

BECOMING CHRISTIAN IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

HIST 31951, Dr. Ingrid Rembold



Above: a selection of late antique Egyptian objects from the Manchester Museum which we examine in an object handling session in week 3.

The early middle ages were an age of conversion. Starting with the famous 312 vision of the Roman Emperor Constantine, the period is full of stories of people suddenly – and often miraculously – becoming Christian. Yet Christian conversion meant different things to different people, in different areas and at different times. While some, like Augustine of Hippo, repudiated marriage and a glittering career following conversion, others simply redefined existing behaviours and practices within new religious frameworks; while some converted as the result of a wife, sister, or mother, others, like the Saxons, were compelled to accept baptism at the point of a sword. Some Christians were buried in church cemeteries; others continued traditional mortuary practices, for example interment in row-grave cemeteries with lavish grave goods. ‘Conversion’ versus ‘Christianization’, syncretic and normative Christianities, and the effects of conversion on social and political life: all of these will be discussed and debated in turn. This course examines the historical contingencies of conversion. It investigates the ways in which people were persuaded or forced to convert, and how those recruited to the faith understood their own conversion.

Indicative topics:

1. Introduction: defining Christian conversion through anthropological and sociological perspectives
2. Constantine: a Christian Roman emperor?
3. Syncretism and survivals: Roman Egypt
4. Gender and conversion: women and families in late antiquity
5. Individuals in the spotlight: Paulinus and Augustine
6. Royal conversions: Clovis and Æthelberht
7. Reconstructing conversion: archaeology and its limitations
8. Mission and missionaries: Boniface and the Anglo-Saxons in Germany
9. *Correctio* and Christianization: Carolingian Francia

10. Conquest and conversion: Carolingian Saxony
11. Conversion and the 'Other': the northern mission

Teaching Methods:

1 x 3-hour seminar and course unit office hours equivalent to 1-hour per week. Seminar readings will be made available via Blackboard; essays and source analyses will be submitted, marked and returned with feedback via Blackboard.

Indicative Reading:

- Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, 200-1000* (Oxford, 1996).
- Birgitte Secher Bøgh, *Conversion and Initiation in Antiquity: Shifting Identities – Creating Change* (New York, 2014).
- David Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ, 2017).
- Richard Sullivan, *Christian Missionary Activity in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1994).
- Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow, 2001).
- Owen Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe: The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum* (Oxford, 2014).
- Ingrid Rembold, *Conquest and Christianization: Saxony and the Carolingian World, 772-888* (Cambridge, 2017).
- Roy Flechner and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (eds.), *The Introduction of Christianity into the Early Medieval Insular World, Converting the Isles I* (Turnhout, 2016).

Assessment:

Source commentaries (2 x 1,000 words each) (40%); essay (3000 words) (60%)

Below: Sample Merovingian (early medieval) 'grave assemblages' which we analyze in week 7



Zoom consultation: Wednesday 14 June, 2-3 PM
Zoom Meeting ID: 928 3077 9027
Passcode: office