

Early Middle Ages



Time and Location

Tuesdays 10:40-11:30 AM; Thursdays 10:40-12:35 AM
Flint 119

Description

“The past is a foreign country.” There is perhaps no period in history to which the words of the American historian David Lowenthal may apply better than to the Early Middle Ages. The *early* part makes it exotic: it is not about gallant knights, courtly love, or crusaders, all of which “happened” much later, after AD 1000. By contrast, *this* was a world of warriors and missionaries, though the names of Beowulf and Boniface may not be as familiar to you as those of King Arthur and Joan of Arc. Moreover, the study of the Early Middle Ages presents a number of serious challenges, especially the combination of written sources and archaeological evidence. In fact, the lack of written sources explains why some historians refer to the early Middle Ages as the *Dark Ages*. In this course, we will examine some of these problems and attempt to present, if not a definite picture, then at least a survey of the current knowledge on this topic. Our focus will be on social and cultural history, our approach chronological and sometimes thematic. From Huns to Vikings, we will bring some light into the study of the Dark Ages.

Textbooks

- Roger Collins. *Early Medieval Europe, 300-1000*. 3d edition., New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010; on two-hour reserve in Library West [hereafter *Collins*]
- Alfred J. Andrea. *The Medieval Record. Sources of Medieval History*. 2nd edition. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2020 [hereafter *Andrea*].
- *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen Through Contemporary Eyes*. Ed. by Deno John Geanakoplos. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984; on two-hour reserve in Library West [hereafter *Geanakoplos*]

Assignments

There is no attendance policy, but you are responsible for attending all lectures and reading the required texts. Class participation may be taken into account to determine the overall grade. The basis for evaluation of performance will be four quizzes and two exams (Midterm and Final). The unannounced quizzes are exclusively based on primary source readings from your *Andrea* and *Byzantium* books, as well as from the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. All quizzes will consist only of questions (no essay). A careful study of these texts is necessary for a good performance at the quiz. The Midterm and Final exams will cover everything from lectures and readings. Both Midterm and Final will consist of two parts: an identification and/or multiple-choice part, and a short essay, in which you will be asked to synthesize your knowledge of the topic, dropping in facts to show that you understand the concrete aspects of that topic. Only the Midterm will be cumulative. In other words, the Final examination will cover only the material since the Midterm examination. Make-up Midterm and Final exam will be given for very serious reasons. There is no make-up for quizzes. Extra-credit work will be accepted only for students with active participation in class discussions. The format of the extra-credit option shall be discussed with the instructor during regular office hours. The following point-system will be used in determining the final grade:

Quizzes: 40 points
Midterm: 30 points
Final exam: 30 points
Total: 100 points

Grades:

Points	Grade
95-100	A
90-94	A-
87-89	B+
81-86	B
75-80	B-
68-74	C+
61-67	C
55-60	C-
48-54	D+
41-47	D
35-40	D-
under 30	E

Weekly Topics

Week 1 (January 9-13): Introduction (terminology, purpose, and methods). The Late Roman Empire.

- The third-century Roman Empire. The Tetrarchy. [*Collin*, 1-15; *Andrea* 4-13; *Geanakoplos*, 39 (no. 19), 229-230 (no. 164), and 252 (no. 177A)]; see also the [on-line map](#) and [Ralph Mathisen's essay on Diocletian](#); see example of [red-slip wares](#) and a [map](#) of their distribution in the first century A.D.; see reconstructions of three types of Roman [amphorae](#); take a tour of the villa rustica in [Hechingen-Stein](#) and visit [Carthage](#) and [Luni](#)

- Constantine the Great [*Collins* 16-30; *Geanakoplos* 87 (no. 57) and 127-128 (no. 92)]; see also the [Edict of Milan](#), [Eusebius on the conversion of Constantine](#), the [Nicene Creed](#), and [Hans Pohlsander's article on Constantine](#); see also a map of [Constantinople](#)

Week 2 (January 16-20): Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages

- The fourth century [*Collins* 31-46; *Geanakoplos* 128-130 (nos. 93-94)]; see also [Walter Roberts' article on Valentinian I](#) and [David Woods' article on Theodosius I](#)
- The Late Roman Empire and the Church [*Collins* 61-78; *Andrea* 17-24; *Geanakoplos* 131-132 (no. 95 – Eusebius on the universal empire and the universal church) and 179-180 (no. 129 – St. Gregory of Nyssa on mysticism)]; see the mosaic of [Christ Victor](#) in the archbishops' chapel in Ravenna; see also [the passio of SS. Perpetua and Felicity](#) and [the on-line map](#)

Week 3 (January 23-27): “Barbarians at the gates?”

