bakr suppressed the revolt.
      6. Henceforth Muslims could not raid one another, and here were the preconditions for the great expansion: The Meccan/Medinan elite would lead the Bedouin, the umma Muslima, in wars of conquest.

II. By the early 8th century, Muslim armies had conquered an empire, called “the caliphate,” which extended from Spain to central Asia and Sind (part of modern Pakistan).
   A. At that point the frontiers assumed a stability that, except for the islands of Cyprus and Sicily, would hold for 300 years.
   B. It is important to bear in mind that with the exception of Spain, where the Reconquista lasted 800 years, every territory conquered by the Muslims has remained Islamic down to today.

III. When Abu-Bakr died in 634, the muhajirun selected his designated successor, Umar, as caliph.
   A. Umar, austere and competent, became the architect of the caliphate in launching the conquests of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt.
   B. Abu-Bakr launched the first raids in Syria, but serious campaigning began under Umar, particularly when forces were consolidated under Khalid bin al-Walid.
      1. Damascus fell in 634, and at Yarmuk in 636 all of Syria except a narrow coastal strip fell into Muslim hands.
      2. Patriarch Sophronius surrendered Jerusalem in 636 or 637.
      3. Khalid then moved his armies into Jazira (“the island”), the land between the Tigris and Euphrates in northern Iraq and eastern Syria.
   C. Iraq was at that time ruled by Persian warlords who exploited the peasantry, but Persian rule had been weakened by wars with Heraclius.
   D. Egypt was a different case, in that the conquests of Syria and Iraq, bordering Arabia, followed on naturally from Ridda War.
      1. Amr bin al-As conducted some raids, and in 639 the patriarch of Alexandria agreed to pay tribute. Heraclius repudiated this “deal” but was powerless to stop it. Umar sent reinforcements.
2. In 641 Amr took the Roman fortress at Babylon, and in 642 he entered Alexandria, ending 1,000 years of Greek and Roman rule.
3. Egypt was lightly garrisoned, and the overwhelming majority of the population remained Coptic Christians for two to three centuries. They paid tribute, and Egypt’s grain now went to Medina and Mecca.

E. Having conquered Iraq, Umar decided to push into Iran and did so in two movements.
F. Egypt having been conquered, it was only natural to move further west. But it is 2,000 kilometers from Alexandria to Carthage and another 1,500 to Gibraltar.

G. The push across the River Oxus (into Transoxania) was a complicated, brutal, and long-lasting affair.
   1. The region had never been under Persian control and was a blend of Iranian, central Asian, and Turkish peoples organized into petty kingdoms and warlord zones.
   2. In 671 some 50,000 Arabs were sent from Iraq to Merv. This changed the face of the area but also imported to Khurasan the traditional tribal rivalries of the Arabs.

H. The conquest of Sind (lands lying west and north of the Indus River) took place at the same time as the push into Transoxania.

I. We have already spoken of Spain in connection with the fall of the Visigothic kingdom.
   1. Tariq and his Berbers may have known about the political troubles in Spain and welcomed a chance to be conquerors instead of the conquered.
   2. A Berber army under Tariq entered Spain in 711 but was supplanted by an Arab army in 712.
   3. From Spain there were raids into Gaul, including the one defeated by Charles Martel at Poitiers in 733, but there was never any attempt at systematic conquest.

IV. Political developments in the caliphate call for a word or two.
   A. In Islamic tradition the first four caliphs—Abu-Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali—are the Rashidun (the “rightly guided”).
   B. In 661 the old Meccan aristocrat Mu’awiya was ruling Syria and had a superb army. He became caliph and founded a dynasty—the Umayyad—that lasted until 750.
   C. In 748–750 hardened warriors and pious Muslims from Khurasan overthrew the Umayyads and founded the Abbasid dynasty.

V. How may we account for the success of this remarkable movement?
   A. Demographic decline after the plague of the 540s, the Persian conquests, and the Byzantine-Persian wars was certainly one factor.
   B. Byzantium and Persia had basically exhausted themselves.
   C. There were religious tensions between Orthodox and Monophysite (or Nestorian) Christians that Muslims cared nothing about.
   D. There were social tensions: For example, the peasants in Iraq welcomed liberation from Persian warlords, and merchants of Sind appreciated getting away from local Brahmins.
   E. The religious motivations of the Muslims were crucial. Jihad was a requirement, but it brought glory and possibly martyrdom and paradise.
   F. Military leadership was superb, particularly in view of the fact that Arabs had no superior technology and smaller numbers than their Byzantine and Persian foes.
   G. Very easy terms were imposed on the conquered: Pay jizya—“tax” or “tribute”—and retain your religion, customs, and much local autonomy.
      1. There was little pressure to convert to Islam.
      2. “People of the book” (originally Christians and Jews but later Zoroastrians and Buddhists) were placed in a subordinate but protected “dhimmi” status.
   H. The Arabs had immense confidence in their culture: The barbarians embraced Christianity and Latin, whereas in the Muslim world the Arabic language dominated for religion and government.

