**CL2369: Historiography of the Roman World**

***Introduction***

# Our understanding of the history of antiquity depends very heavily on our understanding of ancient historiography, the historical writings of the ancients themselves. Perhaps the key skill of the contemporary ancient historian lies in the interpretation and understanding of ancient historiography, and in this we differ fundamentally from our colleagues studying more modern periods of history. Ancient historiography was a far from simple genre. It was often stylised, containing invented speeches and dramatic interventions, literary flourishes, and echoes of prior historians. It was often inventive with the traditions of the past, borrowing stories from different periods or cultures the better to fill in ‘gaps’ in the historical account. Yet, history was a serious business for the Romans; it was not an amusement or entertainment. History was an intellectual engagement with Roman politics and culture and an attempt to understand the world in which the writers lived. If, for Clausewitz ‘War is a mere continuation of policy by other means’ (Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 1918) for Romans, history was the continuation of politics by literary means: it was a way of contributing to politic life through debate and argument. History-writing was a profoundly ideological act. The Romans were a historically-minded people: they looked back to the past to understand who they were and why they were and how they should act. The writing of that past was thus contentious and controversial and for the Romans, as for the totalitarians of Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, ‘He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past’. Before we can understand the Roman past, we have to study the way in which the Romans tried to control that past.

# In recent decades, the study of historiography has been transformed. No longer do historians just mine the historians for facts and pore over the accounts to ascertain the prejudices of the writers, but are interested in more complex cultural questions, issues of ideology, of social memory, of identity, of alienation from the past, of literary tradition and, fundamentally, the way in which Romans understood their pasts and presents. This course, perhaps uniquely, covers the full range of Roman history writing, from the earliest histories of Rome to the histories of the early Byzantine empire. Taking key sections and key historical debates from the range of authors and writers, we engage in close reading of the texts to illuminate particular crux points in the historical record, with all their doubts and ambiguities, and all their historical importance. We begin with the early history of Rome with its founders and heroes, and finish in a world of demon emperors.

# The key authors we consider include:

1. Polybius
2. Livy
3. Sallust
4. Tacitus
5. Dio
6. Ammianus Marcellinus
7. Procopius

**Teaching** will be through a combination of seminars and more formal lectures in two hour blocks.

**Formative assessment**: Either One commentary (1,000-2,000 words) from a selection of texts

Or One essay (2,000 -2,500 words) from a selection of questions

**Summative Assessment:** One Exam (100%)

Key Reading

Much key reading will be provided within Moodle with numerous links to the appropriate secondary literature. Preparatory reading should focus on the key texts. These are available on-line or in easily available paperbacks.

* Livy, Bks I – X
* Polybius, especially Book VI
* Sallust, *Jugurthine War*
* Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline*
* Cassius Dio, Book 52
* Tacitus, *Annales*, Bks I – IV
* Tacitus, *Histories* Bk I
* Tacitus, *Agricola*
* Ammianus Marcellinus
* Procopius, *Anecdota*.

The more historiography you read, the better you will (should?) understand it.