The Birth of Medieval Europe – Interactions of Power Zones and Their Cultures in Late Antique and Early Medieval Italy

**Duration of the course:** Two weeks  
**Period of the course:** 16-27 July 2007  
**Course director:** József Laszlovszky  
**Course coordinator:** Péter Bokody  
**Department:** Medieval Studies Department

The fall of the Roman Empire and the emergence of medieval power centres was one of the most debated historical issues in the last century. Historical, archaeological, and religious studies were dedicated to this problem, and military, economic, and climatic explanations were put forward to highlight and explain the relatively fast decline of the Western Roman Empire and the emergence of new power centres (Byzantine, Carolingian). The survival of the late antique economic system into the early medieval period is one of the most powerful historical concepts for the explanation of the transitional period, and it has been the most debated historical question of the period since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Recently, major monographs have reinterpreted the whole period and the authors have proposed fundamentally new concepts for the explanation of this period. They represent an extremely wide range of modern ideas of reinterpretation and many complex issues concerning the concept of Roman continuity, regional development patterns in early medieval Europe, and a very general concept of “clashes” of cultures. Three very important new works were published in this year and they present a completely controversial image of these issues. The thought-provoking, or rather provocative, essay of Brian Ward-Perkins interprets the whole issue in the light of recent political agenda, arguing that this entire circle of discussions is only the result of historical retrospective arguments, where the modern enlarging EU wants to find a historical justification in this misleading interpretation. In his argument, a peaceful transition, the concept of acculturation, is just a modern political agenda and the end of the Roman world and the emergence of medieval Europe should indeed be seen as a period of invasions, terrible destruction, and the end of an ancient civilization. A fundamentally different explanation and interpretation can be found in the richly documented and clearly argued work of Chris Wickham, who follows the concept of a gradual transformation and takes into consideration the evidence for war and destruction as well as evidence for revival or restructuring. Neil Christie’s major monograph entitled *From Constantine to Charlemagne* offers a wide panorama on the fastest growing source material, the archaeological evidence of this period, which has fundamentally changed our understanding of the main issues of the period. Based on these recent studies and the discussions and debates generated by them, the summer course will focus on these questions in an interdisciplinary approach for scholars.

The SUN course would focus on four major issues, starting from the local-regional context of one of the most important power centres of the period (Ravenna and Classe). Until very recently the main emphasis of research was connected to the artistic
monuments of Ravenna (mosaics), but recent studies have started to focus on economic and topographic issues and on their impact on the later medieval period. Second, the local regional aspect will be incorporated into an Italian panorama of the period, with the main questions centering on the interactions of different power zones and cultural centres. In this part, the interaction of Late Antique (Roman) heritage, its Byzantine transformation, and the emergence of the new power centre will also be discussed in the context of “Barbarian” invasions and the arrival of new ethnic groups (Goths, Lombards, etc.) The third main block of lectures and discussions will focus on the general interpretation of the period from a European-wide perspective, and the new research data derived from the archaeological project in Ravenna will be compared with the general historical debates mentioned in the introduction. Finally, discussion will turn to the afterlife of these places and sites, covering the extent to which this Late Antique archaeological and architectural heritage was reinterpreted, transformed, and re-utilised in the Late Medieval period.

Schedule

1. Week
Monday (16/07)
Session 1. Lecture
Introduction: The Birth of Medieval Europe – Interactions of Power Zones and their Cultures in Late Antique and Early Medieval Italy. József Laszlovszky

Session 2. Lecture – Public lecture
From Roman Italy to Early Medieval Italy – Rome, Tuscany, Ravenna. Andrea Augenti

Session 3. Seminar
Discussion of the presentation topics of SUN participants. Andrea Augenti, Irene Barbiera, Vasco la Salvia, Marianne Sághy and József Laszlovszky

Tuesday (17/07)
Session 4. Lecture
The Transformations of Rome in the late Antique period. Spiritual and religious changes, the churches of Rome. Andrea Augenti and Marianne Sághy

Session 5. Visit
Museum and archaeological site of Aquincum. Marianne Sághy and József Laszlovszky

Wednesday (18/07)
Session 6. Lecture
Invasions or peaceful settlement – struggles or acculturation. The Lombards and their Italian impact 1. Irene Barbiera and Vasco la Salvia