Suggested Reading:
Crone, God’s Rule.
Donner, The Early Islamic Conquests.
Questions to Consider:
1. Thinking about the early Arab conquests, where do you see similarities and differences?
2. To what factors would you attribute primary significance in the rapid Islamic conquests?
Lecture Thirty-Four
Material Life in Late Antiquity

Scope: From one point of view, this lecture will explore the economic realities of the Roman imperial and postimperial worlds. Rome’s was a “command economy.” How did it work? How well did it work? What role did commerce play? The overwhelming majority of people were farmers. What did that mean? From another point of view, this lecture will explore the material conditions of daily life. What changed and what did not in the daily lives of people from Britain to Mesopotamia? For Roman elites life got much worse, but for Arab elites it got much better. Why? Did men and women experience the changes of late antiquity in different ways? What happened to ancient slavery?

Outline

I. Assessing the material realities of life in late antiquity is complicated for several key reasons.

A. The late antique world was huge and immensely complex.
B. We have no statistical data of the kind used by scholars to study the modern world.
C. Subsistence farmers comprised about 90 percent of the population but are often almost invisible.
D. If agriculture was the key component of the economy and was the engine that produced the tax revenues that supported the Roman Empire and the Islamic caliphate, trade in one form or another appears most frequently in the sources, albeit usually anecdotally.
E. Where trade is concerned, there is a problem in weighing the relative significance of the imperial command economy and genuine commerce.
F. Nevertheless certain broad trends are visible and can be tracked with some confidence.

II. Three regional “snapshots” will serve to illustrate the problems and possibilities.

A. In the Syrian limestone massif, there is evidence that large amounts of marginal land were brought under cultivation, with continuous development from 330 to 550.
   1. Archaeology identifies between 700 and 800 settled sites, some of them with stone houses, churches, monasteries, and public buildings.
   2. Sites held populations ranging from a few dozen people to several thousand.
   3. The economy was mainly driven by the production of olive oil, much going to the great cities of Syria: Apamea and Antioch.
   4. Cities were seriously damaged in the Persian invasions of the 6th century, but prosperity returned under the Arabs.

B. North Africa was one of the richest areas of the Roman world in late antiquity.
   1. Interior regions produced high-quality olive oil in vast quantities.
   2. The coastal hinterlands behind the great cities like Carthage emphasized cereal grains.
   3. In many places there was a thriving ceramic industry producing the African Red Slip ware (ARS) that was much prized all over the Mediterranean region.
   4. The Vandals disrupted and probably redirected much trade—grain going more to southern Gaul and Spain than to Rome, whereas ARS continued to flow widely.
   5. Justinian’s reconquest and the imposition of higher taxes produced Berber resistance and the beginnings of decline.
   6. The Arab conquests brought the flourishing late antique economy to a standstill.
   7. Nowhere in the Mediterranean world did the late antique order disappear so completely.

C. Gaul always presented two rather different regions: the urbanized south and the rural north.
   1. Northern Gaul was always a region of widely dispersed rural settlement.
   2. Southern Gaul itself presents two faces.
      a. The agriculturally oriented central region between the Loire and the Garonne had been a land of rich country villas, and many of these were destroyed or abandoned in the tumults of the 5th century.
      b. The more urbanized south seems to have survived without great disruption until the Muslim raids of 715–733.

D. A few generalizations emerge from these snapshots.
   1. Everywhere the connections between cities and their hinterlands were crucial.
   2. Severing the links between cities and their hinterlands had very different effects in various regions.

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III. Clearly trade in some fashion was central to this economy.
   A. What was traded? Essentially the “Mediterranean triad”—grain, oil, and wine—but these were bulk goods and extremely costly.
   B. Only the Roman state had the money and administration to move large amounts of heavy goods, especially grain, over long distances.
   C. Ceramic evidence supplies further clues.
      1. ARS virtually disappeared from the Mediterranean world in the 7th century. Archaeological evidence shows that in one region after another pottery tended to be produced locally and disseminate minimally.
      2. Oil-filled amphorae from North Africa are almost absent from the eastern Mediterranean in the mid-to-late 7th century.
   D. There was always some private trade in luxury items, but its volume and value are hard to assess. Rome could never raise much money taxing it.

