Research Process

Within the fall semester at Marquette University I completed the history class "The Middle Ages," taught by Dr. Lezlie Knox. This class requires each student to complete a research paper, in the Chicago Manual of Style format, about whichever figure in history the student so chooses within the centuries that the class covers. I chose to write about the less known Alaric, King of the Visigoths, and his campaigns prior to the sack of Rome in 410. Here I will describe the process I used to complete the extensive research for my research paper, detailing my criteria for selecting both primary and secondary sources.

To meet the requirements of the paper, a minimum of five primary sources were required. I had to find at least five primary sources that included information about Alaric, which proved slightly difficult as the time period that I am interested in, roughly from 395 to 410, does not have many sources that have survived through the centuries. In order to get an idea of where to look for sources I asked my professor who recommended that I look up a chronicle written in this time period, translated by Alexander C. Murray. The rest of my primary sources I found by looking at sources cited by historians who authored the secondary sources that I used. This proved most useful to my purposes since such historians of the time period are the best source of information about what primary sources are available, and also about how credible these sources are.

In order to find the primary sources used by the historians of my secondary sources I first checked to see if the library had any copies, which they did. For the other primary sources I looked online, and found that a translation of Claudian's work is free on Google books since the copyright wore out, making it accessible to the public. Zosimus' *Historia Nova*, a lengthy historical narrative, is also not in Marquette's library so I used the ILLiad system to get a copy of

the work. I chose these works because they included detailed information about Alaric and historians from my secondary sources have used all of my primary sources comprehensively.

The eleven secondary sources I included within my research paper were much easier to find and to get a copy of the works than the five primary sources I used. I relied extensively on one of the library's historical databases, the International Medieval Bibliography from the University of Leeds to find professional essays about Alaric and the Visigoths. I had some difficulty finding essays in English, as the database had a lot of sources written in Catalan and French about Alaric with no translations available. I also found many useful sources through library books by using the online search bar. My criteria for selecting my secondary sources included those sources that told the campaigns of Alaric in a different perspective, emphasized different parts of his journey, and had the historian's own opinions or deductions about the matter in order to find out any discrepancies and arguments about the history. Finding different perspectives on this part of history allowed me to broaden my understanding of the time period, allowing my paper to take in to account many different matters.

From conducting this extensive research for my paper I learned to use the databases more effectively by narrowing searches and using key words. When the project was first introduced I did not know the difference between primary and secondary sources. After taking the course I now understand the difference and can use both types of sources to prove my point. Researching Alaric also made me realize how complex the events of this time period are, so I had to use many secondary sources from prominent historians to understand what had definitely happened and what has only been theorized as occurring. Conducting the research for my paper was both time-consuming, at times confusing, and without a doubt exciting for learning more about the intricacies of Alaric's campaign and using them to write my paper.