Lecture Timothy Snyder (Yale University, Fall 2022)

The Making of Modern Ukraine

04 - Before Europe

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhCK5uGJ3Tw

00:00 Okay everyone, greetings.

Nice to see you all.

Welcome to the fourth lecture.

As you'll remember, section starts this week.

Somewhat incredibly we have a Pole, a Ukrainian, and a Lithuanian TF-ing in this class, which honestly could not have been, I mean, if I'd tried to do that, there's no way that could have actually happened.

So your TFs will be the beautiful and talented, Zhenia Monastyrskyi.

Zhenia, say hello.

There you go, that's Zhenia.

- [Zhenia] We already met.

- Oh, okay.

The equally beautiful and talented Wiktor Babinski, and the no less beautiful and talented Maksimas Milta.

These are your three TFs.

Get to know them, get to love them, figure out what the bribery culture is in their various countries, and adapt yourself to it.

01:03 Lots of laughter from the Ukrainians there, that's a clue.

(audience laughing) That's a clue.

I do not have time for funny bribery stories.

If there's time at the end of the lecture, I'll tell you a funny bribery story.

Okay, so welcome.

We are working our way now towards proper history.

I've been trying to set up some of the concepts because the longer I've been doing this job, the more it seems to me that we have to think about what history is before we jump into doing the subject.

And so I've been using the fact that we're in the moment in the middle of a war to try to help the, I've been trying to use the war to like shake up the concepts and to help us think about how things are fluid, and also help us to think about how we talk and how we think about things may influence the world more than we realize, right? That the unthinking or half thinking ways that we approach the past will affect the decisions that we make in the future by determining how we see things in the present.

02:02 But this is also really important, because Ukraine is, you know, for many of you, a new subject.

And even for those of you who it's not a new subject, it's unlikely that you've actually had a class that was just about Ukrainian history.

Did anybody check how many classes in Ukrainian history there are? - [Student] I couldn't find any.

- Okay, so I'm holding one lecture class in the United States of America on modern Ukraine, which is an extraordinary thing, right? If you think about it.

It raises the question of what has gone wrong with us in general, right? Like, no, why is it that what we do is so mismatched with the world around us, right? Like don't you feel ill served? If you're going to any, I mean, okay, not everybody at Yale is in this class, but isn't it odd to think that if you were at any other university in the United States, you wouldn't even be able to take a class in Ukraine, even though, right? And that raises the larger question of why is it, in the 21st century, where we supposedly have access to all this data all the time, and we all know everything instantly, why are we always surprised by things, right? Why is it that things that happen in the world always seem to catch us unprepared? And so you know what my answer for that is gonna be, my answer for that is gonna be that you should all be history majors.

03:15 Because if you're a history major, or just take, I don't care whether you're a major or not, just take a bunch of history classes, because you'll be less likely to be surprised by the things that happen to you over the course of your life.

Like, if nothing else, it'll help you not be surprised by stuff that happens.

Okay, our job today is to set up Europe.

You know, if you're looking at it from the point of view of today you could be thinking, well, is Ukraine Europe, is Europe Ukraine.

We're not there yet.

We're thinking about the world before Europe, because Ukraine, Kievan Rus, which we're gonna get to in the next lecture, Kievan Rus is coming into being at a time when the notion of Europe doesn't really exist yet, and wouldn't really make any sense.

So I'm gonna start by talking about a couple of ways that people look at the sequence of events that led to Europe.

04:03 Then I'm gonna move on to the things which really were there before Europe.

I'm gonna talk about language for a bit, I'm gonna talk about pre-Christian religion for a bit, and then I'm going to move towards the story of how this state came into being.

So there are, if you are in, broadly speaking, the trajectory of Western Europe, the United States, or North America, the way that the trajectory of European history is taught begins with ancient Greece.

And I'm not gonna change that here.

We're also gonna be talking about ancient Greece.

I'm just gonna be messing with it a little bit.

I did the whole thing with the olive tree and the trident already, right? Did I do that in an earlier lecture? No, I didn't do that? Okay.

So I did or I didn't? You're the only one who remembers it, okay.

Maybe the entire class has switched out since then, and you're the only, like this was a really aggressive shopping period, they're all new.

05:00 Okay, so just to remind you, of Athens itself, the founding story of Athens itself, involves an olive tree and a trident.

It involves a contest between Athena, the goddess Athena, and Poseidon, who gets to be the namesake.

You know the answer because the city is not called, you know, Poseidon, it's called Athens.

So Athena wins because she gives the Athenians an olive tree, and the Athenians say this is very nice, shade, olive oil, right? Poseidon strikes his trident on the ground, and seawater springs forward, springs forth.

And the Athenians say that doesn't taste very good, we're not really into that.