IV. The most revealing aspect of material conditions in late antiquity is the vast disparity of incomes between the wealthy and the ordinary citizens of the Roman world.
   A. In the 4th and 5th centuries, the average income of a Roman senatorial-class family was 144,000 solidi per year.
   B. Let us put these figures into some sort of perspective.
      1. An ordinary Roman soldier received annual pay amounting to 6–8 solidi.
      2. A working man in Egypt received perhaps 2.25 solidi per year.
      3. A man in Palestine indentured himself for two years at around 7 solidi per year, roughly the annual earnings of a small merchant in Mesopotamia.
   C. Symmachus introduced his son into society at roughly the cost of the annual income of 24,000 men!
   D. As late antiquity turned into the Middle Ages, these disparities were reduced not so much by enhanced incomes for ordinary people as by sharply reduced incomes for the wealthy. Still the differences were vast.

Suggested Reading:
Hodges and Whitehouse, Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe.

Questions to Consider:
1. How is it possible to study the economy of late antiquity? What kinds of things would you like to know that we do not now know?
2. What significance would you attach to the geographical and personal disparities in material conditions across the late antique world?
Lecture Thirty-Five
The Social World of Late Antiquity

Scope: This lecture will look at the world ruled by the Romans and then at the barbarian kingdoms, Byzantium, and the caliphate. We will look at social hierarchies and structures as well as social values and attitudes. We will explore household and domestic organization. When, why, and in what circumstances did people marry? How were children reared? What kinds of houses did people inhabit? Given an absence of abundant sources, this lecture will try nevertheless to talk about how people lived.

Outline

I. How did people identify themselves in late antiquity?
   A. Rome’s founding myth saw the Romans as outcasts, a free people in a free state where all who could contribute were welcome.
      1. The Romans were a political union made in historical times and not a race or ethnicity.
      2. Where the empire was concerned, the law of 212 that made virtually all free people citizens both complicated and clarified matters.
   B. By the 8th century, in its reduced state, perhaps only one-third of Byzantium’s people were native Greek speakers even though the language of religion and government was Greek.
   C. Christianity was universal—both Catholic and catholic.
      1. Nevertheless strains inevitably attended the division of peoples into Chalcedonian, Monophysite, Nestorian, and Coptic communities.
      2. Each of these communities believed that it alone constituted the Catholic Church and that all the others had failed somewhere along the way.
   D. Barbarian cultures were remarkably open.
      1. Adherence to a tribe was largely a matter of choice and personal identity.
      2. There is very little evidence that, say, Franks were hostile to others because they were, say, Goths or Lombards.
   E. Islamic and Arab culture presents internal tensions and broad comparisons with other peoples.
      1. The umma Muslima was intended as a universalizing, transtribal entity that made all Muslims equal in God’s eyes.
      2. Pre-Islamic rivalries among the Arab tribes persisted.
      3. The complicating factor turned on the status of the mawali, the non-Arab converts to Islam.

II. The feature of late antique society that was most pronounced and likely to seem strangest to modern observers centered on entrenched ideas of hierarchy.
   A. The great divide in Roman society was along hierarchy, or class, lines.
      1. To the Romans it was natural that every person had a certain rank (or dignitas), and the hierarchy of ranks grew more complex over time.
      2. Free versus slave was the simplest division.
      3. Another key division in Roman society was between honestiores and humiliores.
      4. Nobilitas was another category, including the senators of Rome and Constantinople, city elites who held high offices, the highest military officers, and eventually bishops.
      5. The top rank was always the senatorial nobility.
   B. Among the barbarians there was also nobility, but access was flexible.
      1. The fundamental criterion was access to royal courts, and the fundamental basis was landed wealth.
      2. Nobles tended to monopolize high offices in state and church.
      3. Lineages were traced along both the male and female lines.
      4. Ordinary free men had the right to bear arms, to share in booty, and to be consulted in the annual assembly (albeit we do not know how this worked in practice).
   C. Among Muslims there was supposed to have been strict equality for all members of the umma.
      1. Nevertheless, the muhajirun—those who accompanied Muhammad on the hijra—and the Ansar—the “helpers” from Medina and the Arabian desert—were always accorded precedence, as were their descendants.
      2. Strict account was maintained of those who had been “companions” of the Prophet as well as the date of a person’s conversion to Islam.
      3. There were serious social tensions between the Arabs and the mawali that did not correspond to any divide in Roman or barbarian society.
D. Slavery was a feature of all late antique societies, but none was strictly speaking a slave society.
   1. The number of slaves declined in Roman and barbarian society but increased in the rapidly expanding Muslim society.
   2. The sources of slaves were fairly constant: the children of slaves, the slave trade, foundlings, kidnapping, and captured peoples.
   3. By Justinian’s time prices had shifted considerably: a male or female slave, uneducated but trained, cost 20 solidi; a notary, 50 solidi; a doctor, 60 solidi; a castrated child under 10, 50 solidi; an educated or trained eunuch, 70 solidi.
   4. The emperors were the greatest slave owners, but aristocrats held many too: A famous woman named Melania had some 50,000, with about 400 per estate in Italy.
   5. The church owned many slaves.

