THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE
(3 credit hours)
Thursday (or Tuesday) 6:00-8:45 p.m.

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Course description
It has been two hundred years since Edward Gibbon spoke so eloquently of the "decline and fall of the Roman Empire" and the "triumph of barbarism and religion." The course will focus on the Roman Empire and its neighbors in the Mediterranean world from the third through seventh centuries AD. Late Antiquity was an era in which people came increasingly to define their identity in exclusively religious terms, and as such it can be said to begin with Christianity's rise to political power, and end with the coming of Islam – developments which continue to shape the cultural and political contours of Europe and the Middle East to this day.

This course offers a comprehensive survey, taking in political, social, economic and cultural history, with a particular emphasis on religious developments. Topics will include the conflict between paganism and Christianity; Constantine’s conversion; the transformation of classical culture; Rome and the barbarians; the military collapse of the western empire; asceticism and monasticism; women in late antiquity; the origins of Islam. We will take a multicultural perspective, going beyond the traditional focus on Greco-Roman elites to include other cultures such as Coptic Egyptian, Syriac, Persian, North African, and the "barbarian" Europeans. Much attention will be given to the reading, interpretation and discussion of primary sources.

Textbooks
The following texts are required, with supplementary readings to be provided by the instructor.

Peter Heather, Empires and Barbarians (Oxford University Press, 2010)- 9780199735603
Bryan Ward-Perkins, The Fall of Rome: And the End of Civilization (Oxford University Press, 2006)- 9780192807281
Peter Brown, The World of Late Antiquity (W.W Norton and Co, 1989)- 9780393958034
Michael Maas, Readings in Late Antiquity (Routledge, 2010)- 9780415473378
Seamus Heaney tr, Beowulf (W.W. Norton and Co, 2001)- 9780393320978

Student Learner Outcomes:
Students who successfully complete this course will be able to

1. Employ the appropriate methods, technologies, and data that social and behavioral scientists use to investigate the human condition by earning a grade of C or better on analytical essays and the final essay. This objective reflects the expectations of Social and Behavioral Sciences Exemplary Educational Objective 1.
2. Use and critique alternative explanatory systems or theories by earning a grade of C or better on analytical essays, class discussions, and the final essay. This objective reflects the expectations of Social and Behavioral Sciences Exemplary Educational Objective 3.

3. Analyze the effects of historical, social, political, economic, cultural, and global forces on the area under study and by earning a grade of C or better on analytical essays and the final essay. This objective reflects the expectations of Social and Behavioral Sciences Exemplary Educational Objective 5.

4. Recognize and apply reasonable criteria for the acceptability of historical evidence and social research study by earning a grade of C or better on the analytical essays and the final essays. This objective reflects the expectations of Social and Behavioral Sciences Exemplary Educational Objective 9.

Assessment/Requirements

**Book Review [20% of course grade; 200 points total].**

Each student will be required to submit one four to five (4-5) page book review of a book not covered in the course syllabus. The text should have some connection to our topics and themes. Choices of books should be completed by the end of February, and the reviews will be due by the end of March. Each student will also be expected to present a brief oral overview of the books at the end of the semester.

**Final Paper [60% of course grade; 600 points]**

This will be a comprehensive research/historiography paper that will allow you to engage with the materials through the prism of determining when, why, and how the Roman empire fell. I will expect the paper to be a minimum of fifteen, and a maximum of twenty (15-20) pages.

**Class Participation [20% of course grade; 200 points]**

Discussion is vitally important. During and/or after class, I will record on a matrix each student’s participation and will evaluate the quality of each student’s participation. I will award points on your final grade based on how often you participate, and how valuable that participation is. Participate!!

**Grading Scheme [1000 points total]**

My grading system is designed to put you in control of your final grade. For each assignment you complete you will accumulate points. The more points you accumulate, the higher your grade becomes. You can always tell how you are doing by comparing your point total to the scale below. The only way to lose points is by missing class.

A = 900 -1000   B = 800 -899   C= 700 -799   D= 600 -699   F= 599 and less

**Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities may request reasonable accommodations through the A&M-Texarkana Disability Services Office by calling 903.223.3062.
Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is expected of students enrolled in this course. Cheating on examinations, unauthorized collaboration, falsification of research data, plagiarism, and undocumented use of materials from any source, constitute academic dishonesty, and may be grounds for a grade of "F" in the course and/or disciplinary actions.” For additional information see the university policy manual.