That's the way the story goes, right? That's the way the story goes.

And it brings you an image of Athens which is peaceful and contemplative and maybe tending towards consumer society.

It's a certain image of democracy, right? Whereas Poseidon is offering, you know, strife, and sea commerce, and war, and navies, and things like that.

Now, underneath that story is a question.

06:03 Because, you know, all societies in the way that they tell their story of founding are hiding something, right? And this little story, what's being hidden is the answer to the question: how can you possibly live just on olive oil, right? You can't.

I mean, no, yes? I mean, at least you need a little bread at least with the olive oil.

And so where was the bread coming from? I'm now gonna see if anybody was at this lecture.

Where was the bread coming from? Where were the calories actually coming from? The grain? Yes.

- [Student] The Southern Ukraine, right? - Right, what's now Southern Ukraine.

The northern coast.

So the ancient world, the ancient Greek world, includes the Black Sea, up to and including the north Black Sea coast, which is now Southern Ukraine.

That's where the calories came from.

And so you can plant your little city state full of olive trees, because you're engaged in an international trade, and you're getting your calories from somewhere else.

07:06 So this isn't just mark that, that's important, because the connection of our part of the world with other parts of the world by way of food and calories is enduring.

So for the ancient Greeks, what we're calling Ukraine was a place.

And if you did your reading of the Serhii Plokhy you'll know that for Herodotus, who was a major source, the ancient historian Herodotus, along with Thucydides the two, you know, the two people who found history, as such.

Herodotus maps what we call Ukraine in a certain way, correctly, which is sea, coast, steppe, and forest, moving from south to north, right? Sea, coast, steppe and forest.

And the further north you go, the more exotic it is, right? So from the point of view of that civilization, northward means more exotic.

And so it's in the North that a lot of the Greek mythology is located, a lot of like the Elysian Fields are there, and the Mountains of Hyperborea are there, griffins are there, all kinds of stuff is there.

08:10 The Scythians, they locate, I didn't write the Scythians, the Scythians are also there.

The Scythians are, in fact, real.

And they did inhabit what's now Ukraine at the time and they did fantastic work in gold.

So that part, the part about Ukraine being rich in gold is not entirely false.

The treasures of the Scythians still exist, they're still in museums, they're being looted in this war.

So there are a lot of ways in which what happens in the war actually reminds us of things that were a couple of thousand years ago, like the Scythians, for example.

There's a museum in Ukraine which was looted, and the Scythian gold work has now been taken off to Russia.

Okay, so the Greeks are already looking at the territory that we think of as Ukraine, and they already have a certain geographical view of it, which is south to north. And I want you to think about this, because we are, you know, we are in the West, and so when we look at Ukraine we're thinking, okay, West Ukraine, East Ukraine.

09:08 But from the point of view of our story, south to north and north to south is actually much more important, at least for the first few weeks of this class.

Okay, so if you're looking, so taking ancient Greece as a starting point, if you're now looking at this whole thing from today, but from a Western point of view, there's a certain way that ancient Greece connects to you, and this will be familiar to you probably, it goes like this: there was Greece, and then there was Rome, and then Rome fell, right? Very dramatic, it fell.

Imagine all the buildings falling, right? It's a very dramatic image, Rome fell.

It was overrun by barbarians, it ceased to exist, right? Very dramatic.

And then nothing happened for a while, and then there was a Renaissance, or there were Dark Ages and then there was a Renaissance, and then that Renaissance miraculously, the clever Europeans discovered all those things that were lost.

10:07 They discovered the Greek stuff, and the Roman stuff, and they, so I told you before, always be skeptical of this rebirth metaphor, because if you think about rebirth for one second, it's really creepy, right? I mean, just birth itself, honestly.

Like, I don't know how many of you have seen one, but it's a thing.

And then think about doing it twice with the, I mean it's just, so be suspicious of rebirth metaphors, including the Renaissance.

So anyway, this is a Western perspective, right? Greece, Rome, Rome falls, then there's a Renaissance where everything is rediscovered, and then after the Renaissance comes nations, and the nations, the French, the Italians, the British, and so on, all in some way look back to ancient Greece to this pattern.

If you're in our part of the world, this looks different.

You can still start with ancient Greece, as I say.

There's Rome, there's ancient Greece, there's Rome.

So far, so good.

Does Rome fall? - [Student] No.

- No, never falls.

Yeah, okay (laughs).

11:01 There's like one solid supporter of Byzantium over here.

I'm glad.

(students laughing) That's right, Rome does not fall, right? Rome doesn't fall, the buildings don't all fall, the Colosseum doesn't fall, it's still there, you can visit it today, trust me.

It doesn't all fall down, the barbarians don't all come rushing in one day and have a barbarian party.

That never happens.

Part of the Roman Empire slowly falls under the influence of others.