III. The experiences of women varied considerably among various late antique societies.
   A. The legal status of women everywhere followed that of their fathers or nearest male relative.
   B. In various ways women were always legally “children” and could not hold offices or play any political or military roles.
   C. Women’s influence in the private sphere was undoubtedly vast but largely invisible to us.
   D. Boys and girls could inherit, own, and alienate property, practice some trades and professions, conduct business, and give evidence in a court.
   E. Marriage was everywhere virilocal: A woman went to live with her husband.
   F. In Roman and barbarian society, women could not be compelled to marry; in Islamic society, arranged marriages and even captured brides were common.
   G. In Roman society and under Christian guidelines, marriage was meant to be monogamous; in Islamic society, a man could have up to four wives if he could provide separate households for each of them.
   H. Roman (and Byzantine) families tended to be small, whereas barbarian and Arab families tended to be large.

IV. Late antiquity opened and closed with hierarchical societies, but the structures grew less rigid and complex over time. The lives of ordinary people probably changed very little.

Suggested Reading:
Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*.
Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*.

Questions to Consider:
1. In what ways were barbarian, Byzantine, and Islamic societies alike and different?
2. How did hierarchy manifest itself in theory and practice in late antiquity?
Lecture Thirty-Six
What Happened, and Why Does It Matter?

Scope: In the years from about 300 to 800, the Roman world was in some ways fundamentally transformed and in other ways remarkably unchanged. The empire itself was divided. The Islamic caliphate emerged. The Western Empire vanished, but the Eastern Empire gathered its resources to survive for a millennium. The imperial regime went through three periods of decisive change fostered by rulers who insisted that they were not changing anything. In a supposed time of decline, Roman law attained its loftiest achievements. Christianity and Islam both emerged in the first place as something different and finally as something triumphant. In almost every imaginable literary form, Christianity and Islam took over ancient ways of thinking and talking and created powerful cultures. Ordinary men and women went about their daily existence much as they always had. We shall conclude with some reflections on why it makes sense to think of late antiquity as a distinctive historical period and not as the declining Roman world or the emerging medieval world.

Outline

I. We began our exploration of late antiquity in earnest in the age of Diocletian. Let us skip forward 500 years and see what the late antique world looked like as it yielded place to the Middle Ages.
   A. There was still a Roman Empire, but it was focused solely on Constantinople, and its ruler, the Empress Irene, faced foes—Slavs and Arabs—with whom the late antique Romans had virtually no dealings.
   B. In the west, on Christmas Day in 800, Charlemagne was crowned emperor in Rome by Pope Leo III.
   C. In the Islamic world, Harun al-Rashi, the greatest of the Abbasid caliphs, was ruling in Baghdad, the new city founded by his grandfather Mansur in 762.

II. Let us imagine these three rulers looking back at the world of Diocletian. What in particular would they notice?
   A. Paganism, first of all: All three rulers would be shocked by the paganism of the Roman world.
   B. The size and shape of Diocletian’s empire would have evoked differing responses from the three rulers.
      1. Irene in principle presided over the same system, but in fact it had been altered significantly several times and was by her day smaller by far.
      2. Charlemagne simply had no bureaucratic structures such as those that had characterized Rome.
      3. Harun operated a sophisticated government based on provincial governors and a horde of minor officials mainly charged with collecting tributes and taxes.
   C. The three rulers might have found much to admire in the elaborate governmental system of Diocletian.
      1. Charlemagne simply knew no such cities; he never visited the eastern Mediterranean, and the Rome of his day perhaps numbered 50,000 people.
      2. Irene ruled from what was still one of the world’s great cities—a city that did not exist in Diocletian’s day—but she was cut off from cities such as Antioch and Alexandria.
      3. Harun knew cities: He lived in one that, despite its youth, was growing into a world-class urban center.
   D. The three rulers would have noticed the large and flourishing cities of Diocletian’s world, but they would have had very different perspectives on them.
      1. Charlemagne simply knew no such cities; he never visited the eastern Mediterranean, and the Rome of his day perhaps numbered 50,000 people.
      2. Irene ruled from what was still one of the world’s great cities—a city that did not exist in Diocletian’s day—but she was cut off from cities such as Antioch and Alexandria.
      3. Harun knew cities: He lived in one that, despite its youth, was growing into a world-class urban center.
   E. Diocletian’s empire was threatened on many fronts. Indeed, many of his reforms had been designed to meet those threats.
      1. Irene had the Arabs in Anatolia and the Slavs and Bulgars in the Balkans temporarily at bay, but her realm was faced by serious threats on two sides, and Arab fleets had twice besieged her capital city.
      2. Neither Charlemagne nor Harun feared any foe. Diocletian might have envied them.
   F. The three rulers would doubtless have noticed the remarkable public buildings of Diocletian’s Rome and of the other cities in the Roman world.
      1. Justinian had been the last great builder—secular or ecclesiastical—in Constantinople.
      2. Apart from his palace complex at Aachen, Charlemagne did not build great public buildings. But he did aid in the building of impressive churches and monasteries.
      3. In the Islamic world, mosques and fortifications were built in many places but not public buildings that, in number or size, rivaled those of the Roman Empire.
III. If we review this list of features of Diocletian’s world that the three 8th-century rulers would have noticed, we can gauge the key changes and continuities of late antiquity.

