General I: c. 370-900 (The Transformation of the Ancient World)

Vacation Reading

For Geographical Orientation:
Most good historical works will have some kind of map in them to aid the reader; the Cambridge Ancient and Medieval Histories usually have both big Mediterranean/Western Eurasia-spanning maps and smaller-scale regional ones to orient you in the political geography. Otherwise, The Times Atlas can be very useful; for maps with more specific period detail, see T. Cornell, J. Matthews, Atlas of the Roman world (Oxford, 1982) and R. McKitterick, The Times Atlas of the Medieval World (London, 2003).

And for a fun way to get a sense of how the Roman world was connected, play around with http://orbis.stanford.edu/ (a digital map of the Roman Empire which allows you to plan journeys and calculate travel times at different points in the year.)

General Surveys
Worth picking up a couple of these for vacation reading to give you an overview of the period. Collins, Brown and Herrin each provide very readable chronological surveys; Innes’ volume gives access to more recent historical interpretations, belying its status as a textbook; McKitterick and Wickham provide more strongly analytical chapters grouped around themes and particular polities respectively.

**Multi-Author Works**
The Cambridge histories are v. useful as first places to go on various topics, but probably not for vacation reading!


Depiction of Theoderic’s palace at Ravenna, mosaic in the church of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, early C6.

**Specific Themes:**
Pick up a couple of these which pique your interest for vac reading; we’ll be returning to many of them over the course of next term. I’ve starred items which I think would act as particularly nice introductions.

**The Later Roman Empire and the Fall of the West**

**The Successor Kingdoms**
A. H. Merrills and R. Miles, *The Vandals* (Chichester, 2010).

**The Eastern Mediterranean in Late Antiquity and the Rise of Islam**
*P. Sarris, Empires of faith: the fall of Rome to the rise of Islam, 500-700* (Oxford, 2011).

**The Carolingians**

**Cultural Histories of the Early Middle Ages**

Good luck!
Robin Whelan (Brasenose/TORCH)
(robin.whelan@history.ox.ac.uk)
Louis the Pious, from Hrabanus Maurus’ *De laude sanctae crucis*, manuscript from Fulda, mid-C9.
I. **The Fall of the (Western) Roman Empire**

What caused the end of the Roman Empire in the western Mediterranean?

OR

‘The problem with the “barbarian invasions” is that they involved neither barbarians nor invasions.’ Do you agree?

OR

When, if ever, did the collapse of imperial power in the West become inevitable?

General

*Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 14: chaps. 1, 5, 16, 18 and 19.


**The Fall of the (Western) Roman Empire**

*[These are the crucial recent contributions; the more you can read of these, the better placed you will be, especially for the first question.]*


**The Later Roman Empire c. 400**

*Heather, Fall, ch. 3; Halsall, Barbarian migrations, ch. 3.*

For more on late Roman government (and its limits): C. M. Kelly in *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 13: 134-82.

**The ‘Barbarian’ ‘Invasions’**


G. Halsall, ‘Movers and shakers: the barbarians and the fall of Rome’, *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999), pp. 131-45. [for the two classic paradigms]


P.J. Heather, *Empires and barbarians* (London, 2009), pp. 333-59. [riposte to last two]


**A Case Study: Goths in the Roman Empire, c. 370-420**


Heather, *Fall*, ch. 5.


Good luck!
Robin Whelan (robin.whelan@history.ox.ac.uk)
II. Successor Kingdoms

Were the first successor kingdoms simply Roman provinces under new management? (Answer with reference to Vandal Africa and ONE other kingdom).

OR

How much did ethnic identity matter in the first successor kingdoms? (As above.)

OR

‘[The barbarians] desire not a single one of the Romans to live... They have never loved a single Roman.’ (Victor of Vita, *HP* 3.61)

‘Our royalty is an imitation of yours, modelled on your good purpose, a copy of the only empire; and in so far as we follow you do we excel all other nations.’ (Cassiodorus, *Variae* 1.1, writing in the name of King Theoderic to the Emperor Anastasius)

How different was the relationship between the pre-existing Roman population and the newcomers in Vandal Africa and Ostrogothic Italy?

