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 short papers (1250 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. Since additional material about your specialty will appear in the weekly readings, seminar work will culminate in a larger synthetic essay (3500-4500 wrds.) to be presented on December 10. It should reflect a maturing grasp of the problems which have dominated your field of specialization and incorporate materials encountered throughout the semester.

Your grade will be determined by your preparation for and participation in weekly discussions and "position papers" (20%), the two preparatory reports (20% each), and your final paper (40%).

Special Topics:
1. Nobility 
2. Kingship 
3. Archaeology 
4. Family/ Kinship 
5. Land and Labor 
6. Trade 
7. Memory and Myth 
8. Law 
9. Letters 
10. Bishops 
11. Monasticism
** Indicates books available in the bookstore.


II. Rings and Things: Romantisizing the Barbarian. Jan. 27
   Selections from the Eddas and Nibelunglied
   Selected viewings from the R. Wagner’s Ring des Nibelungen (1867-84) and F. Lang’s Nibelunglied (1926)

III. Early Barbarian Society and Rome. Feb. 3.
   Selections from Irish Sagas.

Special Topics:

Archaeology: Early Germanic and Celtic Societies.

Family/Kinship: Blood and Protection.
IV. The Barbarian Waves: Conquerors or Settlers?  Feb. 10


Geary, Before France and Germany, pp. 77-135.

Selections from Gildas, Gregory of Tours, Anglo-Saxon Poetry, The Salic Laws.

Special Topics

Land and Labor: Barbarian settlers and Roman landlords.


A. Dopsch, Economic and Social Foundations of Europe, pp. 93-164.


Law: Violence and Justice in the Barbarian West.


V. Northern Christianity: The Heroic Age of the Church. Feb. 17.
Cambell, Anglo-Saxons, pp. 45-100.
Geary, Before France and Germany, pp. 135-49.
Selections from the Letters of St. Patrick, the Life of Guthlac, "Dream of the Rood," Gregory of Tours

Special Topics
Bishops: Guarding God's treasures.
R. Van Dam, Leadership and Community: The Transformation of Late Antique Gaul (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), pp. 1-56, 115-76.

Monasticism: In Search of New Deserts.
Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, Bks. 8-10.
Selections from Fredegar's *Chronicle*, Boniface's letters.

Special Topics


Trade: Pre-Market Exchange or Commerce?
VII. A Monastic View of Tribal Politics: Bede. March 2.


Memory and Myth: A Tribal Historian of Christianity


**Beowulf.**


Selections from Anglo-Saxon charters; "The Seafarer."

Special Topics

Land and Labor: Towards Oppression or Efficiency?


Nobility: Lordship or Freedom?


Selections from Capitulary *De villis*, capitularies.

Special Topics

Kingship: The New Israel.

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

Special Topics

Bishops: Spear-heading reform.

Letters: Setting the mold.
XI. Terror from the North: The Vikings. April 6.


Special Topics

Archaeology: Traces of High Adventure.

Trade: Marauders or Merchants?
Hodges and Whitehouse, Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe, pp.77-122, 158-68.
P. Spufford, Money and its Use, pp. 55-105.
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 20.
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.
XIV. Building Momentum: The Ottonian Renaissance and Anglo-Saxon Monastic Reform. April 27.

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.

Monasticism: Fulfillment and metamorphosis of the old order.