A. In almost every conceivable respect, the great facts of late antique history turned around religious change.
1. In the Roman Empire and in the territories ruled by Irene and Charlemagne, Christianity had supplanted the vibrant pagan religions and cultures of late antiquity.
2. From Gibraltar to the frontiers of China, Islam had swept all before it. The “people of the book,” constituted as dhimmis, still existed as a permanent second class.
3. Christianity also presented itself to the world as an organized church of high-ranking, prestigious officials and as communities of male and female ascetics who rejected almost all aspects of late antique society.
4. Christianity challenged traditional social values, for example idealizing celibacy and propounding a “democracy of sin” over the rigid hierarchies of Roman society.
5. In the writings of the church fathers, Christianity produced the last great age of classical thought and literature.
6. Islam, too, had by Harun’s time begun to show signs of cracking into various sects and movements. The Sunni-Shi’a split was already emerging as the greatest of these, but others were visible on the horizon.

B. Where government is concerned, the key fact is without question the disappearance of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century.
1. Rome’s problems are in large measure attributable to internal flaws in the system. Rome had turned into an armed camp paid for by massive tax revenues.
2. The barbarian peoples who succeeded to Rome did not come as conquerors or destroyers but instead as people who wished to embrace the Roman way of life—and by and large they did so, albeit on a reduced scale.
3. Just as striking as Rome’s fall is Islam’s rise. The Roman Empire grew for five centuries. The vast Islamic caliphate needed less than one century to reach immense proportions.

IV. In the end, then, why does late antiquity matter?
A. Late antiquity marked one of history’s great turning points.
B. This long, complex, rich period shows just how slowly and unpredictably great historical changes work themselves out.
C. Late antiquity erected the platform on which more than a millennium of historical development took place: Three sibling civilizations peered at each other with measures of admiration and suspicion around and across the Mediterranean world.
D. Each of these three civilizations owed much—and sometimes more than any of them was prepared to admit—to the Roman world that had been their common starting point.
E. Finally, the period is compellingly interesting.
1. It had remarkable rulers: Diocletian, Constantine, Theodosius, Justinian, Heraclius, Alaric, Theodoric, Clovis, Umar, Mu’awiya, and Abd al-Malik to name a few.
2. It forged the Christian creeds and the Qur’an.
3. It saw religious leaders such as Anthony, Pachomius, Benedict, the Cappadocian Fathers, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, and Muhammad.
4. It produced the spectacularly influential law codes of Theodosius II and Justinian.
5. It witnessed Rome’s great churches, Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and Islam’s mosques—each of them, to this day, among the world’s treasures.

Suggested Reading:
Herrin, The Formation of Christendom.
Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne.

Questions to Consider:
1. What do you see as the most decisive changes that took place between about 300 and 800?
2. Which explanation now makes more sense to you: “decline and fall” or “transition and transformation?”
Timeline

284–305 .......................................... Reign of Diocletian.
293 .................................................. Creation of the tetrarchy.
300–350 .......................................... Emergence of monasticism in Egypt.
303–305 .......................................... “Great Persecution” of Christianity.
306–337 .......................................... Reign of Constantine I (the Great).
312 .................................................. Battle of the Milvian Bridge.
313 .................................................. Edict of Milan.
320s ............................................... Founding of Constantinople.
325 .................................................. Council of Nicaea.
330–390 .......................................... Cappadocian Fathers.
339–430 .......................................... Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine.
378 .................................................. Battle of Adrianople.
379–395 .......................................... Reign of Theodosius I.
406 .................................................. Alans, Sueves, and Vandals cross Rhine.
407 .................................................. Romans remove troops from Britain.
408–450 .......................................... Reign of Theodosius II.
410 .................................................. Sack of Rome by Alaric and Visigoths.
411–418 .......................................... Settlement of Visigoths in southern Gaul.
429–430 .......................................... Vandals cross from Spain to North Africa.
438 .................................................. Theodosian Code.
451 .................................................. Defeat of Huns on Catalaunian Field.
454 .................................................. Murder of Aetius.
455 .................................................. Murder of Valentinian III.
471–526 .......................................... Reign of Theodoric as Ostrogoth king. (Assumed power in Italy 493–526.)
476 .................................................. End of the Western Empire.
c. 480–c. 550 .................................... Life of Saint Benedict.
481–511 .......................................... Reign of Clovis.
492–496 .......................................... Pontificate of Gelasius I.
493 .................................................. Ostrogoths take charge of Italy.
507 .................................................. Franks defeat the Visigoths at Vouillé.
529–532 .......................................... Corpus Iuris Civilis.
532 .................................................. Nika revolt.
533–534 .......................................... Justinian’s reconquest of North Africa.
535–554 .......................................... Justinian’s reconquest of Italy.
542–544 .......................................... Bubonic plague.