The Post-Roman West: Introductory Reading

*CAH* XIV: chaps. 1, 5 and 18 (Heather, Collins, Wood).


[You may also find useful the reading you did from the ‘barbarian’ bit of the previous reading list.]

1) Vandal Africa

**Primary Texts**

*Victor of Vita, History of the persecution of the province of Africa*, trans. J. Moorhead, TTH 10 (Liverpool, 1992) [make sure to read at least book one, plus Book III from chap. 60 onwards].


**Secondary Literature**

*A.H. Merrills and R. Miles, The Vandals* (Malden, MA, 2010), chaps. 3-4, 6-8. 
[If can’t get hold of, you might also try the intro to Merrills, *Vandals, Romans and Berbers* and Miles in *Antiquité Tardive* (2005)]

**J. Conant, Staying Roman: conquest and identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439-700* (Cambridge, 2012), chaps. 1 and 3. [Two excellent up-to-date works: both essential]


*C. Wickham, Framing the early middle ages* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 87-93, 635-38, 642-43, 720-23.

If you want to read up on Victor of Vita: *Merrills and Miles, Vandals*, pp. 184-92 OR A.H. Merrills, ‘totum subvertere voluerunt: ‘social martyrdom’ in the *Historia persecutionis* of

2) Ostrogothic Italy

**Primary Texts**
* Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 1.3-4, 1.18, 1.27, 1.45-46, 2.1, 2.16, 2.24-25, 2.32, 3.13, 4.51, 5.40, trans. S.J.B. Barnish, TTH 12 (Liverpool, 1992) [*Read as much as you can manage; a text to explore further in the revision period; Barnish's introduction is v. useful.*]


**Secondary Literature**

S.J.B. Barnish and F. Marazzi (edd.) The Ostrogoths from the migration period to the sixth century: an ethnographic perspective (Woodbridge, 2007) [Heather, Wood, Barnish].


S. Bjornlie et al (eds) A companion to Ostrogothic Italy (Leiden, 2016). [*Hot off the press: lots here, I might recommend chs 2-3, 6, 8-9, 19, but follow your interests.*]


3) Merovingian Gaul: Clovis and his successors

**Primary Texts**

**Secondary Literature**


* T. F. X. Noble (ed.) *From Roman provinces to medieval kingdoms* (2006), Part IV [important reprinted articles].


W. Daly, ‘Clovis: how barbaric, how pagan?’, Speculum 69 (1994), 18–39


4) Southern Gaul: Visigoths and Burgundians

Primary Texts


Secondary Literature


Good luck!
Robin Whelan
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III. Justinian

How successful was Justinian as a Roman emperor?

OR

Why did Justinian’s regime find EITHER political OR religious unity so difficult to achieve?

OR

How useful are Procopius’ accounts of Justinian’s reign for modern historians?

Primary Texts

Important to read some of each of Procopius of Caesarea’s works (all trans. Dewey in Loeb Classical Library): Secret History, at least chaps. 6-12 [also (trans.) G. Williamson and P. Sarris, Procopius: The Secret History (2007), with useful introduction by Sarris]; History of the Wars, book 1, chaps. 22, 24-26, and book 2 chaps. 1-2, 4, 7-9, 22-23; Buildings, book 1 at least chaps. 1-3. M. Maas, Readings in Late Antiquity, 2nd edn. (London, 2010), nos 1.2.3, 1.2.11, 1.3.7, 2.7.2-5, 5.4.4-5, 9.1.7-8, 9.2.1. (useful excerpts of various sources relating to Justinian)

Secondary Literature

General

Av. Cameron, The Mediterranean world in late antiquity, AD 395-600 (London, 1993), chap. 5. OR CAH 14: chap. 3 (Cameron).

A.D. Lee, From Rome to Byzantium A.D. 363 to 565 (Edinburgh, 2013), Part IV.


The Reign of Justinian

*M. Maas (ed.) The Cambridge companion to the age of Justinian (Cambridge, 2005), [Essential; esp. chaps by Maas, Haldon, Pazdernik, Lee, Greatrex, Humfress, Gray.]

