Lecture 6: The Roman Empire and Christianity

The Roman Empire

Augustus (Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian)

- Overhauls and reforming most every Roman institution
- Roman Emperor (27 BCE-14 CE)
  - Octavian was born in 63 BC
  - Time of great political upheaval
- Octavian teams with Antony

Augustus

- In 42 B.C. Empire split between and Antony
  - Antony runs away with Cleopatra
  - Augustus defeats Anthony at Actium (31 BC)
- In 27 BC the Senate votes Octavian Augustus

Augustus’ problems

- Secure the northern frontiers
- Army had grown too large and unmanageable
- Urban population and small farmers had to be helped.
- Promote confidence among the senatorial class

Augustus Reforms the Senate

- Princeps and aristocratic senate
  - The senatorial class
  - The Equestrian Order (Class)
  - Lower Class
- Cult of the Emperor
- Social legislation for morality

Augustus Reforms the Army

- Senate subordinate to Princeps
- Augustus elected pontificx maximus in 12 BC
- The Army
  - Standing army of 28 legions; 150,000 men
  - Auxiliaries, 130,000 men who were non-citizens
  - Praetorian Guard
- Imperator (Emperor)

The Early Empire, 14 A.D. – 180 A.D.

- Augustus’ successors make up the Julio-Claudian dynasty
- Civil War in 69 brings Vespasian to power
- The “Five good emperors”

Julio-Claudian Dynasty (27 BC – 68 AD)

- Augustus’ successors
- Julio-Claudian dynasty
Augustus (r. 27 B.C.–14 A.D.)
- Tiberius (r. 14–37 A.D.)
- Caligula (r. 37–41 A.D.)
- Claudius (r. 41–54 A.D.)
- Nero (r. 54–68 A.D.)

Flavian Dynasty (69 AD – 96 AD)
- Flavian Dynasty restored stability
  - Vespasian (r. 69–79 A.D.)
  - Titus (r. 79–81 A.D.)
  - Domitian (r. 81–96 A.D.)

Five Good Emperors (96 AD – 180 AD)
- What made them good?
  - Fare in dealing with senate
  - Increased public good will
  - Frontiers of the Empire consolidated
  - bureaucracy was opened up to all social classes
  - Trade and agriculture flourished
  - Much public building.
- Trajan (98-117),
- Hadrian (117-138)
- Antoninus Pius (138-161)
- Marcus Aurelius (161-180)

Rome Turns Cosmopolitan, ca. 200
- At its height Rome was a city of 1 million
- Enormous gulf between rich and poor
- Slavery was an intricate part of the empire
- Entertainment was important to Romans

The Romanization of Europe
- The Roman Army played an important social role
- At its height the Roman Empire was 3.5 million square miles and 50 million people
- Roman citizenship was granted to many people
- Romanization of the provinces
  - The Roman Army surged to 400,000
  - 1 in 5 were Italians
  - Forts were the center of commerce and Roman institutions

The Late Roman Empire, 300 -476
- Commodus comes to power(180-182) starting a long line of poor emperors
- “The Barracks Emperors” 235-284
- Persians invade from east, Germanic Tribes from north…
- Diocletian (284-305) and Constantine (306-337) restore empire
  - Empire split in two
  - Tetrarchy formed
• Army and civil service enlarged
• Positions made hereditary
• Tenant farmers bound to land
• Nobility exempted from taxation
• One can easily see Medieval Society “in the making”

The Rise of Christianity
• Christianity represents a fundamental break with dominant values of the Roman and Ancient World
• Augustus revives Greco-Roman gods
• How did Christianity gain a foothold?
• Christianity will be seen as disruptive and immoral

The Triumph of Christianity
• Christianity’s promise of salvation brings many converts
• Church is organizing as Roman Empire is breaking apart
• Cosmopolitan Judea
• Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 6 BC-29AD)
  – Childhood in Galilee
  – Ethics of humility, charity
  – Brotherly love – sermon on the mount
  – Teach to all who would listen
  – Jesus was Crucified and Resurrected

The Triumph of Christianity
• Peter (Saint Peter)
• Paul of Tarsus (ca. 5 AD-67 AD)
• Jerusalem destroyed 70 AD
• The Gospels
• “New testament” in Latin ca. 200
• Increasing role of Bishops in everyday life
• Constantine favors Christianity
• Theodosius (378-395 – “The Great”)

The Fall of the Roman Empire
• 395 empire will officially be divided into east and west
• 476 Odoacer will depose emperor
• Causes of the fall…
  – Christianity
  – Decline of Roman values
  – Lead poisoning and the plague
  – Slavery
  – Constant political strife
  – Loss of trade and financial capital
  – Barbarian invasions