- Migration(s) and *Völkerwanderungszeit*; the Adrianople syndrome [*Collins* 47-60; *Geanakoplos* 329-330 (no. 243 – Synesius on the Gothic threat)]; see also [Ammianus Marcellinus on the battle of Adrianople](#); see also [the on-line map](#)
- AD 476 [*Collins* 79-98; *Geanakoplos* 330 (no. 244 – Jordanes on Odovacar)]; see also [a brief essay on Romulus Augustulus](#)

Week 4 (January 30-February 3): Some barbarians

- Who were the Goths? [*Andrea* 27-34, 45-49; *Geanakoplos* 327-328 (no. 241 – Wulfila converts the Goths)]; see also [Jordanes, *Getica* 25-48](#) and a brief presentation of the [Wielbark archaeological assemblages](#); see also the first page of the Gospel according to St. Luke in Wulfila's Gothic translation (*Codex Argenteus*)
- The Huns (*Geanakoplos* 332-333 (no. 247 – [Priscus on Attila the Hun](#)); for the archaeology of the Hunnic empire, see a few examples of gem-encrusted jewelry ([fibulae](#)); see also a modern reconstruction of [Hunnic bows](#), based on the archaeological evidence; see also [Jordanes' account of the battle at Campus Mauriacus](#)

Week 5 (February 6-10): Successor states...

- ... in Italy: the kingdom of the Ostrogoths [*Collins* 99-109; *Geanakoplos* 331 (no. 245 – *Anonymus Valesianus* on Theodoric)]; see also [Theodoric's letters](#) and [the on-line map](#)
- ... in Gaul: the Frankish kingdom [*Collins* 109-113; *Andrea* 48-54, 60-68 ([Salian Law](#), [Gregory of Tours on Clovis](#)); *Geanakoplos* 331-332 (no. 246 – Gregory of Tours on Clovis as Roman consul)]; see also [the on-line map](#)

Week 6 (February 13-17): The sixth century

- Justinian's *Reconquista* [*Collins* 114-132; *Andrea* 53-56; *Geanakoplos* 30-31 (no. 12 – Procopius on Justinian's *Reconquista*), 73-75 (no. 48 – the plan of the Digest), 76-77 (no. 49B – *Corpus Iuris Civilis* on natural law, law of nations, and civil law), 258-260 (no. 183 – Procopius on the Nika riot), 319-321 (nos. 235-236 – Procopius on Theodora)]; see also the [on-line map](#) and other selections from the [Corpus Iuris Civilis](#)
- Sassanian Persia and Byzantium [*Collins* 133-150; *Geanakoplos* 134 (no. 98A – Theophanes on Heraclius melting down church treasures) and 334-335 (no. 248 – [Antiochus Strategus' view of the sack of Jerusalem by the Persians](#))]; see [the on-line map](#) and [Judith Herrin's analysis of the Byzantine-Sassanian conflict](#)

Week 7 (February 20-24): Islam

- From Muhammad to the Umayyad caliphate [*Collins* 133-150; *Andrea* 64-73 ([surahs from the Qu'ran](#); the [Pact of Umar](#)); *Geanakoplos* 338-339 (no. 250 – Al-Baladhuri on the conquest of Alexandria)]; see also [Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*](#)
- Islamic culture; see [Oleg Grabar, *Ceremonial and Art at the Umayyad Court*](#); see a picture of a [dirham](#) and another of the Dome of the Rock ([exterior](#), [interior decoration](#), and [cross section](#)); see also the Great Mosques of Kairouan ([prayer hall with two domes](#) and [courtyard with minaret](#)) and Cordoba ([aerial view](#), [arches](#), and [entrance to the mihrab](#))

Week 8 (February 27-March 3): A case study: Spain

- Visigothic Spain [*Collins* 151-160]; see also selections from the [Code of Euric](#)
- Muslim Spain; see [Ibn abd-el Hakem](#) on the conquest of Visigothic Spain and [the on-line map](#)

Week 9 (March 6-10): Far and not too far from the Empire

- Anglo-Saxon Britain [*Collins* 173-197]; see also [the on-line map](#), a brief presentation of the Anglo-Saxon village excavated at [West Stow](#), and selections from [Gildas' *De excidio Britanniae*](#); see an illumination from [Codex Amiatinus](#) and a [coin](#) of King Offa; see also a [map](#) and an [image](#) of Offa's Dyke
- The Lombards [*Collins* 198-219]; see [the on-line map](#) of the Lombard kingdom before its conquest by Charlemagne; see also an image of a Lombard king on the so-called [helmet of Agilulf](#)