J. Moorhead, Justinian (London, 1994),


Economy and Society

*P. Sarris, Economy and society in the age of Justinian (Cambridge, 2006), chap. 11.


Procopius

*Av. Cameron, Procopius and the sixth century (London, 1985), chaps. 1, 4, 8 and 10.


For more on Theodora
D. S. Potter, *Theodora: actress, empress, saint* (Oxford, 2016), esp. ch. 2 on Procopius, but if you get interested, read more widely.

S. A. Harvey, 'Theodora the “believing queen”: a study in Syriac historiographical tradition', *Hugoye* 4.2 (2001) 209-34 [available through Google search; for a sharply contrasting view of Theodora to that presented by Procopius].

Good luck!
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IV. The Rise of Islam

Account for the success of the Arab conquests.

OR

To what extent can we reconstruct the first decades of Islam?

OR

Had the governance of the Near East become distinctly Islamic by the reign of ’Abd-al-Malik?

Primary Texts

*The Qur’an*, Sura 2, 17, 23, 30, 48 (various translations, e.g. trans. N. Dawood, *The Koran* [1965]).


Secondary Literature

General


*Islam in its late-antique context*


*The life of Muhammad*


*The Arab conquests and the early Caliphate*

J. Howard-Johnson, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford, 2010), chs 11-16 and Conclusion.


P. Crone, *From Arabian tribes to Islamic empire: army, state and society in the Near East c. 600-850* (Ashgate, 2008), esp. IX (‘The Early Islamic World’).

‘Umayyad caliphs

Writing early Islamic history: sources and problems

R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (1997), chaps. 12-14. [Foundational on the non-Muslim sources; explore if you have time; if not, come back to at revision]
*C. Robinson,* *Empires and elites after the Muslim conquest* (Cambridge, 2000), intro and chap. 1.

Good luck!
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V. The Carolingian Empire

‘Influence without control.’ Is this a fair assessment of Carolingian government?

OR

What was more important for ruling the Carolingian Empire: written word or drawn sword?

Primary Texts


*Selected Capitularies*, in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, pp. 65-92 [get a flavour].

Charlemagne’s Division of his Kingdoms, in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, pp. 146-51.


Secondary Literature

General


The Written Word


Jennifer Davis book—and ask Ingrid for more suggestions.

The ‘Reuter Thesis’ and the role of the army


Consensus Politics and the Aristocracy


Locality and Centre

Good luck!
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VI. Conversion and Religious Change

Choose ONE of the three historical contexts and answer ONE of the following questions.

Who were the most significant agents of conversion?
Was the work of conversion ever complete?
Were anxieties about religious pluralism endemic to late antique and early medieval societies?
Is it possible to reconstruct ‘paganism’ in EITHER the later Roman Empire OR Carolingian Europe?

Good luck!
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General Reading
A. D. Nock, Conversion: the old and the new in religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo (Oxford, 1933) [get a sense: a key dialogue partner for most modern accounts of conversion]
**N. B. McLynn, A. Papaconstantinou and D. Schwartz (edd.) Conversion in late antiquity: Christianity, Islam and beyond (Farnham, 2015), introduction (Papaconstantinou) and chap. 1 (Cameron). [This volume essential reading]

For an introduction to conversion in each period and its key questions:

(i) Conversion to Christianity, part I: the later Roman Empire

Primary Texts
There is a very useful set of texts in A.D. Lee, Pagans and Christians in late antiquity: a sourcebook, chaps 5-7.
If you want to dive into more of these primary texts ‘in the wild’: Theodosian Code 16.10 (trans. C. Pharr).
Libanius, Or. 30, ‘For the temples’, (trans. in Loeb Classical Library).

Secondary Literature
Basic orientation: Cambridge ancient history vol. 13, chaps. 8, 21 (Hunt, Brown); Av. Cameron, The Mediterranean world in late antiquity (London, 2012), chap. 3.

Useful (if somewhat hyperbolic) accounts of Christianisation and the end of paganism:
R. MacMullen, *Christianity and paganism in the fourth to eighth centuries* (New Haven, CT, 1997).
P. Chuvin, *A chronicle of the last pagans* (Boston, MA, 1990), chaps 4-5.
Read the former (in particular) with critique of *R.A. Markus, The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. chap. 1.

