Brigham Young University
History 300
The Early Middle Ages

9-9:50 MWF
3016 HBLL

Phone: 422-3335; email paul_pixton@byu.edu
email: paul_pixton@byu.edu

Instructor: P.B. Pixton
Office: 2148 JFSB
Hours: 10-10:40 MWF

Course Description and Rationale

The world of late classical antiquity was shattered by the failure of the Roman state, the spread of Christianity, and the appearance of various Germanic peoples within the borders of the Empire in sufficient numbers that the old institutions of law, government and the army proved inadequate to sustain a high level of civilized life. During the centuries from approximately 350 AD to 950 AD several traditions competed with one another for dominance; new expressions of political, religious and cultural life emerged, laying the foundation for what we now recognize as Western Civilization.

These centuries were shaped by specific individuals, and by historical forces which, once they were set in motion, played out in their own fashion: in what can best be called a "domino effect" one set of circumstances led to another, etc., until the Roman Empire survived as a mere dream – a phantom.

Our objective will be to trace the evolution of early medieval Europe as it defined itself over six centuries, to examine the forces which shaped it, and to become acquainted with some of the dominant personalities. We will compare various Germanic successor states, noting their respective strengths and weaknesses, and we will focus especially on the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons whose historical role it was to carry the burden of civilization on poorly-prepared shoulders.

Textbooks

Patrick J. Geary, Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World (Oxford)
Rosamond McKitterick, The Frankish Kingdoms Under The Carolingians (Longman)
Patrick J. Geary, Readings in Medieval History, vol. 1 (Note I will give you the Readings Nrs. ASAP by email)

Tests and Term Paper

There will be two mid-term exams and a final exam; the latter will consist of two parts, the first of which will cover the final third of the course, while the second will be a comprehensive question dealing with the entire course. All exams will be essay in format; you will select one question from several and write a full 50 minutes. Review questions for the first exam will be distributed about week 3.

The final exam is December 2011, 3016 HBLL – . I am not authorized to change this date for anyone!

All students will submit a 8-10 page term paper based on some aspect of the period covered by the course. Since our focus is the Latin West, papers dealing with Islam or Byzantium will only be approved and accepted if their relevance to the former (i.e., the Latin West) can be demonstrated. Specifics regarding the format of the paper will be distributed after the first mid-term.

Grading

Your grade for the course will be calculated on a straight 10% of the total points awarded: 90% of 500 = A-
Special Considerations

Students who require special considerations (visual, audio, learning challenges, etc.) should consult with me a.s.a.p. There is a great deal of this course which is visual, so an ability to know what those visuals present is imperative.

BYU Standards

Consistent with published standards for the university, we invite you all to observe the highest levels of integrity in your work and in your demeanor. Research papers must be based on books, not the internet; exams are closed-book. Plagiarism in any form is unacceptable.

Lectures and Reading Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Aug 29</td>
<td>Introduction to the Course</td>
<td>Geary: Preface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 31</td>
<td>The Roman World of ca. 350 AD</td>
<td>Geary 2-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 1</td>
<td>The Germanic World of ca. 350 AD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Sep 4</td>
<td>LABOR DAY HOLIDAY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 6</td>
<td>The Huns and the Collision of Barbarian Cultures 350-400 AD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 8</td>
<td>Large-Scale Germanic Movements 400-430 AD</td>
<td>Geary 39-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Sep 11</td>
<td>The Age of Atilla</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 13</td>
<td>476 – the End of the Roman Empire (in the West)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 15</td>
<td>Late 5th Century Britain</td>
<td>Film Clip: King Arthur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Handout: From Scythia to Camelot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Sep 18</td>
<td>Theodoric’s Italy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 20</td>
<td>Visigothic Spain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 22</td>
<td>The Franks Before Clovis</td>
<td>Geary 77-116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Sep 25</td>
<td>Clovis</td>
<td>Reading: “How Barbarian Was Clovis” – article accessible on Blackboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 27</td>
<td>The Frankish Realm to ca. 700 AD</td>
<td>Geary 117-149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 29</td>
<td>The Frankish Realm (cont.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 6:  Oct 2  First Hour Exam

Review Questions

Questions similar to those found below will comprise all three exams: this set relates to the first exam and shows the pattern I will follow for the other two; your task will be to create your own set of review questions for the second mid-term and the first portion of the final. The comprehensive section of the final will be compulsory, as all will write on the same question selected from the list provided at the end of this syllabus.

Select any one of the following questions and write a well-organized response to it. Support generalizations with specific information derived from lectures and reading.

1. Although the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476 by Odovacer is traditionally taken as marking the "Fall of the Roman Empire" in the West, in reality the collapse of Roman government in the West had occurred over many decades.

Discuss some of the underlying causes of that collapse from about 350 until 476.

2. Although Roman awareness of the Germans dated back to the conquests of Julius Caesar and the Julio-Claudian emperors of the first century AD, the "stacking-up" of the Germanic peoples east of the Rhine and north of the Danube was largely beyond the Romans' knowledge and/or concern. Then, seemingly all at once after the mid-4th century AD Germans of all sorts exploded into the Roman world, changing it forever.

Describe in general terms the placement of the Germans across Europe ca. 350: what caused the equilibrium to shift?

3. The Franks were relative late-comers on the historical stage, and yet they were still standing when the dust cleared after the collapse of the Roman state in the West.

Explain as best you can why the Franks, and not the Ostrogoths or Visigoths, became the architects of the "New World Order" which emerged after 476.

4. The history of the Merovingians is at times difficult to get at, despite the extensive history by Gregory of Tours and his continuators.

How do his biases show through his History of the Franks, and what sort of credence ought we to give his account? In other words, do we have to take his word for everything that comes forth from his writings?

5. Despite the twisted, turning nature of Frankish history from 450 until roughly 600 AD, there are some main themes which emerge and which provide the general framework for our study of this stage in the Early Middle Ages.

Identify several of those themes, supporting you choices with specific details regarding the events and personalities which composed them.