

From Ancient to Medieval Societies: c. 200-1000

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Level 5



Image: Saint Paul Preaching to the Jews and Gentiles of Rome, from the Pauline Epistles. Second half of ninth century. Saint Gall (Switzerland) Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 64.

Abstract:

The period stretching from the late Roman Empire to the early eleventh century is marked by dramatic transformations in social organisation, language, economic exchange and political systems. People living in the former Roman world witnessed the collapse of the Empire in the west and its replacement by barbarian kingdoms, the survival of a changed Empire – Byzantium - centred on Constantinople in the eastern Mediterranean, and the creation of Islam and an Islamic political system - the Caliphate – which spanned from Asia to Spain. The degree of consistency achieved by the administration of the Roman Empire gave way to smaller scale systems, bound by kinship, and defined by militarised aristocracies and organised religion. New figures in these societies emerged as powerful: clerics, holy men and warriors were eulogized in new kinds of literature like saints' lives and miracle stories. The built environment and the material culture of these people was new, as well, reflecting their everyday economy. This course will focus on the people of the British Isles, Europe and the Mediterranean in their transitions, looking comparatively across different parts of the region at key themes such as state-formation, courts and aristocracies, religion in society, intellectual life and towns and trade.

Initial reading:

Cameron, Averil. *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395-600*. London: 1993

Costambeys, Marios, and Matthew Innes & Simon Maclean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2011)

Kennedy, Hugh. *The Prophet and the age of the Caliphates : the Islamic Near East from the sixth to the eleventh century*, 2nd edition. London: 2004

Whittow, Mark. *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025*. London: 1996.

Rosenwein, Barbara. *Reading the Middle Ages: Sources from Europe, Byzantium, and the Islamic World*. Peterborough, Ont.: 2006