For the role of the imperial state:
*S. Corcoran, ‘From unholy madness to right-mindedness’, in McLynn, Papaconstantinou and Schwartz (edd.) *Conversion in late antiquity*, pp. 67-94.

For excellent revisionist takes on the ‘spaces’ available for pagans in the LRE and the transformation of Roman public life: *P. Rousseau (ed.) A companion to late antiquity* (Chichester, 2009), chaps 38 and 39 (McLynn and Lim). [The former includes a nice account of a number of the primary texts.]


On the role of bishops in forming Christian communities (and the multiple beliefs, identities and social practices which those communities stubbornly maintained), the following three books are superb. Explore them as much as you can and think about their theoretical approaches.


(ii) Conversion to Islam: the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid Caliphate

**Primary Texts**

**Secondary Literature**

A classic study is R. W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the medieval period: a quantitative history* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); note criticism by Morony in *Conversion and continuity* (below).

For a more recent (and very contrasting) approach applied to specific case studies: **Sizgorich, *Violence and belief*, introduction and chaps 5-8.

For further excellent individual case studies:
MCLyn, Papaconstantinou and Schwartz (edd.) *Conversion in late antiquity* [pieces by Sizgorich, Key Fowden, Simonsohn].
R. Hoyland (ed.) *Muslims and others in early Islamic society* (Farnham, 2004), reprints of lots of useful articles: see esp. introduction by Hoyland, and papers by Morony, Noth, Griffith, Frantz-Murphy.
R. J. Bikhazi and M. Gervers (edd.) *Conversion and continuity: indigenous Christian communities in Islamic lands, eighth to eighteenth centuries* (Toronto, 1990), introduction [Bulliet] and chaps 1-2, 7-8 (Griffith, Haddad, Bulliet, Morony).


On the *jizya* (poll tax) and conversion, see now P. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim state: the world of a mid-eighth-century Egyptian official* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 190-216.


(iii) Conversion to Christianity, part II: eighth- and ninth-century western Europe
Primary Texts
First Saxon Capitulary (782) and General Admonition (789) trans. P. D. King, Charlemagne: translated sources (Kendal, 1987).

Secondary Literature
For general orientation, see:


Cities

What were the most significant changes in urban life EITHER between 350 and 600 OR between 600 and 900?
Did late antiquity see ‘the decline and fall of the Roman city’ (LIEBESCHUETZ)?
How useful are cities as an indicator of economic vitality in the early middle ages?
(You may, if you wish, limit your answer to any of these questions to a specific geographical area.)

The end of the ancient city?
*C. Wickham, Framing the early middle ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800 (Oxford, 2005), ch. 10 (dip into for summaries of specific regions).
C. Rapp, Holy bishops in late antiquity: the nature of Christian leadership in an age of transition (Berkeley, CA, 2005), pp. 208-234. [Bishops and cities]

Eastern urbanism
*H. Kennedy, 'From polis to madina: urban change in late antique and early Islamic Syria', Past and Present 106 (1985) 3-27.
C. Foss, Ephesus after antiquity: a late antique, Byzantine and Turkish city (Cambridge, 1979), 46-99. (Ephesus in Asia Minor)

Western urbanism
A. Leone, Changing townscapes in North Africa from late antiquity to the Arab conquest (Bari, 2007), chaps. 1 and 2. (Africa)
B. Ward-Perkins, From classical antiquity to the middle ages: urban public building in northern and central Italy (Oxford, 1984). (Italy)

Carolingian urbanism
*R. Hodges, Towns and trade in the age of Charlemagne (London, 2000).
(Three accounts of the new towns in Carolingian Francia and the North Sea)

Good luck!
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Vikings

What did the Vikings want?
OR
‘We have heard much about the destructive effects of the Vikings on Frankish society in the ninth century: we forget that for most of Europe in the eighth and ninth century it was the Franks who were the Vikings...’ (Reuter, ‘Plunder and tribute’, p. 91)
Were the Vikings that different from those whom they raided and those with whom they traded?
OR
Has the Viking impact on the Carolingian Empire been exaggerated?
OR
Account for the differing character of Scandinavian activities in East and West.