Session 7. Lecture
Invasions or peaceful settlement – struggles or acculturation. The Lombards and their Italian impact 2. Irene Barbiera and Vasco la Salvia

Thursday (19/07)
Session 8. Lecture
Ravenna and Classe. Topographical and economic changes and their interpretation in the context of recent debates. Andrea Augenti

Session 9. Roundtable dedicated to the memory of Riccardo Francovich – Public lecture
Interpretation of the late antique and early medieval archaeological material in Italy – new concepts and their impact on the historical questions. Andrea Augenti, Neil Christie, Irene Barbiera, Vasco la Salvia and József Laszlovszky

Friday (20/07)
Session 10. Lecture – Public lecture
From Constantine to Charlemaigne – Histories and Archaeologies in Italy. Neil Christie

Session 11. Lecture – Public lecture
The Byzantinists’ Look on the Birth of Europe. Evangelos Chrysos

Saturday (21/07)
Session 12. Lecture and visit of the world heritage site at Pécs
Ancient Christian monuments and the emergence of the Christian cult. Social and religious problems. Marianne Sághy

Session 13. Lecture and visit of the world heritage site at Pécs
Archaeological approaches to the Late Antique and Medieval Ecclesiastical Complexes at Pécs. József Laszlovszky

2. Week
Monday (23/07)
Session 1. Lecture – Public lecture
Technology and culture – The antique heritage and the new influences. Vasco la Salvia

Session 2. Roundtable – Public lecture
The Fall of an Empire, Rise of an Empire – Culture and material culture. Neil Christie, Irene Barbiera, Zara Pogossian, Vasco la Salvia and József Laszlovszky

Tuesday (24/07)
Session 3. Roundtable – Public lecture
Fall of an Empire, Rise of an Empire – Art and Culture. Neil Christie, Marianne Sághy, Zara Pogossian and Irene Barbiera

Session 4. Lecture
Acculturation or clash of cultures: Lombards, Avars, Franks. Walter Pohl

Wednesday (25/07)
Session 5. Lecture – Public lecture
“Barbarian” invasions and their impact on early medieval state formation– a comparison with the Italian situation. Walter Pohl

Session 6. Lecture
Transitions or Breaks in the Urban Centers of Italy. Neil Christie
Session 7. Roundtable – Public lecture
Fall of an Empire, Rise of an Empire – Economy and society. Walter Pohl, Neil Christie, Balázs Nagy, Vasco la Salvia and Irene Barbiera

Thursday (26/07)
Session 8. Lecture
The Church of Saint Severo in Ravenna/Classe: An Evolving Church and State in the 6th Century. Neil Christie

Session 9. Lecture – Public lecture
Burial practices and the transformation of late antique society. Irene Barbiera

Friday (27/07)
Session 10. Lecture – Public lecture
The church of St. Severo in Ravenna and its afterlife in the Middle Ages. József Laszlovszky

Session 11. Lecture and guided visit

Each lecture and roundtable will be followed by a seminar discussion with the participation of all the resource persons of the block. The course will also include a field trip to visit the ancient Christian monuments in Pécs (UNESCO World Heritage Site) and we will discuss there the impact of these Late Antique monuments on the later development of Pécs as an ecclesiastical centre in the Middle Ages.

Level of the course:
The course is designed for postgraduate students and for scholars with previous knowledge gained in at least one aspects of the course (the Roman period, the early Middle Ages, continuity problems, etc.)

Readings:
_______, “Conclusions – Living and (Dying) in Late Antique and Early Medieval Italy.” From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy AD 300-800, 497-511. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
_______, “Author's response to Bryan Ward-Perkins’ review of Neil Christie, From Constantine To Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy, AD 300–800 (review no. 598).” URL: http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/ward-perkinsresp.html

“Review of Neil Christie, From Constantine To Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy, AD 300–800 (review no. 598).”
URL: http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/ward-perkins.html

Resource persons and their affiliation:
Andrea Augenti, University of Ravenna-Bologna
Irene Barbiera, University of Padua – CEU
Zara Pogossian, American University of Rome
Neil Christie, University of Leicester
Evangelos Chrysos, Athens
József Laszlovszky, CEU
Walter Pohl, University of Vienna
Marianne Sághy, CEU
Vasco la Salvia, University of Chieti