

History of Rome: The Empire
CLASS-UA 278.001 = HIST-UA 206
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I. Course Requirements/Grades

Your grade will be calculated from the average of the grades you earn on three short papers. There will be no exams, and no other assignments. Class participation will not count in any way toward your grade. There will be no extra credit, or extra work of any kind.

Because of the number of people in the class, we will not be able to read and correct drafts of papers, for which I apologize in advance. Therefore, please take special care in writing these papers, since you will not have the opportunity of re-writing to improve your grade. If you feel that you need help with your writing, please take advantage of the university's Writing Center, and do so well in advance of a given paper's due date:

www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html

I will provide you with a separate set of instructions, which give you some explicit guidelines about writing a paper of the sort expected for this class.

You may consult with other students in the class, as you think through what you are going to write. Indeed, doing so is probably a good idea. However, when you write, this must be accomplished by you, and you alone. If we find that papers are in whole, or even in part, identically written, all such papers will receive a failing grade, regardless of who supposedly borrowed from whom; and there will be no subsequent discussion of the matter. Nor will there be subsequent discussion of the evaluations of your papers. You will receive clear written comments, and these will be the explanation of the evaluation/grading of your work.

Each paper should be written in 12 pt. font, and double-spaced. You may write up to three pages (so, roughly 1,200 words) – not including footnotes. This means that you will have to be very concise. This limit on length will also mean that you must think carefully, and revise carefully before handing in your paper.

Each paper should be sent to me by email on its due date. If you miss the due date, there is the very real chance that confusion about the whereabouts of your paper will arise, and you will have to accept the responsibility for that. Please write the paper as a Word file, and attach it to the email you send.

If the conditions set out above do not suit you, then you should not take this class.

Paper 1 (due March 5). Read Tacitus, *Annals* 1. 9-10 very carefully. In this passage, Tacitus talks about the opinions of the Romans regarding Augustus at the moment of Augustus' death. Some people were inclined to view Augustus and his accomplishments favorably, some were not at all so inclined. Take a position in this debate. Is the first emperor to be viewed favorably, or is he not to be perceived positively? Or, even: Is it possible to reach a

decision on this matter altogether? You should work from the text of Tacitus, and then, employing all you have thus far read and learned, support whatever stance you take.

Paper 2 (due April 9). Given what you know of the reigns of Tiberius and Caligula, do you think it was possible to rule, and to be considered by contemporaries as a good emperor during this period? If you answer 'no,' then you must explain what things were working against the man on the throne, so as inevitably to prevent his being a 'good' emperor. If you answer 'yes,' then you should discuss the things, which would have had to be done, so as to rule well. You should also take into consideration, in working up a position here, that there were different audiences in this world. Thus, the 'good' emperor in one group's eyes, might not be so good in the eyes of another group.

Paper 3 (due May 13). Read very carefully the exchange of letters between Pliny and Trajan about the Christians in Bithynia. Then, read the debate between A. Sherwin-White and G. de Ste. Croix (this will be posted on the NYU Classes website) about this exchange. Then, take a stand in this debate. The question is: Why exactly were the Christians punished by Pliny? What, in other words, was the ultimate nature of the misdeed, which led to their being punished?

II. Readings, Ancient Texts:

You can find the ancient literary texts in various ways; therefore, I have not ordered these in printed versions at the NYU Bookstore. Here, I list on-line/electronic versions, as well as printed versions. The printed copies all cost about \$10, and can easily be got from Amazon, or a bookstore, if you would like a printed copy. All handouts and other readings will be available as indicated on the syllabus below.

You will not be tested, in any formal manner, about the assigned readings. These will help you, however, to write the required papers for the class. Also, if you would like to profit from in-class discussion, you should do the reading, because our goal will be to discuss these readings as a basis for understanding our period of history.

Augustus, *Res Gestae*.

Res Gestae Divi Augusti. The Achievements of the Divine Augustus, ed. P.A. Brunt (Oxford)

On Line:

www.skidmore.edu/academics/classics/courses/1999spring/hi361f/resgestae.html

penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Augustus/Res_Gestae/1*.html

New Testament

I will assume that you all have access, in one way or another, to the *New Testament*. One good version of this is the *Oxford Study Bible*.

Plutarch, *Lives*.

Plutarch, Roman Lives, trans. R. Waterfield (Oxford)

Bobst: The Loeb edition by B. Perrin is available electronically.

On Line: penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/home.html

Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*.

Lives of the Caesars, ed. Catharine Edwards (Oxford)

The Twelve Caesars, ed. James Rives (Penguin)

Bobst: The Loeb edition by J.C. Rolfe is available electronically.

On Line:

penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/home.html

Tacitus, *Annals*.

The Annals of Imperial Rome, ed. A. Woodman (Hackett Publishing)

Bobst: *Tacitus, Annals*, ed. C. Damon (Penguin), available electronically

On Line: penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/home.html

III. Weekly Class Plan:

Week 1 (Jan. 27 & Jan. 29)

This week, we will do several things: a) get acquainted with the sources available to us for doing Roman history; b) get a sense of the overall history of the Roman republican period (753-44 BC); c) look at the general outlines of the Roman imperial period.