The capital of Rome moves to the city which is today known as Istanbul, but which for a long time was known as Constantinople.

And the Roman Empire continues as Byzantium, as Byzantium.

It continues for another thousand years, which let's face it, even if we're cynical, is a pretty

long time.

And that thing which is called the Renaissance, where the clever Europeans like rediscover all the things, the Renaissance is possible, you know, in large measure, because Rome never fell in the first place, because there was, there's no, I'm not gonna say the Byzantium preserved everything of ancient Greece and ancient Rome, it didn't, but it preserved a lot of things, like for example the Iliad.

12:08 So if you've had like any kind of like, if you've done, you know, DS here, have had any kind of that sort of education, the Iliad only exists, that's the story of the Trojan War with Achilles and all these figures, the Iliad only exists because people for a thousand years in Byzantium hand copied the thing over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over again, right? Until late in the day copies were transferred to Italy right before Byzantium was overcome, let's say.

And then they were printed in Italy and translated and then it becomes a classic text.

And so therefore, because of Byzantium, we have Achilles, we have the Iliad, we have Homer, right? And we can say, oh, we rediscovered it, isn't that wonderful? And we can do that kind of time travel magic where we leap back to ancient Greece.

But it's less time travel magic if you remember that Byzantium was actually around for another thousand years.

And for our story, for our East European story, you just can't do without Byzantium in the middle.

13:05 If you're telling this story from a Western point of view it's kind of awkward that Byzantium is still there, right? It's kind of awkward.

It's like you're trying to like date a new person but you're still going out with the other person but it's like, I'm not really, you know, not really, like you know, she's not, not, you know? And that's what Byzantium is like in the Western story.

Like okay, there's this huge thing over there, and it calls itself Rome, and they're speaking Greek, but it's not really Europe.

It's not really there.

Let's just look the other way, right? That's what Byzantium is if you're doing the West European thing.

But if you're not, if you're trying to figure out Ukraine, or for that matter Russia or Belarus, but the fact that Byzantium is there the whole time is important.

It's not marginal, it's not some kind of unwanted appendage, it's not this confusing thing.

It's part of this unbroken tradition, right? So I was just in central Kyiv and I was looking at the cathedral, which is spectacularly beautiful, St. Sophia, and it was built, you know, that was built in 1037, right? It was built, you know, it was built while Byzantium was still around.

14:05 It was built three centuries before Notre Dame, right? Three centuries before Notre Dame.

The daughter of the guy who had it built, by the way, was Queen of France.

And she went to France and she said this place is backward and dirty, and I really wanna go home, right? So that gives you, and that's not just the kind of thing that makes Ukrainians proud, but it also just gives you a sense that, for quite a while, this Byzantine story was a heartier and more interesting story than the West European story.

Okay, so there's a different story starting with ancient Greece, which is, in a way, more robust and continuous.

I'm not saying it had to be that way.

I'm not saying that Ukraine had to be part of the Byzantine tradition.

Other things could have happened, but that is in fact how it turned out.

Okay, so language here then becomes important.

In the West European version, or the Western version, there's Greek, right, then there's Latin, and then from Latin you get the Romance languages, Portuguese, Romanian, French, Spanish, Italian.

15:12 So the Romance languages they're called, Rome.

And then you have the Germanic languages.

So the Germanic peoples were some of the ones who overwhelmed Rome, replaced Rome actually kind of slowly.

So, you know, Danish, and Dutch, and Swedish, German, right? So in Western Europe, the Western Europe is dominated, oh English is a Germanic language, forgot.

So Western Europe is dominated by these Germanic and these Romance languages.

In Eastern Europe we have a different trajectory, which is Greek, more Greek, a language called Old Church Slavonic, which we'll explain more about at the end of this lecture and next week, and then Slavic languages.

Now Slavic languages, which we're gonna move into, they are par excellence something which comes before Europe.

16:03 It has always been and is still frankly a little mysterious why so many people speak Slavic languages, right? The Slavic languages are actually the dominant language group of Europe if you count the people, right? If you count the people, or especially if you count the territory where more people speak it than any other, right? Slavic languages cover a lot more territory than Germanic ones do or than Romance ones do.

And the Slavic languages that were spoken a thousand years ago are not, are clearly related to the Slavic languages that are spoken now.

Okay.

Okay, what am I doing with my hand? - [Student] Punching.

- Punching, okay.

So if you had a drink, if you had a drink, I'm not saying that you did, but if you had a drink on Saturday night, and it was in a big bowl, had some alcohol in it, some other stuff, what was that called? - [Student] Punch.

- Okay, why, has it ever occurred to you, like why is this and the, why is that the same word? That's never occurred to you, okay.

17:08 But you know the answer.

