Course Description

At the beginning Rome was ruled by kings, so wrote the historian Tacitus, until an oligarchic clique fomented a coup ushering in a republic. Aristocratic infighting eventually drained the republic of its vigor. In its place came quasi-restoration in the form of disguised monarchy, the extraordinary political theater of which Suetonius made great play. This course investigates the emergence of monarchy from the sinews of a republic that maintained a complex system of checks and balances to forestall the reemergence of monarchy. It begins with an inquest into the civil wars that shook the republic to its core thereby paving the way for men of unbridled ambition such as Octavian-Augustus who outmaneuvered his political rivals. It traces the economic, political, religious, and social fabric of a city-state that first extended its rule over Italy, then over the entire Mediterranean basin. It ends with the accession of Marcus Aurelius, last of the so-called Five Good Emperors, who despite his reputation as a Stoic philosopher imprudently broke with tradition by appointing “his base, shameless, cruel, lecherous son” successor. Topics include: Roman Revolution, Principate, Germanic invasions, arena spectacles, Jewish Wars, Christian persecutions, Silk Road networks and interactions.

Syllabus

“Rome at the beginning was ruled by kings. Freedom and the consulship were established by Lucius Brutus. Dictatorships were held for a temporary crisis. The power of the decemvirs did not last beyond two years, nor was the consular jurisdiction of the military tribunes of long duration. The despotisms of Cinna and Sulla were brief; the rule of Pompeius and of Crassus soon yielded before Caesar; the arms of Lepidus and Antonius before Augustus who, when the world was wearied by civil strife, subjected it to empire under the title of Principate.”

Thus Tacitus. This course eschews the traditional approach to Roman Empire preferred by Classicists throughout the Twentieth Century in favor of a revisionist one first pioneered in the 1930s no less, one that abandoned the year 27 B.C. as marking the inception of a golden age. In its stead we cast a wider net with an eye to acquiring a deeper understanding of issues that drove the demise of the republic, that unraveled a political consensus albeit fragile at times that made it a relatively stable proposition for several hundred years. To this end, we shall focus our attention on a turbulent phase of republican history, one an Oxford don named Ronald Syme (1903-1989) dubbed The Roman Revolution. Syme was a Tacitean scholar whose assessment of Julio-Claudian rule represents one of two leitmotifs of this course. We should bear in mind that he advanced his ideas during the 1930s whilst Mussolini and the fascists were busy extolling the virtues of pax Romana as a presentist foil to provide political cover for their actions. Remarkably, fifty years later Syme’s ideas still exercised the imaginations of Classicists and students alike; indeed, Roman historian, G. W. Bowersock, noted their staying power in a March 1980 review essay published in The New York Review of Books:
“its author described its tone as “pessimistic and truculent.” Its aim was nothing less than the demolition of the Augustan Age which generations of modern scholars had carefully fabricated from a largely favorable ancient tradition. Instead of the Augustus who rescued Rome from anarchy and designed a beneficent Augustan peace, there emerged a cruel and duplicitous politician who deliberately destroyed the Roman republic while announcing that he was restoring it.”

Well you get the idea where we are going here. Whether you are an ardent fan of Augustus or you despise him with every fiber of your being, the point is there is a divide here that still lends itself to study and reflection. Manichean dichotomies are good pedagogical/andragogical tools after all. Now the point is Syme’s construct does highlight the fact that the nominal restoration of the Republic under Augustus was illusory because it failed to resolve serious contradictions in the economic, social, and political structures of the state. Rome of course did not have a constitution in the American sense of the word; hence, it would be better for us to think in terms of British constitution, meaning political precedents that the English ruling classes acceded to if only grudgingly in some cases over the course of centuries. There was no legal mechanism in place to provide for succession of power from one family to another, and we see evidence of this in the crisis that was the “year of the four emperors,” *interregnum* that erupted after the un lamented demise of Nero; that fighting culminated in the rise of the Flavians, thus establishing the principle that power in the fledgling monarchy could pass from one family to another. This may strike you as a trivial observation but it is important. Indeed, in an oblique way this episode inspired the historian A.H.M. Jones who claimed to have read the entire corpus of Greek-Latin literature to coin the phrase “Republican Sentiment,” an important concept in this course. Republican Sentiment may be no more than an internalizing myth, to appropriate the jargon of anthropology, but it remained deeply entrenched in the psyche of the aristocracy, of the Senate in particular. Astonishingly, Republican Sentiment managed to endure the vicissitudes of time until the Seventh Century expansion of Islam reduced the Roman Empire to modern-day Turkey, having first detached by way of jihad the Levant and Egypt.