Primary Texts
[This both extremely fun and, in parts, seriously disturbing]

Secondary Literature

Starting Points

General
P. Sawyer (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 1997), esp. introduction, chs 2 and 6. S.HIST.7S.30.15
S. Brink (ed.), *The Viking World* (London, 2009), Part II.

Scandinavians and the Carolingian Empire
If you get really interested in Carolingians and Vikings, see MacLean, Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire (2003), chapter 2, esp. pp. 30-7 and J. Nelson, Charles the Bald (1992), ch. 2.

Scandinavians in contemporary perspectives

Scandinavians in the East

Good luck!
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Gender

Questions to think about
Did gender have a ‘transformation of the Roman world’?
‘Early medieval representations of women tended to conceal arguments about the conduct of men.’ Do you agree?
Have anachronistic notions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ led historians to underrate the political and social roles of women—and misunderstand those of men—in late antiquity and the early middle ages?

Introductory Reading
I. Queenship in the early middle ages

How significant was the political influence of EITHER East Roman empresses OR Merovingian queens?
Were early medieval queens inevitably either saints or Jezebels?
Did early medieval queens generally succeed in spite or because of their biological sex?
How far can the study of early medieval queens illuminate the broader experiences of women in EITHER the late antique East OR Merovingian Gaul?

(A) Fifth- and sixth-century East Roman empresses


D. S. Potter, *Theodora: actress, empress, saint* (Oxford, 2016), esp. ch. 2 on Procopius, but if you get interested, read more widely.
S. A. Harvey, ‘Theodora the “believing queen”: a study in Syriac historiographical tradition’, *Hugoye* 4.2 (2001) 209-34 [available through Google search; for a sharply contrasting view of Theodora to that presented by Procopius].


(B) Merovingian Queens
See too, the lives of Radegund in J.A. McNamara et al., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (1992).

*E. Dailey, *Queens, consorts and concubines: Gregory of Tours and women of the Merovingian elite* (Leiden, 2015), esp. chs 3, 6 and 7.
*J.L. Nelson, ‘Queens as Jezebels: the careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian history’, in Nelson, *Politics and Ritual* (1986). [A classic—very detailed on both careers—make sure you don’t get too lost in the rich documentation—keep your focus on the agency of the two queens]


For more on Gregory: K. Mitchell and I. Wood (eds) *The world of Gregory of Tours* (2002), chs by Rosenwein (pp. 189-95), Halsall, and *Shanzer.

*S. Tatum, ‘Auctoritas as sanctitas: Balthild’s depiction as ‘queen-saint’ in the Vita Balthildis’, *European Review of History* 16.6 (2009), 809-34.

Good luck!
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II. Gender and Late-Antique Christianity

Did the rise of the church have any impact on late Roman gender norms?
OR
What can we conclude about gender roles from the experiences of elite ascetic women in the later Roman Empire?
OR
Did Christian ascetic lifestyles offer women new forms of agency in late antiquity?

*The Life of Melania the Younger*, trans. E. Clark. [Or: how to leave Rome, give up your wealth (ish) and set up a monastery in the Holy Land in the C5—I can send PDF.]
Jerome, Letters 22, 45, 107, 130. [Or: advice letters for various ascetic women from late antique Christianity’s creepy uncle. Available through SOLO—Loeb Library]
Augustine, Ep. 262 to Ecdicia [Or: what to do when your husband breaks your joint vow of celibacy... Available through SOLO: type in Augustine: Past Masters;]
For an intro to the *Life of Melania*, see the relevant chapter of Brown, *Through the eye of a needle* (Princeton, NJ, 2012) and now

**Asceticism and Gender**

**Approaching late-antique women**
A. Arjava, *Women and law in late antiquity* (Oxford, 1998) [excellent discussions of various key issues]

**Elite Families: Christianity and Gender Norms**

**Roman and Christian masculinities**

**Reading holy women**


Good luck!
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