- [Student] No, I don't, I just, if you drink a lot of the punch, maybe you're more likely- (Timothy laughing) - All right.

That is what is known as a folk etymology.

(students laughing) Like, and the thing is like, now that's gonna be on the internet, and next week it's gonna be true.

(students chuckling) It's gonna cover the, you're gonna have taken over the cognitive space to that explanation.

So the reason why, okay, is that a punch is a drink that has five ingredients.

And a punch like this, count 'em, five fingers, okay.

How do you, anyone know how to say five in Russian? - [Student] Pyat.

- How do you say five in Polish? - [Student] Piec.

- Five in Ukrainian? - [Student] Pyat.

- Okay.

That's why, all right? It's a rare example of a base Slavic word coming into our language, right? So the reason why punch and punch, we have that word, is from Slavic languages' five, the word for five, that's where it comes from.

18:11 And so, interestingly, so that raises the question like are you speaking the language, or is it speaking you? Because you didn't have to know why it's a punch, like you would've gone through your, if you hadn't taken this class, amazingly, you would've gone through your whole lives without knowing, right, why it's a punch, and why I'm throwing a punch, or why I'm drinking punch.

So are you speaking the language, or does the language speak you, right? Language is interesting because, I mean, how many of us actually invent a word and have it stick? Relatively few.

Even in the age of the internet, relatively few of us.

The language is there for us, we speak it, or does it speak us? And it outlasts us.

I mean when we're gone, the language that we speak is still going to be there.

So it's important to kind of, it's important, what I'm starting to say is, to disaggregate the language from the people.

So I'm gonna be talking about the Slavs, and the Slavic language, but it's important to remember that it's not that there's a language biologically connected to people.

19:06 The language is there when people are born.

And whether they end up speaking that language or other languages are gonna depend upon what happens to them over the course of their lives, right? So just to take a very easy example, more people are speaking Ukrainian in public now than when I was there the last time a year ago, noticeably.

That's not, that's because of something that's changed in the world, right? It's because something that's changed in the world.

Language is not, so it's not the same thing, like when languages move, it's not necessarily because people have moved.

It's not as simple as that.

So the way that historians tell the story in terms of the movements of people is not the same way that the historical philologists tell the story with the movements of languages.

And historical philologists are probably, I think, are probably right.

So language does change, but it changes more slowly than we do, right? So, I mean, we can still, we can all read Shakespeare, right? If you're Polish, you can easily read the Polish of 400 years ago.

20:05 And if you're Russian or Ukrainian or Belorussian or whatever, you can read texts from several hundred years ago with just a little bit of effort.

And although it's weird to think about vice versa, right? Like if you could time travel people from like 500 years ago to now, they would understand our conversations, at least with a little bit of work.

So the language is there before you get there.

An example that's relevant for our class is the Vikings.

The Vikings are speaking, obviously, you know, proto-Swedish, Scandinavian languages, a Germanic language.

They arrive in Kyiv.

Don't worry, there's a whole lecture about this, it's the next one.

They arrive in Kyiv and the dominant language around them is a Slavic language.

And what do they do? They learn it, right? They learn it, and they take it on, they change their own names so that their name sounds Slavic, right? So what could sound more Slavic than Yaroslav, right? Yaroslav.

But if I say Jarisleif, you might think for a second, say, oh, Jarisleif, that sounds like somebody in an Icelandic saga, and you would be right, and it's the same person.

21:04 Or if I say Volodymyr, you'll think, well, that's the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr, that sounds very Slavic.

But what if I say Valdamar, right? Then we're somewhere completely different.

And the guy who is remembered by the Ukrainians as Volodymyr, or by the Russians as Vladimir, was actually called Valdamar, right? And certainly like when he, you know, talked to his Scandinavian relatives, that's what he was called.

So they learn the language, they adapt their own names to this language, and then this language also speaks us, right? Then this language speaks us.

Like I was on American television last night, with an American, you know, asking me questions.

And he's talking about Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy and I'm thinking, you know, more than a thousand years ago, a Scandinavian called Valdamar, you know, got himself baptized and now we are saying Volodymyr.

Like it hasn't, my point is that it hasn't changed that much, and we can even kind of explain why it changed.

Like the guy who was called Valdamar, he took on the name, in this language at that time was probably something like Voldemar, right? But he took on a name, and now a thousand years later we're still, these names are speaking through us.

22:13 Okay, you get the point.

So language is there between us and language is helping to make us.

Now this is only possible because some institutions outside of individuals are keeping the language going, right? And we're gonna talk a little about what those institutions might have been.

But the big institutional change is whether there are, whether there's a written language or not, and whether some institution is propagating the written language.

And so a big moment of historical change for any language is when literacy comes, and that's where we're gonna be edging towards.