Using prosopography to bolster his case, Syme argued the political institutions of the Republic were not up to task. Now you see this is more than just a question of political reform because the political climate was still not ripe for a return to monarchy long after the memory of Actium had faded away. At the time the only viable option available to Augustus, to his way of thinking better to be said, was to create the illusion of republican government. True monarchy only became possible centuries later after the protracted crisis of the Third Century transformed thinking making it possible for an obscure Illyrian soldier named Diocletian to mark the restoration of Roman authority by dispensing with the political kabuki Augustus and successor put in place. This explains why Rome turned for inspiration to neighboring Persia by appropriating court ceremonial and ritual in an effort to revivify the state.

The second overarching theme this course will spotlight is the role of arena spectacle. In their amphitheaters the Romans watched for entertainment violent spectacles often featuring murder on an appalling scale. It is no coincidence those politicians who felt it necessary to mount spectacle in order to secure public office did so during the period of the Roman Revolution, not the empire. It is, moreover, no accident that the first amphitheater arrived on the scene with the accession of Augustus, while the Colosseum followed suit under the Flavians in the wake of their victory over the Jews. We often encounter the expression days of bread and circus but what exactly does this mean? This topic gets short shrift in survey courses that tend to place disproportionate emphasis on the gladiatorial combats, but as Cathleen Coleman points out there was more going on than meets the eye. Suffice to say, the need to mount spectacle in public spaces symbolized the disenfranchisement of Roman citizens who no longer could vote for their favorite politicians, so in effect they lost the vote but in return they
got the games. This shift mirrors the metamorphosis from republic to empire, but it also created a dilemma—the spectacle trap as Andrew Wallace Hadrill called it, a dynamic whereby both rulers and ruled were trapped in the sense if the ruling class ever failed to provide more novel, cruel forms of entertainment, the crowd might riot and threaten the regime as we like to call many foreign governments today:

“To consort with the crowd is harmful; there is no person who does not make some vice attractive to us, or stamp it upon us, or taint us unconsciously therewith. Certainly, the greater the mob with which we mingle, the greater the danger. *But nothing is so damaging to good character as the habit of lounging at the games; for then it is that vice steals subtly upon one through the avenue of pleasure.*”

Seneca, Letter 7: *On Crowds*

Seneca’s words were a cautionary tale; while the Senate continued to meet and to deliberate throughout the *Principate*, the amphitheater gradually became a kind of pseudo parliament swallowing the political, judicial, and social institutions of the state. In his box the *princeps* received petitions of all manor, many for tax relief. The pageantry on display, furthermore, is worth noting because of the ceremonial and ritual that emerged over time, whereby the emperor and the senate processed into their assigned sections wearing special clothes: the arena thus represented a microcosm of the new imperial society. Significantly, the Romans never solved this trap, at least not during the period covered by this course. That solution belongs to another course, Later Roman Empire.

**Course Learning Objectives**

1. Understand the distinction between primary and secondary sources
2. Acquire a grasp of issues at the forefront of debate among Roman historians and Classicists
3. Assess patterns of interaction in the Roman Political Economy
4. Analyze the effects of Roman Revolution on the emergence of Empire
5. Compare the development of paganism and Christianity
6. Assess the significance of gender roles and expectations within political, legal, economic, religious institutions
7. Examine the civilizational model on which the Roman Empire operated
8. Assess the role of social status within the political, legal, economic, religious, social, and systems of the Roman Empire
9. Understand the role of arena spectacle on the Roman Empire