Week 10 (March 20-24): The early medieval Church

- **Midterm**
- Orthodoxy and theological controversies; mission and conversion (*Geanakoplos* 145-147 (no. 106 – Socrates on the Council of Nicea), 148-150 (no. 108 – the Council of Chalcedon), 152 (no. 110B – the sixth ecumenical council on Monotheletism); see also [the chronology of Arianism](#); see also [Bede on the conversion of England](#) and the collection of texts on [St. Boniface and the conversion of Germany](#)

Week 11 (March 27-31): Western and Eastern Christianity

- Iconoclasm [*Collins* 220-235; *Geanakoplos* 152-154 (no. 111 – [John of Damascus' defence of icons](#)), 154-156 (no. 112 – [the decisions of the iconoclastic Church council of 754](#)), 156-157 (no. 113 – the condemnation of Iconoclasm at the council of 787), and 157 (no. 114 – Emperor Leo V's iconoclastic views)]
- Monasticism east and west [*Collins* 236-262; *Andrea* 83-89 ([the Benedictine rule](#)) and 89-96; *Geanakoplos* 165-167 (no. 120 – the Life of St. Anthony), 167-169 (no. 121 – St. Basil's "Longer Rules"), 168-170, and 177-178 (Theodore of Sykeon and the charisma of the monk)]; see also the brief presentation of the [Great Lavra](#) at [Mount Athos](#)

Week 12 (April 3-7): Early medieval culture and art

- Early Byzantine art [*Geanakoplos* 192-195 (no. 139 – the [Akathistos Hymn](#)), 196-197 (no. 141 – [Paul the Silentiary's description of Hagia Sophia](#)), 393-395 (no. 296 – St. Basil on the Classics), 421-422 (no. 317 – the [Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon](#)), and 432-434 (no. 324 – Philoponos against Aristotle)]; visit the basilica of [Sant'Apollinare Nuovo](#) and the [Mausoleum of Galla Placidia](#) (with the famous representation of [Christ as the Good Shepherd](#)) in Ravenna; see a presentation of the [Rossano Gospel](#); visit the Church of [Hagia Sophia](#) in Constantinople; see a seventh-century icon of the [enthroned Virgin with Child](#) (St. Catherine Monastery, Mount Sinai)
- Insular art and the "animal style" on the Continent; for examples of Insular manuscript illumination, see the [Lindisfarne Gospels](#)

Week 13 (April 10-14): New powers

- Rise of Bulgaria [*Geanakoplos* 346-347 (no. 257 – Emperor Nicephorus I's campaign against Krum); 47-348 (no. 258 – the *Life of Methodius*) and 348-349 (no. 259 – the *Annals of St. Bertin* on the pagan revolt against Prince Boris)]; see maps of ["Great" Bulgaria](#) and a brief presentation of Kubrat's burial in [Malo Pereshchepyne](#); visit the ruins of [Pliska](#) and the [Madara Horseman](#); see a map of [Danube Bulgaria](#) during the early Middle Ages and another of [Great Moravia](#); see examples of the [Glagolitic](#) and [Cyrillic](#) scripts; see an icon of [Sts. Cyril and Methodius](#)
- Carolingian Francia [*Collins* 160-172, 280-317; *Andrea* 114-127 ([Einhard's Life of Charlemagne](#), Charlemagne's [letters](#) and [capitularies](#)); *Geanakoplos* 356-357 (no. 266 – Michael II's letter to Louis the Pious)]; see also [the on-line map](#) and an example of [Carolingian script](#)

Week 14 (April 17-21): The tenth century

- The decline of the Carolingian empire [*Collins* 318-343]; see also [the on-line map](#) and [Agobard of Lyon](#)
- Vikings and Magyars [*Collins* 344-370; *Geanakoplos* 118-120 (no. 89A – Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus on the Pechenegs; 349-350 (no. 260 – the *Annals of St. Bertin* on the Rus'), 350-351 (no. 261 – Photius on the Viking attack on Constantinople), 351-352 (no. 262 – the *Russian Primary Chronicle* on the conversion of Olga), and 352-353 (no. 263 – the *Russian Primary Chronicle* on Prince Vladimir's conversion)]; see also [the on-line map](#) and [three views on Viking raids in Francia](#); for Vikings in Russia, see the [Russian Primary Chronicle](#); you may wish to visit the Viking-age sites at [Llanbedrgoch](#) (Wales) and [Anse aux Meadows](#) (Canada); see also [an essay on the Magyar raids](#)

Week 15 (April 24-27): Conclusion

- Towards A.D. 1000 [*Collins* 394-429]; see a map of [Germany, ca. 962](#).
- Thursday, May 04, 5:30-7:30 PM: **Final Exam**