So the conversion, in around 988, to Christianity is also the moment when a written language emerges on these territories.

But, that said, you know, it's important that there was a Slavic language, that it was spoken, that it was not so terribly different from the Slavic languages that are spoken now.

23:10 This is a, so this is a continuity.

This is something which was there before Kievan Rus, before any idea of Europe.

If there was a time traveler from a thousand years ago and heard Ukrainian or Russian for that matter being spoken, they would understand that there was, that this language had something to do with their language.

Now, by the way, I'm not trying to say that Slavic was the only kind of language being spoken then, right? Other languages are being spoken on the territory of Ukraine as well, like Greek, for example.

But it was the main language then, just as it is the main language now.

And so here we have a very significant continuity.

Okay, what was that language, and what can that language tell us about the people we're concerned with? Slavic language, so how do we call each other? When I was in Kyiv, I was overhearing, as one does, it's like an important, you know, scientific method, you listen in to other people's conversations.

24:06 I was listening to a couple of military officers talking about like one of their colleagues who's going off for training.

And the first guy said, you know, he went, he said he went do Germaniyu.

And then he corrected himself, do Nimechchyny, right? So what was happening there is that do Germaniyu is not really, that's like, kind of, so that's not really Ukrainian.

It's kind of Russian.

Do Nimechchyny is Ukrainian, to Germany is what it means.

Nimechchyny, Nimechchyna.

Why is that country called that, why is Germany called that in Slavic languages? You've taken classes before.

Have you taken classes before? Okay, why is it called that? - [Student] Well Nemets means kind of mute in Russian and they couldn't understand the Germans.

- Very good.

Yeah, so a Nemets, sorry, Nemets, it's the same in a bunch of Slavic languages, is somebody who can't hear you, can't understand you, right? So in a lot of these languages up till now a Neme or something like that means mute or maybe deaf, someone who can't talk or can't who can't hear.

25:06 So there's, so that, like that tells you that there is this ancient barrier between people who speak Slavic and people who speak Germanic languages, and that line is still there, right? It's not where it always was.

It's probably, I'm sure it's occurred to you, if it hasn't it's gonna stay with you the rest of your life, Berlin isn't really a very German name, right? It's not, it's a Slavic name, right? A lot of the toponyms in what's now Germany are actually Slavic names because the line between the two languages used to be further to the west than it is now.

So the way people use languages starts to tell us where they think they are, where they think they start, where they think they stop.

The word for Slav, which we're just gonna use Ukrainian 'cause this is a class on Ukraine, but if I say Slav in Ukrainian it's Slovyan, and the word for word is Slovo, okay? So as best as we can make out, the Slavs thought of themselves as the people who could talk, right? The people of the word.

26:06 As opposed to the Germans who you can't figure out what they're saying, and you know, they don't understand you.

So it, so like Slovyanska, or in Polish Slowianska, these are people, these are the people who have the word.

And this, like this broader name, it survived into the nations that named themselves the latest.

So like the Slovenes and the Slovaks, right? Those were the Slavs who took on national names late.

And so basically they just took the name Slav as opposed to other people.

Now, that word, Slav, for self, which means people of the word might mean something else to other people.

So in, if you are an Arab speaking slave trader that word means something entirely different.

Al-Saqaliba means slaves, means slaves, and that Arabic word then becomes the, goes into the West through German as Sklavin and becomes the English word slave.

27:11 So it's actually not a coincidence that the English word slave sounds like the word Slav that we're talking about.

It's not a coincidence at all.

It's historically revealing because the people that we're talking about were enslaved, right, between the Baltic and the Black Sea, usually by slavers coming from the north to the south, and so an Arabic word to describe them then comes into our language, right? With a very different meaning.

It's very different to say I'm the people of the word as opposed to the people who can be enslaved.

And although, like with the punch thing that you could probably do without the word punch, but you can't really do without the word slave.

And so here you have an example of how the language is speaking you and the language is carrying knowledge of something that happened, as it happens in our part of the world, the language is carrying knowledge of something that happened in our part of the world a thousand years ago or more, right? And now you know what that knowledge is.

28:05 The knowledge is that the pagan Slavs that we're talking about, for a long while, were enslaved, they were legitimately enslaved.

Why do I say legitimately? That's not a good word.

It's because the monotheistic religions in general did not enslave their own people.

So they might enslave other people who are believers of other monotheistic religions, but not themselves.

But if you were a pagan, everyone could enslave you, right? If you were a Christian, Muslims might, and pagans might, and so on, but if you're a pagan, then everyone might enslave you, including the other pagans.

And so that's an important point that raises the stakes of this whole monotheism.

When we get to the conversion it's not just this, like, it's not just that people are becoming Christian.

I mean in a way like that's the least important thing, and it takes a while to happen.

