The Barbarian North

The seminar is intended to introduce students to the transformation of Northern Europe from a peripheral to a central zone of Western civilization during the early Middle Ages and to explore how different disciplines have tried to make this transformation understandable. From the perspective of the Greco-Roman world, the differences among Northern peoples seemed inconsequential in comparison to the gulf separating Greek and Latin speakers from those who did not share the language and the way of life which had unified Mediterranean civilization in the ancient world. Before there were France, Germany, England, Ireland, or Scandinavia, there were simply Romans and barbarians. We will try to discover how the line between Roman and barbarian was gradually erased from the fourth to the early eleventh century and how the different peoples of Northern Europe began to take on their separate identities.

Because the surviving evidence from this period is often scanty and difficult to interpret, it is imperative that historians turn to neighboring disciplines in order to reconstruct the evolving societies of the North. Archaeology, numismatics, paleography, anthropology, and topography have recently made significant contributions to the methods traditionally used by historians to reconstruct the past. During the semester, students should become aware of the strengths and limitations of these new approaches to the study of early medieval history. In order to delve into the various problems presented by the historiography of the period, students will be asked to specialize in one subject area listed below in addition to reading the general weekly assignments. You will be asked to write two preliminary papers (5-7 pp., 1500-2100 wrds.) based upon the in-depth reading materials below, present the papers to other seminar members, and lead the discussion for those sessions. Papers and presentations should offer an original analysis and synthesis of the historical interpretations on a given subject; both a bare bones narration of events or facts and “book reports” should be avoided. It is important to remember that you will know more about the subject than anyone else in the seminar; presentations should therefore make the problems under examination clear to others who are not as familiar with the particular field. You writing in the course will culminate in a final synthesis (app. 10-12 pp.; 3000-3600) of all the specialized material you have covered in the semester.

Your grade will be determined by your preparation for and participation in weekly discussions and presentations (30%) and the two papers (20% each) and the final paper (30%), which is due on May 5.

N.B.: The “essoin de malo lecto” will be required in this seminar: if a student misses more than one seminar, he or she will have to present a letter from the dean explaining the circumstances or be subject to failing the seminar.

Special Topics:

1. Nobility
2. Kingship
3. Archaeology
4. Ethnicity and Identity
5. Family/ Kinship
6. Land and Labor
7. Paganism and Conversion
8. Memory and Myth
9. Law
10. Letters
11. Trade
12. Saints
** Indicates books available in the bookstore.

I. **Introduction: From Periphery to Core.** Week of Jan. 19.


Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, pp. 36-94.

Selections from Early Irish Sagas and the Prose Edda.

III. **Early Barbarian Society and Rome.** Feb. 2

Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, pp. 95-150.

Tacitus, *Germania*

Special Topics:

Archaeology: Early Germanic and Celtic Societies.

- Fehr, Hubert, "Volksstum as Paradigm: Germanic People and Gallo-Romans in Early Medieval Archaeology since the 1930s," in *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. A. Gillett (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 177-200.

Family/ Kinship: Blood and Protection.

IV. The Barbarian Waves: Conquerors or Settlers? Feb. 9.

Heather, Empires and Barbarians, pp. 151-207.
Selections from Gildas, Gregory of Tours, Anglo-Saxon Poetry, The Salic Laws.

Special Topics

Land and Labor: Barbarian settlers and Roman landlords.
- C. Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800 (Oxford, 2005), pp. 257-302.

Law: Feud and Justice in the Barbarian West.

Ethnicity and Identity: How were Barbarian Peoples Formed?
V. Northern Christianity: The Heroic Age of the Church. Feb. 16.
Campbell, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 45-100.

Selections from the Letters of St. Patrick, the *Life of Guthlac*, "Dream of the Rood," Gregory of Tours

Special Topics

Paganism and Conversion: Repositioning the Supernatural.

Saints: In Search of New Deserts.
Heather, Empires and Barbarians, pp. 266-332.
Selections from Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks, Fredegar's Chronicle, Boniface's letters.

Special Topics


Trade: Pre-Market Exchange or Commerce?
VII. Views of Tribal Politics: Bede.  March 1.

Ethnicity and Identity

Memory and Myth: A Monastic Historian of Tribal History:

**Beowulf.**


Special Topics

Land and Labor: Towards Oppression or Efficiency?


Nobility: Lordship or Freedom?


IX. Northern Caesars: The Carolingians. March 22.

**Costambeys, Carolingian World, pp. 9-16, 31-80, 154-94.


Special Topics

Kingship: The New Israel.

Law: Written Precepts and Oral Procedures.
Selections from capitularies, Lupus of Ferrières' letters, Paschasius Radbertus' Life of Wala.

Special Topics

Paganism and Conversion: Supernatural Power and Carolingian Order
I. Wood, “

Letters: Setting the mold.
XI. Terror from the North: The Vikings. April 5.
Heather, Empires and Barbarians, pp. 452-514

Special Topics

Archaeology: Traces of High Adventure.

Trade: Marauders or Merchants?

Selections from Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, Burghal Hidage, charters

Special Topics

Nobility: Digging in.
G. Tellenbach, "From the Carolingian Imperial Nobility to the German Estate of Imperial Princes," *ibid.*, pp. 203-242.

Memory and Myth: Memorilization and Oblivion.
XIII. A New Order in the East: *Das erste Reich*. April 19.
Widukind of Corvey: *The Deeds of the Saxons*.

Special Topics

Family/Kinship: Tightening the Rules.
J. Goody, *The Development of the Family*, pp. 103-156.

Saints: Violence, Aristocracy and Holiness
    Reuter, Germany in the Early Middle Ages, pp. 181-253.
    Selection from Wulstan's Sermon of the Wolf to the English, Aelfric's Homilies, Gerbert's letters.

Special Topics

Letters: On the edge of a new world.