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570–632 .......................................... Life of Muhammad.
590–604 .......................................... Pontificate of Gregory the Great.
622 .................................................. Hijra of the Prophet.
630s ............................................... Heraclius defeats the Persians.
632–634 .......................................... Ridda Wars.
632–661 .......................................... “Rightly Guided” caliphs.
634–660 .......................................... Muslim conquests of Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt.
661–748 .......................................... Umayyad caliphs.
660–750 .......................................... Continued Muslim expansion across North Africa and into central Asia.
711–716 .......................................... Muslim conquest of Spain.
717–802 .......................................... Isaurian dynasty at Byzantium.
730–787 .......................................... Byzantine iconoclasm.
748–750 .......................................... Abbasid Revolution.
786–809 .......................................... Caliphate of Harun ar-Rashid.
749–751 .......................................... Papal alliance with Pippin III.
751 .................................................. Carolingian dynasty takes the throne of the Frankish Kingdom.
768–814 .......................................... Reign of Charlemagne.
780–802 .......................................... Regency and reign of Irene.
Glossary

Abbasids: Dynasty of caliphs from 750 to 1258. Moved the Islamic capital to Baghdad and fostered a brilliant culture. Gradually declined in power as regions broke away and Turkish mercenaries acquired real power.

Anglo-Saxons: Catchall name for various peoples from northern Germany and southern Denmark who settled in England from 450 to 600 and built small kingdoms.

apologists: Christian writers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries who tried to differentiate between Christianity and Judaism, to demonstrate some compatibility between Christianity and classical culture, and to point out to Christians how to live in a pagan world.

Arianism: See Arius in Biographical Notes.

barbarians: To the Greeks, babblers, people who did not speak Greek; to the Romans, people outside the empire. The word gradually acquired more acutely negative connotations.

basilica: A rectangular building used by the Romans for many purposes and adapted by Christians for their churches. Its name derives from Greek basileus (“king”), hence a “royal hall.”

bishops: “Overseers” in Greek, the chief religious and administrative officers of the Christian church.

Burgundians: Barbarian people who settled in (today’s) Savoy in the 5th century and built an effective kingdom; conquered by the Franks.

caliph: Successor to the Prophet in Islam. Originally held only Muhammad’s secular authority, but over time acquired some responsibility for custody of the faith.

Cappadocian Fathers: Basil the Great (c. 330–379), his brother Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330–395), and Gregory Nazianzus (c. 329–389), who were among the greatest Greek church fathers. They wrote especially on Trinitarian and Christological issues.

Carolingians: Dynasty of Frankish rulers whose most famous member was Charlemagne (Carolus Magnus). Became kings in 751 and ruled until 911 in Germany and 987 in France.

Christology: The branch of Christian theology that explores how Jesus Christ can be true God and true man.

church fathers: Greek and Latin Christian writers (from the period of 300–750, but especially 350–450) who set norms for biblical interpretation and explained key Christian doctrines.

Corpus Iuris Civilis: Massive codification of Roman law carried out (529–532) by a commission headed by Tribonian under the aegis of Justinian (see Biographical Notes).

Council of Chalcedon: Summoned by Pulcheria and Pope Leo I in 451 to address the Monophysite heresy.

Council of Nicaea: Summoned by Constantine I in 325 to address the Arian heresy.

dioceses: Twelve, later 14, administrative districts of the Roman Empire; the division below the prefectures and above the provinces.

Dominate: Name for the Roman imperial regime beginning with Diocletian, from dominus, “lord and master,” emphasizing enhanced imperial authority and Persian-style ceremony.

Edict of Milan: Decree in 313 whereby Constantine I granted legal toleration to Christianity.

ethnogenesis: Name for the complex process of “the makings of a people”; stresses identity more than ethnicity.

evergetism: Name for the highly competitive civic benefactions that governed public life and construction in cities of the Roman Empire.

federates: People who had a foedus, a treaty, with Rome; usually along frontiers.