**Required Texts**

**Primary**


**Secondary**


### Course Evaluation Criteria

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<tr>
<th>GRADING PERCENT BREAKDOWN Activity</th>
<th>Grading Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Forum Participation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper #1 (6 pages)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper #2 (6 pages)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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### Grading Scale

- A=100-97
- A+=96-93
- A-=92-90
- B+=89-87
- B=86-83
- B-=82-80
- C+=79-77
- C=76-73
- C-=72-70
- D+=69-67
- D=66-63
- D-=62-60
## Written Assignment Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sophisticated</th>
<th>Highly Competent</th>
<th>Fairly Competent</th>
<th>Not Yet Competent</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Depth of analysis</strong></td>
<td>Paper goes beyond the assignment to explore the implications of arguments or evidence in new contexts or in particularly thoughtful, insightful, and/or original ways. Paper shows grasp of history methodology, including the ability to apply these principles with facility.</td>
<td>Paper fully meets the parameters of the assignment but does not exceed them. (and/or…) Paper demonstrates a good grasp of history methodology but some awkwardness applying them.</td>
<td>Paper does not address some aspects of the assignment. (and/or…) Paper demonstrates a somewhat shaky grasp of history methodology.</td>
<td>Paper does not address the assignment. (and/or…) Paper is inconsistent with history methodology (i.e. it makes or fails to challenge ethnocentric assumptions.)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grasp of reading(s)</strong></td>
<td>Paper represents the authors’ arguments, evidence and conclusions accurately, fairly and eloquently. Demonstrates a firm understanding of the implications of the author’s arguments.</td>
<td>Paper represents the author’s arguments, evidence and conclusions accurately. (Where applicable) Some opposing evidence is considered and refuted.</td>
<td>Paper represents the authors’ arguments, evidence and conclusions accurately though not sufficiently clearly. (and/or…) There are minor inaccuracies.</td>
<td>Paper badly misrepresents the authors’ arguments, evidence, and/or conclusions. (Where applicable) Important opposing evidence is ignored, thereby weakening the central argument.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis paragraph</strong></td>
<td>Clearly and eloquently identifies a demonstrable and nuanced central argument. Provides the reader with a clear sense of the nature of evidence that will follow. Reveals the organizational structure of the paper. Guides the reader smoothly and logically into the body of the paper.</td>
<td>Thesis paragraph clearly identifies a demonstrable central argument. Gives the reader a reasonably good sense of the nature of evidence that will follow. (Where applicable) Important opposing evidence is considered and refuted.</td>
<td>Thesis paragraph identifies a central argument that is demonstrable, though not stated sufficiently clearly. (and/or…) Does not guide the reader into the body of the paper.</td>
<td>Thesis paragraph does not have a discernable central argument (and/or…) The argument is not demonstrable.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Evidence used to support the central point is rich, detailed and well chosen. Evidence sections employ appropriate illustrations and/or quotations. The connection between argument and evidence is clearly and compellingly articulated in all cases. (Where applicable) Important opposing evidence (i.e. evidence that might seem to contradict your argument) is considered and convincingly refuted.</td>
<td>Evidence used to support the central point is well chosen, though not particularly rich or detailed. The connection between argument and evidence is clearly articulated. (Where applicable) Consideration of opposing evidence is cursory or the evidence is not convincingly refuted.</td>
<td>Connection between argument and evidence is not clearly articulated in all cases. (and/or…) (Where applicable) Important opposing evidence is ignored, thereby weakening the main argument.</td>
<td>Evidence used does not clearly support the main argument. (and/or…) (Where applicable) Important opposing evidence is ignored, thereby weakening the main argument.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Elegantly synthesizes and reframes key points from the paper.</td>
<td>Synthesizes and brings closure but does not examine new perspectives or questions.</td>
<td>Restates the same points as the topic paragraph without reframing them. (and/or…)</td>
<td>Is missing or cursory. (and/or…) Repeats the topic paragraph more-or-less verbatim.</td>
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**Important Notes**

**Academic Integrity**: Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses that can result in a range of penalties. If you have not read the university’s academic integrity policy do so before the beginning of the course.

