



by **Philip Daileader** ([Biography](#))

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- [Course Summary](#) - Professor's written description of the course.
- [Professor Recommended Links](#)
- [Condensed Bibliography](#) - Prepared by the professor for this course.

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## Course Summary

In this course, we will examine a period of European history that is sometimes designated as the "Dark Ages." Our focus will be on the seven centuries between 300 and 1000, a period most unlike the thousand years that would follow. Our period is dominated by the history of two empires, the Roman and the Carolingian, rather than by the history of independent kingdoms or nation-states. It is a period when the mass movement of ethnic groups, involving hundreds of thousands of individuals sweeping across Europe, was nearly a routine event. It is a period when Europe is buffeted time and time again by external invaders, from the Huns to the Arabs to the Vikings. Many aspects of life at this time will appear strange to you. None of us is a serf, vassal, or lord. None of us is a stylite, living atop tall poles for 20 or 30 years at a time. None of us has undergone trial by ordeal, whereby we prove our case by plunging a hand into a cauldron of boiling water as we try to pick up a pebble resting at the bottom.

Odd as this world may seem at times, it is a world that is recognizably becoming our own, and we should not unquestioningly accept the label of the "Dark Ages." In countless ways, seemingly obscure events and developments from the "Dark Ages" impinge on the lives of people today. This is true in the realm of religion, because our period saw the triumph of Christianity over paganism. This is true in the realm of language, because every word that we speak and write—indeed, the handwriting that we use each and every day—is a product of the historical forces that we will study. This is true in the realm of family life, because many practices that existed in 300, such as *polygyny*, marriage within the kin group, and infanticide, are illegal today and were vanishing or completely gone by the year 1000. This course will attempt to strike a balance between difference and similarity, recognizing what this period bequeathed and failed to bequeath to the present.

The course is divided into two sections. The first half will cover the period from circa 300 to circa 650, which historians sometimes call the *world of Late Antiquity*. Late Antiquity is a period that saw the political collapse of the western half of the Roman Empire and the official acceptance of Christianity by Europe's rulers. Late Antiquity is still, in many ways, part of the ancient world, but the ancient world is changing into the medieval world. The transformation of the ancient into the medieval was highly complex—our goal will be to trace the history of that transformation and to explain why it happened at all. The second half of the course will deal with the period from circa 650 to circa 1000, or the Early Middle Ages proper. With the ancient world gone, Europe developed new political orientations, new military technologies, new cultural forms, and new social categories, among many other things. The second half of the course will highlight not only those developments that separated the Early Middle Ages from the ancient world but also those that would be crucial in determining Europe's future identity and development. This course is at an intermediate academic level. As you will soon perceive, not everything has been said that could have been said about, for example, the birth of Islam. Those with an interest in any of the topics that we consider should regard the lectures as a point from which they can launch their own in-depth explorations. Nonetheless, the lectures are more detailed and more involved than is the case in an introductory survey.

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#### Professor Recommended Links

- <http://labyrinth.georgetown.edu/>
- <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall>
- <http://www.netserf.org/>
- <http://www.the-orb.net/>

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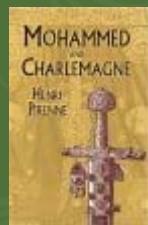
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#### Condensed Bibliography

These selected titles from the reading list are now available on Amazon.com. Click here for more information and/or to order them.

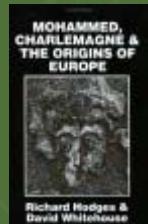
- Michael McCormick. *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West*

Trailblazing examination of late antique and early medieval political culture and ceremonial.



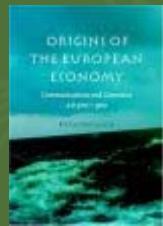
- Henri Pirenne. *Mohammed and Charlemagne*

A recent edition of Pirenne's highly influential book, which was first published in 1937.



- Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse. *Mohammed, Charlemagne, and the Origins of Europe*

Brief but very influential examination of how archeology has fueled reevaluations of the Pirenne thesis.



- Michael McCormick. *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce, 300-900*

A work of prodigious scholarship; provides a thorough reexamination of the Pirenne thesis.

- Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable. *People and Power in Byzantium*

Brilliantly evocative essays on the nature of the Byzantine Empire and the study of Byzantine history; a masterpiece.

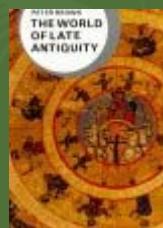
- Peter Brown. *The Body and Society. Men Women, and Sexual Renunciations in Early Christianity.*

Superbly written and judicious examination of Christian and pagan debates over the ideal of sexual renunciation.



- Edward Gibbon. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

Abridged version of Gibbon's eighteenth-century masterpiece.



- Peter Brown. *The World of Late Antiquity*

Beautifully illustrated book, written with the author's usual flair.

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