



HILLSDALE COLLEGE

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Hillsdale College Hosts Conference on Warfare and Christianity in the Roman Empire

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College's Center for Military History and Strategy hosted its third annual conference, "Barbarism and Religion: Warfare and Christianity in the Roman Empire" August 30-31.

"It is important to understand the past for its own sake, but also to gain wisdom from its triumphs and failures that we can use in our own time," said Mark Moyar, William P. Harris Chair of Military History at Hillsdale College. "We were honored to host distinguished speakers whose discussion of warfare and Christianity in Rome was both thoughtful and timely."

Assistant Professor of Medieval History Charles Yost provided an overview of Rome and Christianity, and College President Dr. Larry P. Arnn gave opening remarks. Peter Heather, professor of Medieval History at King's College London, then gave a talk on why empires fall. Heather argued that the Roman Empire, like empires generally, transformed the surrounding world to the point where it lost control.

The following day, Assistant Professor of History Jason Gehrke spoke on Rome, Constantine, and the fall of Christianity; Mattias Gassman, assistant professor of humanities at the University of Florida, spoke on Augustine and Roman warfare; and Anthony Kaldellis, professor of classics at the University of Chicago, spoke on the Eastern Roman Empire and its armies.

Gehrke rejected the claim that Constantine's embrace of Christian military service was a break with early Christianity.

"What Constantine did was make a series of very traditional Christian claims out in public and for the first time from a position of military power," Gehrke said. "And in that, his greatest impact was not the subordination of Christianity but rather the transformation of the Roman army from a pagan institution into an instrument of Christianization."

Kaldellis argued that many explanations of the fall of the Western Roman Empire — including Christianization — fail to explain the longevity of the empire in the East.

“Factors that are common to both East and West cannot really have been the cause of anything quite so grand if the East continues on for another 1,000 years. In fact, it has a remarkable history of not just resilience but tenacity and the ability to recover from shocks. There are very few states in history that can do this,” Kaldellis said. “It’s almost by definition the most resilient state in history.”

Following a faculty round table, Victor Davis Hanson spoke on military history and the Roman Empire.

Hanson said that, while military history has been neglected and even stigmatized in recent times, war was the primary subject of history for the ancients, from Herodotus to Thucydides to Xenophon to Polybius.

“From the very beginning, history was considered synonymous with war. Why is that? I think that the ancients had the answer,” Hanson said. “When we study war, we assume that history is in hyperspeed; it’s accelerating. Things happen during a period of warfare that do not happen in times of peace.”

For photos from the conference, click [here](#).

For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click [here](#).

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, *Imprimis*, with a circulation of more than 6.6 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

About the Center for Military History and Strategy

The Center for Military History and Strategy (CMHS) studies warfare from all times and places to better our comprehension and military readiness. Its focus lies in academic research that joins military history with insights from strategic thinkers throughout history. By providing an education in the study of war and strategy, the CMHS strives to prepare scholars, officers, and policymakers to preserve those “inestimable blessings” of liberty in a world that continues to ignore the lessons of the past. For more information, visit warhistory.hillsdale.edu.

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