**Accommodations**: Students in need of special facilities or accommodations need to see me during the first two weeks of the session.

**Extensions**: These will be granted in appropriate situations, but approval must be obtained *in advance of deadlines*.

**Attendance**: This is an online course, and weekly attendance is required of you. In fact, you must participate in the weekly discussion forums week in, week out, over a period of two-to-three days. Failure to meet this requirement will result in a reduction of your final grade, or a failing grade, depending on the level of inactivity.

**Written Assignments**

You will write two papers for this course. One is due at the end of Week 8, while the other one is due at the end of Week 16. Email them to me in `.docx` or `.odt` format so I can insert in-text comments throughout your final draft. Docx is proprietary, while `.odt` is open source and licensed under the GPL. I prefer one or the other at your discretion. Please do not submit your work in pdf format; while it is the case Adobe has developed tools for in-text commentary, I still find them rather awkward to use by comparison. You will format your papers in accordance with *Chicago Manual of Style* conventions, use
the Times New Roman font--12-point--with 1.5-inch spacing. You must also use a *critical apparatus*, meaning footnotes and bibliography. I prefer footnotes over endnotes in the event you are you have a penchant for lengthy digressions.

**Discussion Sections**

Each week we will dedicate 30 minutes of class time to discussion of assigned readings, multimedia content, etc. There will be an assigned article in pdf format each week, and our discussions will be based on these readings.

**Final Exam**

Since this is an online course the final exam is obviously virtual. It is a take home, essay-based exercise, and you will be given 72 hours in which to complete it.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1: Introduction: An overview of Roman history and civilization**


- Syme, *Roman Revolution*. Begin reading it and have it finished by the end of Week 3. We will discuss Syme’s thesis in the Week 3 Discussion Forum.

- Video Lecture on Canvas.

- Scarre, Chris. *Historical Atlas of Ancient Rome*. Start studying the maps with attention to the ways geography shaped the destiny of Italy and Rome. Get in the habit of doing this on a weekly basis because some of the discussion forum prompts will send you on a geographic egg hunt as it were.

**Week 2: The Republic goes to war: Carthage and the Hellenistic Successor States of Alexander the Great**


- Video Lecture on Canvas.

- Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*. Keep in mind Rome’s frontier are in a constant state flux so maintain a keen eye for detail.

**Week 3: Stasis: The unraveling of political consensus**

• Syme, *Roman Revolution*. Finish reading and prepare for discussion of his thesis which you should have identified by now. The discussion prompt will focus on this question.

• Video Lecture on Canvas.

• Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

**Week 4: New Men and Client Armies**


• Video Lecture on Canvas.

• Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

**Week 5: The Rise and Fall of Caesar**


• Video Lecture on Canvas.

• Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

**Week 6: Enter Augustus and Principate**


• Video Lecture on Canvas.

• Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

**Week 8: Republican Sentiment and the Julio-Claudians (27 B.C. - A.D. 68)**


• Video Lecture on Canvas.

• Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

• **First Paper Due.**
Week 9: *Arena Spectacle and the Emperor Trap: Entertainment and Propaganda*


- Video Lecture on Canvas.

- Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.


Week 10: *Jewish War*

- Flavius Josephus. *The Jewish War*. Finish the text and prepare for discussion in the weekly forum.


- Video Lecture on Canvas.

- Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

Week 11: *Pagans and Christians*


- Video Lecture on Canvas.

- Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

Week 12: *Thanksgiving Break*

- Continue reading MacMullen, *Paganism*.

Week 13: *The Flavians*


- Video Lecture on Canvas.
• Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

**Week 14: The Nerva-Antontines (A.D. 96 – 162)**


• Video Lecture on Canvas.

• Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

**Week 15: The German Problem: A foreshadowing of things to come**


• Scarre, Chris. *Atlas*.

• Video Lecture on Canvas.

• **Take-Home Final Exam (72-Hour Window)**

**Week 16: Commodus**

• Video Lecture on Canvas.

• **Second Paper Due.**