An extremely important thing to realize, however, when dealing with this world, is just how different ancient Rome was from our own world. People simply thought and acted in ways that are, often, very strange to us. We must have some sense of this if we are going to learn properly about these people.

To start getting a broad feeling for ancient mentalities, read and think about the handout.

Also, for Thursday, look through the book listed here, pick a couple of things that strike you as interesting in that book, and come to class on Thursday prepared to ask about and/or discuss these.

Handout: "The Different World of Rome" [NYU Classes Site]

J.C. McKeown, *A Cabinet of Roman Curiosities. Strange Tales and Surprising Facts from the World's Greatest Empire* (Oxford 2010) [Bobst electronic version]

Week 2 (Feb. 3 & Feb. 5)

We will now begin our study of Augustus, and the revolution he carried through. We will begin with (a) the last years of the dominance of Julius Caesar, (b) Augustus' personal background, and then (c) we will begin to trace the story of Augustus' takeover. We will go through this history very carefully, for it is crucial to grasp just exactly what kind of revolution this was, and by what means and steps it occurred.

Handout: "Caesar's Last Years" [NYU Classes Site]

Handout: "The Early Life of Augustus" [NYU Classes Site]

Handout: "Augustus' Family" [NYU Classes Site]

Handout: "Chronology of Augustus' Reign" [NYU Classes Site] – We will use this handout for the whole time we are dealing with Augustus.

Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* chpts.1-9

Week 3 (Feb. 10 & Feb. 12)

We will spend this week working through the first moments of Augustus' rise to power, and in particular we will begin on the events leading to the battle of Actium, in 31 BC.

Plutarch's biography of Marc Antony will help to give you a sense of the kinds of source material we have for this period of history, and will provide you a picture of Antony. Osgood, in the pages assigned, provides an outstanding account of the time from March 15, 44 through November 27, 43. However, wait until we have gone over, in class, this whole period, and then read Osgood. You will get much more from this if you know the basic historical outlines of the period before you read this.

Plutarch, *Life of Antony*

J. Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy. Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 2006) 12-61 [NYU Classes Site; also on reserve in Bobst]

Week 4 (Feb. 17 & Feb. 19)

Now, we will finish our overview of Augustus' reign – i.e., the bare course of events.

The Suetonius biography is one of our chief sources for Augustus.

Millar, in this article, wants to illustrate the impact of Augustus' revolution on the populations living in the provinces of the Empire. To get at this, one must have recourse, very largely, to inscriptions of various kinds, which were set up in the cities. So, for example: copies of letters sent by the emperor; inscriptions set up on the bases of statues, which were meant to honor people from the town, or others.

Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* chpt. 9-end

F. Millar, "State and Subject: The Impact of Monarchy" in F. Millar & E. Segal (eds.), *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (Oxford 1984) 37-60 [NYU Classes Site; also on reserve in Bobst]

Week 5 (Feb. 24 & Feb. 26)

This week we will deal with probably the two greatest conundrums created by the whole Augustan revolution. First, the matter of some definition for the new system. Since there was a general refusal to admit that the Republic had been abolished, and that an imperial system of government had been created, could one somehow produce a 'constitution' for the new imperial 'system' of government? Secondly, now there was a person who had to be recognized as the emperor (whatever one wanted to call him – there was, in fact, no agreed-upon title for the new position). However, this man would eventually die. Where was a new emperor to come from? How was the new one to be identified/selected?

Handout: "Augustus and the Succession" [NYU Classes Site]

Handout: "Augustus' Constitutional Position" [NYU Classes Site]

Augustus, *Res Gestae*

M. Peachin, "Augustus' Res Gestae and the Emerging Principate" in W. Eck, et al. (eds.), *Studia Epigraphica in Memoriam Géza Alföldy* (Bonn 2013) [on the constitution] [NYU Classes Site]

W. Eck, *The Age of Augustus* (Malden 2007) 148-164 [on the succession] [NYU Classes Site]

Week 6 (March 3 & March 5)

We will use this week to wrap up our study/discussion of Augustus. There will be no reading assigned, as you have a paper due this week.

***** Paper 1 is due on March 5 *****

Week 7 (March 10 & March 12)

We now will examine the transition from Augustus to Tiberius, considering various of the problems Tiberius was faced with, e.g.: the mere fact that he, Tiberius, was now emperor; the potential revolt of the northern legions, in favor of Germanicus; the death of Germanicus, and the resolution of that crisis.

Tacitus provides our chief narrative for this period. He must be read very carefully, and the reading goes slowly. So, see how much of this you can get through.

The Woodman article is a brilliant reading of the passage in Tacitus, which describes the very first moments of Tiberius' reign. Before you read this article, please do this. Read the opening of Tacitus' *Annals*. Then, once you've read through book 1, chapter 6, write down your interpretation of this passage – most importantly, write down what you think about who had Agrippa Postumus murdered, and why. Then, and only then, read the Woodman article. You'll see why once you've done this.