You're, but when you join the Christian world it means that other Christians aren't going to enslave you.

And it means that you're, you know, you're part of a larger group.

29:03 But don't worry, we'll talk more about that later.

Okay, so the Slavs, from their own point of view, are the people of the word.

From the point of view of people around them, for a while at least, they are people who can be enslaved.

So this brings us to what I want to talk about next, which is who they were at the time.

So again, before Europe, before the conversion, means before literacy, so we know less about them, right? So, I mean the history, this may seem like a bit of a cop out, but history is based on written records, and so, you know, we have the history of ancient Mesopotamia and history of ancient Egypt, legitimately the history, because they left documents.

We don't have the history of their neighbors necessarily because their neighbors didn't leave behind documents.

30:00 So when we're talking about the history of the Slavs up to this point where the sources we're using are Jewish travelers or Arabic travelers, right? Or maybe Christian missionaries, and just the most basic principles of source criticism would tell you that these monotheistic visitors are gonna have a certain kind of bias towards the pagans that they see.

But those are the kind of written sources we have up until the Christian conversions.

But we know some things, but we know less than we might.

We know something about the paganism, but because these people were not literate and because they didn't have temples, and they were an aniconic, that is they didn't have icons.

They only started to have temples and icons, that is physical instantiations of their divinities, very late in the day when they were influenced by the Christians.

But on their own, they didn't.

And so there isn't really a physical trace, not just not a written trace, but there isn't really a physical trace of how they worshiped.

But we know something.

31:00 We know that they were, as I've said, that they were pagans.

That means that there were a number of gods and the gods were not necessarily divinity separate from the world.

On the contrary, they were connected to the world.

They were connected with things that happened in the world.

This will be familiar from Greek or Scandinavian mythology.

There, actually there's pretty strong similarities between this and Scandinavian mythology, so if you think of Thor, not in the most recent movie, not that Thor, like I thought the most recent one didn't really work, I don't know about the rest of you.

Like I was in Vienna and I was with a seven year old and a 10 year old and I took them to see the most recent Thor movie and like it turns out that it was like 17 and over.

Seemed weird to me.

And I said like together they're 17, and they're like, okay.

(students laughing) And they looked away.

And I took them, but it wasn't really, I don't think that last Thor movie really worked, yeah.

Anyway, but if you think of Thor, the Scandinavian divinity, you're not far away from Perun who is a central divinity in the Slavic pantheon, a god of thunder associated with the thunderbolt also associated with the oak tree.

32:11 Another important god was called Svarog who was associated with the sun and with the crops, but the spirits and divinities were everywhere.

So that's the thing about, like, about monotheism, it's not just that there's one god, it's that that one God is often located somewhere else besides Earth, which is a very strange thought if you're not used to it, right? Like there's something, there's something very, there's something very ascetic and demanding and disciplined about monotheism, where you put God somewhere else besides here.

Like there's a way in which it's much more comforting, actually, to have the gods kind of around all the time.

Right? Okay, so the gods were everywhere and the notion was that you are in constant relationships with them, which explains things that we now treat as superstitions.

The things that we now treat as superstitions, the little physical actions, are gestures towards the gods.

33:04 Sacrifice, human sacrifice, would be part of these relationships, sacrificing the right kind of person at the right kind of, at the right time.

If you spent any time in the Slavic world, and you think about it, you'll notice that the sacrifices to, the spring sacrifices and the summer sacrifices to water and to flame are both still present in the culture.

They're now ritualized and nobody gets hurt, but the rituals are still there.

We can talk more about that if you want.

The dead are still with you.

That's another part of this pagan religion.

The ancestors will help you, or they will hurt you.

Your kin relationships extend to the dead members of your family as well, and so you're supposed to continue to do certain rituals in their direction, which is not really so strange if you think about it.

At the end, very important was the end of life.

The end of life is something that had to be very carefully met, very carefully looked after,

because if not then the dead are angry, or the dead are irritated and the dead don't do the things that they're supposed to do, instead they do other things, which is a very fruitful source, by the way, for our own culture.

34:17 And probably more fruitful all the time.

The, if death is not handled properly, then the dead are unquiet, and how, what's an improper death? If you're drowned, if you commit suicide, if you're hanged, all these things, if you die during childbirth, if you die on your wedding day, which frankly, I get it.

I mean, that's, that does seem like bad news.

And if you're not cremated properly, right? So religions have ways of physically handling death, not just narratively, but physically, and so cremation is what's supposed to follow.

35:00 The female unquiet death, unquiet dead, this is still quite popular in the Czech lands like if you're have anything to do with Czech culture you'll have heard of these creatures, Rusalki.

Rusalki are water spirits or meadow spirits that, again, like a lot of, actually like a lot of pagan stuff this shows up in Tolkien, things like this.