Franks: Germanic peoples who gradually moved south from the mouth of the Rhine toward Paris and built powerful kingdoms under the Merovingian and Carolingian families of kings.

Hadith: The sayings of the Prophet, Muhammad. Collected and written down, they are studied in the Islamic world as a source of religious guidance, although not on a par with the Qur’an.

Hagia Sophia: The church of “Holy Wisdom” built in Constantinople on Justinian’s orders. Owed much to traditional Roman architecture but also innovated. Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles were the principal architects.
hijra: The “flight,” or pilgrimage, of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622. Taken in the Islamic world to inaugurate a new era.

Huns: Fierce nomadic warriors from the frontiers of China who appeared on the Roman scene around 370 and pressured the western empire until their defeat in 451.

iconoclasm: Official religious policy of the Byzantine Empire from 730 to 787 that rejected all figural religious art and any acts of devotion performed in connection with works of art.

Isaurians: Ruling dynasty in Byzantium from 717 to 802. Defended frontiers, issued new laws, carried on with development of the theme system, and promoted iconoclasm (the removal or destruction of devotional images).

Islam: From al-Islam, “the surrender,” the customary name for the faith taught by Muhammad, the Prophet, and involving a complete surrender of the self to Allah.

Lombards: Germanic people who entered Italy in 568 and gradually built a strong kingdom with rich culture, especially in law, only to fall to the more powerful Franks in 773–774.

Manichaeanism: Widespread religious sect that emphasized dualism: good-evil, flesh-spirit, light-dark, etc.

monk: Christian ascetic who in principle lives alone but in practice lives in some form of community.

Monophysitism: Christian heresy prominent in the eastern Mediterranean holding that Jesus Christ had only one true (divine) nature. Condemned by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Still influential among Christians in western Asia.

monotheism: The belief in the existence of only one God.

Nestorianism: Christian heresy prominent in the eastern Mediterranean that emphasized Jesus human nature.

Notitia Dignitatum: A massive register kept at the Roman imperial court showing all the officials in the administrative hierarchy. A copy survives from the early 5th century.

Ostrogoths: Germanic people who, under Theodoric (r. 471–526), built a kingdom in Italy in 493, which eventually fell to the armies of Justinian (see Biographical Notes).

Papal State: Lands in central Italy ruled by the papacy beginning in the 8th century.

patristic era: The period of the church fathers (patres).

Petrine theory: Idea advanced by Roman bishops that as Peter was leader of the Apostles, the successor to Peter is the leader of the Catholic Church. Based on Matthew 16:16–19.

Pillars of Islam: Five practices that characterize the Islamic faith: profession of faith, fasting, daily prayer, generous almsgiving, and pilgrimage to Mecca.

polytheism: The belief in the simultaneous existence of many gods.

pope: The bishop of Rome who, on the basis of the Petrine theory, the historical resonances of Rome, and various historical circumstances, achieved a leading position in the Catholic Church.

prefectures: The four great administrative districts created under the tetrarchy by Diocletian; administered by the praetorian prefects.

Principate: Name for the Roman regime inaugurated by Augustus Caesar as princeps, or “first citizen.” Contrasted with the Dominate of Diocletian (see Biographical Notes).


Septuagint: Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, allegedly prepared by 70 translators in 70 days in Alexandria. Seven books longer than the Hebrew version. Authoritative still in Orthodox churches.

Sueves: A barbarian people who crossed the Rhine in 406, moved across Gaul to Spain, and built an effective kingdom in Iberia, later conquered by the Visigoths.

Sunna: The “good practice,” or the habits and customs of the Prophet, studied in the Islamic world as a guide to life but not on a par with the Qur’an.

syncretism: The tendency, often manifest in religion, to adopt and adapt ideas and practices from neighbors, conquerors, or even those whom one has conquered.
Synod of Whitby: Church council in the north of England (664) that decided for Roman instead of Irish customs.

tetrarchy: “Rule by four” instituted by Diocletian. Two augustuses and two caesars would jointly rule the empire and provide for orderly succession. Only partially successful in practice.

Torah: The first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, traditionally ascribed to Moses.

Trinity: The Christian doctrine according to which one God exists in three distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

typology: The typical Christian way of reading the Hebrew scriptures (the Old Testament). Stories in those scriptures had value only in so far as they foreshadowed developments in the New Testament.

Umayyad: Dynasty of caliphs from 661 to 750 who moved the capital of the caliphate to Damascus and did much of the work of building institutions.

umma Muslima: The community of all those who have made al-Islam, not confined to any political or ethnic boundaries.

Vandals: Germanic people who crossed the Rhine in 406, raided in Spain for a generation, crossed to North Africa, practiced piracy in the Mediterranean, and fell to Justinian (see Biographical Notes) in 532–534.