The *senatus consultum* is the decree of the senate, which resolved the whole case of the death of Germanicus. This senatorial decree was circulated around the empire, and in Spain (at least), was inscribed on bronze plaques, and set up publicly. Fragments of several of these inscribed copies started to turn up in Spain in the 1980s. Here you have a text of the decree.

Tacitus, *Annals* Books 1 & 2

A.J. Woodman, "A Death in the First Act. Tacitus *Annals* 1.6" [NYU Classes Site]

Senatus Consultum de Gn. Pisone patre

[www.academia.edu/389206/The_Senatus_Consultum_de_Cn._Pisone_Patre]

Spring Break (March 17 & March 19)

Week 8 (March 24 & March 26)

We will now look at the second half of Tiberius' reign. This was overshadowed by the rise of the praetorian prefect, Sejanus, and then by the various trials of various prominent people for treason.

Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius*

Week 9 (March 31 & April 2)

Next, Caligula. Caligula has long been interpreted as having been utterly mad. A new interpretation by Aloys Winterling, however, offers an utterly fascinating, and different view of things. We will first go over the bare events of the reign, as these come to us in our ancient source tradition, and then we will examine Winterling's interpretation of things.

Read as much of Winterling as you have time for.

A. Winterling, *Caligula. A Biography* (Berkeley 2011) [Bobst electronic version]

Week 10 (April 7 & April 9)

Claudius and Nero will be our next subjects. By now, the imperial form of government is settling in; however, given the styles of rule of Augustus, Tiberius, and then Caligula, the way in which one ought to be emperor is not altogether clear. And then, there are still some of the basic troubles about extent of powers and the like, which remain puzzling – both for the Romans involved in this history, and for us, who now try to understand that history.

No reading is assigned this week, since the second paper is due. However, there is a very good and interesting biography of Nero, which some may want to have a look at:
E.J. Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, Mass. 2003) [Bobst electronic version]

***** Paper 2 is due on April 9 *****

Week 11 (April 14 & April 16)

In the early summer of 68, Nero commits suicide because it looks as if another man will take the throne from him. With Nero, the Julio-Claudian line of emperors also passes into history. There ensues a year-long civil war, during which several different contenders attempt to take the throne. A man named Vespasian wins, and he then establishes a new dynasty. We will examine these civil wars, and the new dynasty, and the status of the whole imperial project under these conditions.

Aside from the lives in Suetonius, we will read and discuss the so-called *Lex de imperio Vespasiani*. Again, this is an inscribed text. This bronze plaque was discovered in Rome, in the 16th century. It holds the last part of a statute, bestowing the imperial power on Vespasian. This is the only evidence we have for the exact terms, which were dictated, when a Roman emperor was given power. So, this is a fascinating, and hugely important, document in a number of ways.

Suetonius, *Lives of Vespasian, Titus, Domitian*

Lex de Imperio Vespasiani [droitromain.upmf-grenoble.fr/Anglica/vespas_johnson.html]

Week 12 (April 21 & April 23)

When Domitian, the last of the Flavian emperors (he was Vespasian's younger son), dies, another civil war nearly begins. This is avoided, but only narrowly. Now, Nerva and then Trajan rule. Behind their reigns appears to have been a group of senators, which worked out a kind of understood 'constitution' for the imperial system. We will examine that, and then see what this might have meant for the stability and longevity of the whole imperial project.

The first text to read, Pliny's *Panegyric*, is an oration held by this important senator when he was made consul, in AD 100. It is a speech of thanks to the emperor for the grant of this position. However, it also served as a kind of description of the new consensus as to how the imperial system would work.

The article by Wallace-Hadrill is a brilliant depiction of just how this system looks in broader terms.

Pliny, *Panegyric*

A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Civilis Princeps: Between Citizen and King" *Journal of Roman Studies* 72 (1982) 32-48 [available on JSTOR]

Week 13 (April 28 & April 30)

This week, we will examine perhaps the most important development of the early imperial period for the rest of human history, namely, the rise of Christianity. We will be able to do this only extremely briefly. That said, from *1 Corinthians*, we will get a first-hand picture of a very early community of Christians. Then, from the exchange of letters between Pliny and Trajan, we will have a glimpse of how the Romans were dealing with this phenomenon at

the turn from the first to the second century AD. This will also provide us with a glimpse of how the Romans governed their empire, just generally.

New Testament, 1 Corinthians

Pliny, *Epistles* 10. 96 & 97 [faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/pliny.html]

Week 14 (May 5 & May 7)

A brief summary of the rest and/or review of what we have done already. This week, I will provide, in class, a brief overview of what happens next, so to speak – at least down to the time of the emperors Diocletian and Constantine, when the Empire was first divided into four parts, and when then, Christianity became effectively the official religion of the Roman Empire.

No reading is assigned for this week.

***** Paper 3 is due on May 13 *****