Like, if you know about Slavic paganism and then you reread Tolkien, there'll be a lot of things which pop out at you.

But they sing you, or they lure you into the marshes, the Rusalki, so they're very beautiful and they're very attractive and they know how to draw you in, and then you drown.

The, or sometimes they tickle you to death.

I don't know what to make of that, but that's a possibility too.

The male unquiet dead are, it's an easy one, what's from Eastern Europe, still with us? Yeah.

- [Student] Is it vampire? - Yes, vampires.

The male, a male unquiet dead is a vampire, right? So, and you know what vampires do.

36:04 The vampires, they come back, they feed on the blood of the living, they take the souls away, they start with the family, right? So when Bram Stoker brought the vampire into Victorian culture he was working with an actually existing pagan tradition.

And the reason why, so it appears, and this is now, again, this is not from historical evidence 'cause we don't have it, but it's from, it's actually from archeological evidence.

It appears that when the Slavs did convert to Christianity, which, again, don't worry, we're gonna talk more about it in the next lecture, but when they did convert to Christianity, there was a vampire crisis, which you can imagine, right? Because suddenly nobody was being, like even if you do convert, and remember conversion, like when conversion is presented retrospectively, it's like boom, like the leader dunked himself in the water and suddenly everybody was Christian and you know, that's it.

But it actually takes generations or centuries and there's usually lots of backtracking and rebellion and so on.

37:00 And even if you convert, it's a pretty dramatic thing.

And it's very unlikely that you will instantly get rid of all of your previous convictions, right? And when the convictions are very high stake convictions, oh, sorry for the pun, it was not intended, but when the convictions are very, like when they're very significant convictions, like will my loved ones come back after death or not, you may want to hedge your bets a little bit.

So when the Christians came the Christians said no, no don't cremate, inhume, bury.

Right, bury.

But that's not a proper way to die, right? That's not a proper way for, and so the way that the Slavs handled this was to keep, in order to keep the male dead down, they put stakes through the bodies so that the vampires couldn't come, just in case, just in case, right? And so hence the notion that the way to stop a vampire is to put a stake through the heart, right? So these, you know, these things are very old and very interesting.

38:06 All right.

So how do we get then from no written language to written language? How do we get from paganism to Christianity? I'm gonna talk about the details of this next time, but what I want you to see now is that the Slavic world was being prepared for conversion to Christianity somewhere else.

The first Slavic state is the Grand Duchy of Moravia, which is first mentioned in the year 822, and the first Slavic state, so Moravia is now in the middle, the northern part of what's the Czech Republic.

And it was being contested between Byzantium and Western Christianity.

So Byzantium, the Byzantine Empire, sent missionaries and these missionaries were Slavs, because remember there were Slavic languages are spoken all over Europe until you get to Central Europe.

39:11 It's a huge amount of territory where people speak Slavic languages.

So there were a couple of men, you might have heard of them, Cyril and Methodius, who were Slavic speakers, from probably what's now Macedonia.

They were sent north to Moravia to convert the Czechs.

And in order to convert them, you know, their tool was a written language, right? So as Slavic speakers, they generated a Slavic language, which we now call Old Church Slavonic, and they translated some of the Bible into this language, passages of the Bible, and brought them with them.

And so in the attempt to convert the Czechs, which fails, eventually it fails, but the attempt to convert the Czechs generates this language, and this language is accepted by the Pope, for a while anyway, as a third legitimate language aside from Greek and Latin.

40:15 So Cyril and Methodius, it's a long story, but they fail.

Cyril never leaves Rome, he's buried in the basement of a little church called San Clemente, which if you visit like lots of people from the Balkans leave their candles there.

Cyril never leaves Rome, Methodius does get back to the Slavs, but he fails to convert the Czechs.

But, and he dies in Moravia.

But here's the interesting thing, just as a spoken language is there when you arrive and it's there after you die, if you can create a written language, it's also gonna be there after you die.

So Cyril and Methodius die, but Church Slavonic goes on, the written language goes on, it's taken on, it's taken up in Bulgaria by people actually who are trying to set themselves up as rival to the Byzantines, it's taken up in Bulgaria.

41:10 The Tsars, as they call themselves, of Bulgaria, support it.

In Bulgaria, this language shifts to a different alphabet.

The original alphabet was called Glagolitic, but the new alphabet was called Cyrillic.

Not because Cyril invented it, he didn't, it was, he was dead, it was named after Cyril.

So Cyrillic, which is gonna be familiar to all of you.

If it's not familiar, some of the words on the sheet are written in Cyrillic, like I wrote, what did I write? Oh, I wrote Slovo, I wrote Slovian, I wrote Nimecy, Nimechchyna.