Visigoths: Germanic federates who crossed the Danube into Roman territory in 376, defeated a Roman army in 378, sacked Rome in 410, settled in Gaul under Roman auspices in 418, lost to the Franks in 507, migrated into Spain, and created a kingdom that finally fell to the Muslims in 711.

Vulgate: Latin translation of the Bible prepared by Saint Jerome (see Biographical Notes) on the order of Pope Damasus.

Zoroastrianism: Principal religion of the ancient Persians. Revealed in songs (gathas) in the Avesta, the holy books of the religion. Consisted of the teachings of Zarathustra (dates controversial), who stressed dualities.
Biographical Notes

**Ambrose** (339–397): High-born citizen of Milan who became bishop of the city and wrote extensively, bringing to Latin theology the conceptual frameworks of Greek thought. He is considered a church father.

**Anthony** (c. 251–356): Egyptian solitary who established the ideals of eremitic (solitary) monasticism.

**Arius** (c. 250–336): Priest of Alexandria who, in an attempt to preserve absolute monotheism, taught that Jesus Christ was slightly subordinate to God the Father. Condemned by Council of Nicæa in 325 but influential among Germanic peoples who were converted to Arianism.

**Attila** (r. c. 434–453): Charismatic leader of the Huns who exacted tribute from the Romans but eventually lost a great battle in Gaul.

**Augustine** (354–430): Prolific Christian theologian and greatest of Latin church fathers. One of the most influential writers in Christian history.

**Basil** (330–379): Greek church father who wrote influential theological, liturgical, and monastic works; one of the Cappadocian Fathers.

**Bede** (673–735): Anglo-Saxon monk and scholar at Wearmouth-Jarrow who wrote biblical commentaries, a book on time reckoning, and history. Greatest scholar of his day.

**Benedict of Nursia** (c. 480–c. 550): Italian ascetic who founded a community at Monte Cassino where he wrote his *Rule*, eventually the most influential of all monastic rules.

**Boethius** (c. 480–c. 524): Neoplatonic philosopher put to death by Theodoric. He wrote *Consolation of Philosophy* and translated mathematical and logical works of Aristotle from Greek to Latin.

**Cassiodorus** (c.480–c. 585): High-born Italian who served Theodoric; author of historical and educational works.

**Clovis** (r. 486–511): Greatest Frankish king of the Merovingian dynasty who consolidated Frankish rule in Gaul, defeated the Visigoths in 507, and accepted Roman Catholicism.

**Constantine I** (the Great) (r. 306–337): Roman emperor who continued the reforms of Diocletian, restructured the Roman army, granted toleration to Christianity, and became Christian himself.

**Diocletian** (r. 284–305): Roman emperor who instituted the tetrarchy (see Glossary), reformed the Roman administration, and persecuted Christians.

**Gelasius I** (r. 492–496): Pope who spelled out respective spheres of authority of kings and priests.

**Gregory I** (r. 590–604): Pope who wrote influential books and ruled Rome as temporal overlord in the absence of effective Roman rule.

**Heraclius** (r. 610–641): Byzantine emperor who defeated the Persians, only to lose to the Arabs. Failed to achieve religious unity. Began to promote a more Greek culture. Initiated the theme system as a new form of administration.

**Ignatius of Antioch** (c. 35–107): Author of letters to Christian communities that show the emerging structure of the Christian church.

**Jerome** (342–420): High-born Roman citizen who became a Christian ascetic, wrote many letters, and translated the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate; see Glossary). He is considered a church father.

**Justin Martyr** (c. 100–c. 165): Christian apologist who wrote *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* to differentiate between Christianity and Judaism.

**Justinian** (r. 527–565): Byzantine emperor who reconquered some western provinces, overhauled the administration, issued the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* (see Glossary), failed to institute religious unity, and built the Hagia Sophia.

**Leo I** (r. 440–461): Pope, gifted writer, and great theoretician of the powers of the papal office.

**Muhammad** (570–632): Meccan merchant who became the Prophet of Islam.

**Offa of Mercia** (r. 757–796): Anglo-Saxon bretwalda who was first to call himself “King of the English.”

**Pachomius** (290–346): Egyptian monk credited with preparing the first monastic rule and thus formulating cenobitic (common-life) monasticism.
Pippin III (r. 751–768): First Carolingian (see Glossary) to become king. He allied with the popes, defeated the Lombards in Italy, and fostered church and cultural reform.

Theodosius I (r. 378–395): The last emperor to rule a unified Rome. An effective military leader, he pacified the Balkans after the Visigothic incursion of 376–378.

Valens (r. 364–378): Roman emperor who was defeated and killed by the Visigoths at Adrianople.
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