

Syllabus

The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

Professor Edward J. Watts (ewatts@ucsd.edu)

Office: Humanities and Social Sciences 4005

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 8-9

Office Phone: 534-2733

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The idea of the Roman Empire is a powerful one that has captured minds for centuries. At its height in the second century AD, Rome was the most powerful state the Mediterranean region (and perhaps the world) had ever seen. By the year 500, however, the Western European parts of the Roman Empire had splintered into a number of smaller kingdoms and the Empire's Eastern half was forced to reorient itself away from the West. Explaining this dramatic change stands as one of the most difficult questions facing ancient historians.

This class will examine the Roman world as it slips from its position of great power. We will focus upon the political, military, and social changes that accompanied Rome's decline, but the course will devote just as much attention to the impact that these developments had on the lives of individual Romans. In the course of the semester, we will discuss such themes as the relationship between paganism and Christianity, the impact of social and political change on daily life, and role of violence in the lives of Romans. In so doing, students will come to appreciate both the variety of source materials that a historian can use to reconstruct details of ancient life and the challenges that these materials can present.

OUTLINE:

The course will first discuss imperial Rome and the political, cultural, and religious institutions that sustained Rome's Empire. Within this context we will explore the archeological, literary, and artistic evidence for the Empire's wealth, power, and thriving cultural life. Special attention will be paid as well to the rise of Christianity in the third century Roman world.

Next, the course will describe the third and fourth centuries. This was a transition period in the Roman Empire in which its political, military, and social institutions were all profoundly challenged and the Empire itself was faced with destruction. In this segment of the course, we will examine how this time of turmoil changed life in the Roman world. Particular attention will be paid to the roles of Diocletian, Constantine, and Theodosius I in the Roman Empire's recovery from this turmoil as well as the increasingly high profile of Christianity in Roman society.

Finally, we will move our discussion to life after the final division of the Roman Empire into Eastern and Western halves. To understand this, we will explore the events leading to the loss of Roman control in the West and the reasons for Rome's continued control over the Eastern Empire. We will then consider Rome's successors, Byzantium in the East and the Germanic kingdoms of the West, and their relationship to the old Empire.

EXPECTATIONS:

Students will be expected to attend each class and complete readings in both ancient and modern historical sources. Larger assignments for the class include one short paper (~5 pages), a midterm exam, and a comprehensive final paper of 8-10 pages reflecting your understanding of how a historian can best illustrate Rome's decline. There will be no final examination. Evaluation will be based upon attendance and class participation (15%), the short paper (15%), the midterm exam (30%), and the final paper (40%). These percentages are not hard and fast, however. Demonstrable improvement throughout the semester will be rewarded. **Class disruptions, such as audible talking or cellphones ringing, will lead to deductions from the participation grade.**

DUE DATES:

Please note the following dates:

April 25 (short paper due)

May 7 (Midterm Exam)

June 6 (Final Paper Due in class)

(These dates have been listed in bold and italicized on the syllabus for easy reference.)

Papers must be turned in through *turnitin.com* and in *hardcopy* by the end of class on the day they are due (the turnitin.com password for this class is "decline"). **No papers submitted to the professor or graders by email will be accepted.** Late papers will be penalized 5% for the first day, 10% for each subsequent day. After 5 days, the grade will be recorded as a zero. Extensions on papers and make-up examination requests will be granted only in the most extreme circumstances and then only with appropriate documentation that clearly explains their necessity.

MATERIALS:

The following books are required:

- 1) Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire* (trans. Hamilton), Penguin, 1995.
- 2) Edward Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, California, 2006.

Readings from a selection of ancient sources are also required. These are all available in a course packet or on TED.

In addition, the following book is recommended:

- 1) Strunk, White, and Angell, *The Elements of Style, fourth edition* (though earlier editions will work as well).

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

"Plagiarism—A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, words, or statements of another person without appropriate acknowledgment. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge an indebtedness whenever he or she does any of the following:

- a. Quotes another person's actual words, either oral or written;

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b. Paraphrases another person's words, either oral or written;
 c. Uses another person's idea, opinion, or theory; or
 d. Borrows facts, statistics, or other illustrative material, unless the information is common knowledge.”

(Quoted from Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct, Part III, Student Misconduct, Academic Misconduct)

This is the grossest form of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism will earn the student an automatic failing grade in the course. The case will also be forwarded to the appropriate administrators for disciplinary action.

WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

April 2

Lecture 1— **The Antonine Age—Rome in its Grandeur**

April 4

Lecture 2— **Culture and Learning in the High Empire**

Readings:

“Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor” (TED)

Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Tales* (TED)

Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* (489-492 on Favorinus; 522-527 on Dionysius; 549 on Herodes Atticus and the Panathenaic Stadium; 559-563 on Herodes’ trial—TED)

Lucian, *Eunuchos* (TED)

Watts, *City and School*, 1-14, 24-38

April 9

Lecture 3— **The Severan Dynasty**

Readings:

“The Military Monarchy” and “Anarchy: The Legions become Kingmakers” (TED)

Historia Augusta, Life of Septimius Severus (TED)

April 11

Lecture 4— **The Third Century Crisis**

Readings:

Selections from N. Lewis and M. Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*, vol. 2, numbers as follows : 107 (on burdens placed on civilian population), 109 (on rise of brigandage), 111 (villagers fleeing to escape soldiers and officials), 115 (compulsory public services)

117 (restrictions on *coloni*)—all are in the TED

Historia Augusta, Life of the Two Maximini (TED)

April 16

Lecture 5— **Paganism and Christianity in the Third Century Roman Empire**

Readings:

Mithras Liturgy (TED)

“Interrogation of Christians” and “Organized Persecution of Christians” (TED)

Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas, see link at:

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0324.htm>

April 18

Lecture 6— **Diocletian**

Readings:

“Diocletian’s Edict of Maximum Prices” (TED)

Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors* X-XII, XX-XXV, see link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.iii.v.x.html>

April 23

Lecture 7— **Roman Cultural, Religious, and Administrative life at the turn of the fourth century**

Readings:

Theophanes archive (TED)

Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists*, 482-486 (TED)

Libanius, *Autobiography* 14-22 (TED)

Watts, *City and School* 41-47

April 25

SHORT PAPER DUE

Lecture 8— **Constantine and the Arian Controversy**

Readings:

Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, pages 12-16

On Constantine:

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 1.13-44 (family background, conversion and aftermath), 1.57 (on fate of Maximian), 3.10-22 (on Nicaea), 3.23-42 (on Holy Sepulchre), 3.54-57 (on temple destructions), 4.61-68 (Constantine’s death and its aftermath), see link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iv.vi.i.i.html> (NOTE: this link takes you to book 1.1; you will need to click through the pages or return to the index to find the individual chapters assigned above)

On Arianism:

Arius, *Thalia*, selections (TED)

Letter of Eusebius on the Creed of Nicaea (TED)

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Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.38 (on the death of Arius), see link at:
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.iv.xxxviii.html>
Watts, *City and School*, 171-77

April 30

Lecture 9— **Law, Religion, and Culture under the Constantinian Empire**

Readings:

Ammianus, 14.6 (on the faults of Rome and the Senate)

Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, Chapters 1-7, 46-7, 68-73, 81 see link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.xvi.ii.ii.html>

Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists* 492-3 (TED)

Watts, *City and School*, 177-81

May 2

Lecture 10— **Julian**

Readings:

“The Emperor Julian on Teaching” (TED)

Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 15.6 (on Paul the chain), 15.8, 16.1-5, 11-12 (on Julian in Gaul), 17.3 (Julian and tax reform), 20.4 (revolt of Julian), 21.1-2 (Julian and plans for campaign), 21.8-10 (his division of forces and attack), 22.13 (Christians blamed for burning a temple), 25.3-4 (Julian’s death and character)

Watts, *City and School* 48-9 (introduction to Prohaeresius), 64-76 (on Prohaeresius and Julian’s teaching law)

May 7
MIDTERM

May 9

Lecture 11— **Valentinian, Valens, and Theodosius—Politics, Culture and Law**

Readings:

Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 27.7 (on Valentinian’s cruelty), 28.6 (corruption in Tripoli), 29.2 (on magic trials in Antioch), 31.12-14 (on Adrianople)

May 14

Lecture 12— **Christianity and Paganism under the Theodosian Dynasty**

Readings:

Altar of Victory controversy:

Pagan Perspective: Symmachus *Relatio* 3, see link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf210.v.iii.html>

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Christian Perspective: Ambrose, *Letters* 17-8, see links at:
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf210.v.ii.html>
and
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf210.v.iv.html>

May 16

Lecture 13— **The Empire Divided: Arcadius, Honorius, and the Two Roman Empires**

Readings:

Cameron, 57-71

Theodosian Code, selections—Minutes of the Senate of the City of Rome, 4.7.1; Manumission in the Churches; 9.16.1-11; on Magicians and Astrologers; Novel 1; the Validation of the Code (TED)

Selections on Bishops and politics—

Case 1: Theodosius, Ambrose, and the Massacre at Thessalonica

Ambrose, *Letter* 51 to Theodosius, see link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf210.v.xi.html>

Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 7.25, see link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.iii.xii.xxv.html>

Case 2: Eutropius and John Chrysostom

Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* Book 6.2-5, (on Eutropius and John), see

link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.ix.iii.html>

John Chrysostom, *Contra Eutropium I*, see link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.xv.iii.html>

May 21

Lecture 14— **A Generation living through Roman decline**

Readings:

Cameron, pages 16-56

Paulinus, *Eucharisticon* (TED)

Sozomen on the Sack of Rome (TED)

May 23

Lecture 15— **Culture, Religion, and Law in Post Roman Gaul**

Readings:

W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, 103-26 (TED)

Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* 7.47, 9.19 (TED)

Venantius Fortunatus, *Poem* 6.7, 6.8, *Appendix 2: To Justin and Sophia* (TED)

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May 28

Lecture 16— **Culture, Religion, and Law in Post Roman Italy**

Readings:

Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.45-6, 2.40-1 (TED)

Jordanes, *Gothic History* 176-215 (TED)

May 30

Lecture 17— **Culture, Religion, and Other concerns in Post-Roman Africa and Spain**

Readings:

Isidore of Seville, *History of the Kings of the Goths*

June 4

Lecture 18— **The Eastern Empire in the Fifth Century**

Readings:

Cameron, 131-138; 141-144, 157-166 (pay particular attention to concepts of urban change), see also the map on page 178

Watts, *City and School*, 187-203

Views of the Murder of Hypatia, a female pagan Philosopher:

The “Orthodox” Christian perspective: Socrates, *HE* Book 7.13-15, see link at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.x.xiii.html>

The Egyptian Christian perspective: John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 84.87-103, see link at:

<http://cosmopolis.com/alexandria/hypatia-bio-john.html>

The Pagan perspective: Damascius, *Life of Isidore* (from the Suda), see link at:

<http://cosmopolis.com/alexandria/hypatia-bio-suda.html>

June 6

FINAL PAPER DUE

Lecture 19— **Conclusion**

* Note that there will be no final examination in this class. *