That's Cyrillic, right? That's Cyrillic as it was invented, more or less as it was invented, circa 893, right? So you can, if you invent a language, it can last, and if you invent an alphabet, right, that can really endure.

I mean, so the people in Bulgaria who set down Cyrillic, if they picked this up, they could read it, right? They could read it.

42:06 So that's something which was there before the conversion happens, and it's very important

that it's there before the conversion happens because when Kyiv converts to Christianity this civilizational package, Old Church Slavonic, which is a Slavic written language, the Cyrillic alphabet, which allows you to write things down, is going to be available with Eastern Christianity.

And so, you know, not that things don't change along the way, but here we are more than a thousand years later, and it's still, it's an Eastern Christian country using the Cyrillic alphabet.

Okay, so that is all generated for different reasons, and those different reasons have to do not just with Byzantium wanting to convert people.

I mean that's normal, you would expect that, but it also has to do with a competition, which we'll talk more about next time, between the Byzantines and the Western Christians.

43:06 So this whole, in this, in our class, we're generally residing in this trajectory which goes Greece, Byzantium, Kyiv, right? But there is this other trajectory, which is real.

And the other trajectory there is Greece, Rome, and then the creation of this new model state, this new model state, which has become, gonna become very important in the world, where church and state are sort of separated, where the states are Christian but the Pope is not in charge.

That model of state.

And the first important model of that state is founded by the Franks, who we'll talk more about, but the Franks are the ones who essentially establish the political version of Western Christianity.

The Franks are the ones who stop Islam at the Battle of Poitiers.

44:02 This is like the kind of thing, so Poitiers is 722, so this is really, so I'm not sure to wrote that down.

When I say before Europe, one of the things I mean is before the Classical world, which is a Mediterranean world and a Black Sea world becomes a world which is north of the Mediterranean.

The Classical world is just as much about Africa and what we now think of as the Near East as it is about the European coast.

And insofar as it's about Europe, it's about the coast, the northern coast of the Mediterranean, the northern coast of the Black Sea.

It's not about most of what we think of as Europe.

So before Europe also means before it gets established that north of the Mediterranean people are going to be Christians, not Muslims, and one of the ways that gets established is at the Battle of Poitiers in 722 when the Muslims are stopped.

In our part of the world at about the same time, it'll be the Khazars who stop, in the Caucasus, who stop Muslim armies.

45:07 Another way that Europe becomes Europe is not just that Islam is stopped, but that Christianity spreads northward, right? Christianity spreads northward.

The Franks, the other thing that they do is that they provoke the people who we remember as the Vikings.

Okay, so much as I'd like to, I can't completely keep Western Europe outta the story, because the West Europeans do do some important things like Poitiers and like provoking the Vikings.

So it's, the Vikings like if you just have a cartoon image of the Vikings, the Vikings come and they destroy, right? Like they're just there to take the gold from the churches.

But the Vikings were responding to the emergence of the Franks as a power.

And they responded to the dominance of the Franks on land by their superior naval technology, right? The way that they fought and the way that they sailed was a response to the power of the Franks.

46:06 This is how history works.

You run into somebody else who's strong in one way, you become strong in a different way.

So the Viking Age, which begins in the eighth century, is a response to the power of the Franks.

And the Viking Age, although it includes North America and Greenland and Iceland and of course Scandinavia and of course Normandy, the north of France, and by way of Normandy the remaking of England into the form that we now know it, all those things, the Viking Age is very important for Europe, Northern Europe, North America, our class is also part of the Viking Age, right? Because when the Vikings bump into the Franks and then set all, and become a kind of counter power, right? The power that uses the boats, the power that's in charge, that can move, right? One of the places they get to is Kyiv.

Getting to Kyiv in the eighth century, the ninth century, is part of the Viking Age.

So another thing that the Franks do is they set off the Viking Age and the Viking Age leads to Kyiv.

47:03 So that brings us to where we need to be when we start the next time.

Byzantium is trying to convert from the south.

Byzantium is in a contest with the Franks about which kind of Christianity, under who's domination.

Meanwhile, the Vikings have been released and are moving around the north and are trying to find a way from the Baltic Sea down to the Black Sea in their boats.

And the reason why they're doing this, one of the reasons, is because of the slave trade, the economics of the slave trade.

They're capturing and they're enslaving the people who live, are Slavs, right? They're capturing those people and they're bringing them down.

So the metamorphosis that's going to happen is when these Vikings have an encounter with the Byzantines and decide to become Christians, and as they become Christians, the people around them become, not potential commodities, but rather become people to be ruled by law.

48:04 And at that point then we can start to talk about a state.

So I've tried to line up the things that we need to have, the religion, the language, right, a little bit of the economics, before we get to this very important moment, which is the conversion of the people who are ruling Kyiv, which is next time.

Okay, thank you.