Email Account

Upon application to Texas A&M University-Texarkana an individual will be assigned an A&M-Texarkana email account. This email account will be used to deliver official university correspondence. Each individual is responsible for information sent and received via the university email account and is expected to check the official A&M-Texarkana email account on a frequent and consistent basis. Faculty and students are required to utilize the university email account when communicating about coursework.
Course Outline/Schedule of Readings and Assignments
The “DECLINE” (c.180-500 A.D.)
(Textbook readings are TBD)

January 18
Introduction - What do we mean by ‘Decline and Fall’?
A Short History of Everything Roman
The Late Republic

January 25
The Principate
Roman Imperial Society

Reading:
Augustus the Libertarian? (http://www.cato.org/pubs/journal/cjv14n2-7.html)

February 1
Roman Religion and Christianity

Reading:
The Martydom of Perpetua (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html)
Letters of Pliny (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pliny1.html)

February 8
Rome and the Barbarians

Reading:
Tacitus, Germania (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/tacitus-germanygord.html)

February 15
The Enemy Within: Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Schism

Reading:
Online, Ambrose, Letter 40 (http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/340940.htm)

February 22
Christians in the World: The Bishop and Society
Christians Against the World: Monasticism and Asceticism

Reading:
Augustine, Letter 29 (http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102029.htm)
Life of St. Anthony (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vita-antony.html)

March 1
Romans and Barbarians: Beowulf
Beowulf

MARCH 8: SPRING BREAK!
March 15
Politics and Government in the 5th Century East
The Emperor and the Law

Reading:
Priscus, Attila the Hun (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/priscus1.html)
Augustine, The City of God (Blackboard)

March 22
The Sack of Rome and the End of the Western Empire
The 5th Century Thesis

Reading:
Gibbon, General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West (Blackboard)

March 29
The End of the Western Empire
Early Medieval Society

Reading:
Rostovtzeff, The Decay of Ancient Civilization (Blackboard)
Salic Law (Blackboard)

April 5
The End of Empire and Fall of Rome

Reading:
Heather, pp TBD

April 12
The Age of Justinian and Theodora
The “Other” Empire: Sasanian Persia

Reading:
Procopius, The Secret History (Blackboard)

April 19
Death of a Civilization

Reading:
Ward-Perkins, pp. TBD

April 26
A 7th Century “Fall”?- The Pirenne Thesis
Muhammad and Islam

Reading:
Henri Pirenne, Mohammed and Charlemagne (Blackboard)
***FINAL PAPER***

**Question**- In which century did the crucial transition from Roman civilization to Medieval civilization take place? This question allows you to craft an argument based on not only the other historians that we have studied this semester, but also to analyze the evidence yourselves. Remember that much of your argument will center on how you define “civilization”, so be sure to define your terms well and convincingly.
Essay Grading

Thesis
- Does the essay have a clear thesis? You should be able to summarize the main point of your essay in one or two sentences; the whole purpose of the essay is to convince the reader of that main point. Be clear about what you are trying to prove, and let your reader know.
- Is it a strong thesis? I am looking for interesting, original explanations of why things happen in history; avoid weak topics that focus on insignificant points or ones that are so obvious that they do not require detailed proof.

Arguments
- Is the thesis supported by a sufficient number of logical arguments and sub-arguments? In order to convince the reader that your thesis is correct you will need to present several supporting arguments; some of those arguments may in turn require support of their own.
- Does each argument contribute directly to your thesis? An essay this brief needs to remain sharply focused on your thesis; don’t wander off into other topics.

Evidence
- Is each argument or sub-argument supported by convincing evidence? Remember that primary evidence is generally more convincing than secondary, and that the most convincing way to use primary evidence is to quote it directly. Be sure to explain all primary evidence as well.
- Is all evidence correctly quoted and cited? If you paraphrase from any source, you must give the original author credit. If you copy from any source, you must use quotation marks and give a brief citation in a footnote. If you quote from a source that is not among the course readings, you must also give a complete citation in a bibliography. Failure to correctly cite source material is plagiarism. Plagiarism will be reported to the Dean and result in an F for the course (at the minimum).

Clarity/Organization
- Is the essay clearly organized and easy to follow? Does support for your thesis proceed logically from point to point, and is each point presented in a separate paragraph? Often the only way to keep a complex structure of arguments and sub-arguments organized is to outline it first.
- Is the meaning of each sentence clear and easy to follow? When in doubt, keep it simple!

Writing Errors
- Is the essay free from embarrassing errors in spelling and punctuation? Mistakes make you look dumb, which makes the job of convincing your reader much more difficult. In particular, watch for mistakes caused by homonyms (easily confused words) and apostrophes. Proofread!
- Are all sentences grammatically correct? In particular, watch for sentence fragments, comma splices, fused sentences, and subject-verb disagreement.