

History 318: The Byzantine Empire
Fall, 1995
Professor Abrahamse

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Office Hours: Thurs. 5-6:30 or by appointment

Assigned Texts:

Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*
Procopius, *The Secret History*
Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*
Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*
Kazhdan and Epstein *Change in Byzantine Culture*
Browning, *The Byzantine Empire*
Reading Packet

General description of the class: This is an overview of 900 of the 1100 years of Byzantine civilization. Since it is impossible to get more than a taste of the subject in a semester, this course will concentrate on broad issues and problems of the three major periods in Byzantine history (early, middle and late, not surprisingly), with emphasis on the following: Byzantine society, culture and economy; historical interpretation of major crises in Byzantine civilization; the Byzantine heritage; Byzantium as a multi-national pre-industrial society; the role of Byzantium in world history. For each period, will look at the questions and problems that occupy Byzantine historians in their attempt to understand this civilization, and the primary sources from which they draw their analysis. In addition, we will discuss the relevance of underlying structures and events in Byzantine society to modern world issues (for example: the Byzantine roots of the Bosnian crisis). The class will involve discussion and lecture, and you will be expected to keep up on the reading as we go along and to take part in class discussions. Your grade will be based on: midterm (25%); source reading reports (25%), a term paper or project (25%) and a final examination (25%). You are encouraged to keep in touch with me by E-Mail if you use it: I read it regularly, and promise to answer quickly.

ADD-DROP POLICY: THIS COURSE FOLLOWS THE UNIVERSITY ADD-DROP POLICY. THAT MEANS THAT IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STUDENTS TO DROP COURSES THEY DO NOT INTEND TO COMPLETE BEFORE THE THIRD WEEK OF CLASS. FAILURE TO DROP A COURSE WILL RESULT IN A "U" (UNAUTHORIZED WITHDRAWAL), COMPUTED AS AN "F" ON YOUR RECORD. STUDENTS MAY DROP WITH INSTRUCTOR'S PERMISSION (FOR GOOD REASONS) UNTIL THE FINAL FOUR WEEKS OF CLASS. IN THE LAST FOUR WEEKS, DROPS ARE NOT PERMITTED EXCEPT IN A CASE OF SERIOUS ILLNESS INVOLVING A COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY.

DATE TOPIC ASSIGNMENT

Aug. 31 Introduction: Geography of the Byzantine world
The nature of ancient empires
Role of Byzantium in world history: why study a dead civilization anyway?

Topics for discussion: How do physical setting and climate affect the development of a civilization? Has that changed between pre-industrial and modern times? Did empires in pre-industrial times share common structures, pre-conditions for existence, forms of economy, religion and culture?

Recommended reading: A physical geography of Europe or the Mediterranean; a good atlas of the climate and topography of the region; Braudel, *The Mediterranean World*, Ch. I; P. Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies*.

Sept. 7: The Empire in Late Antiquity Browning, Ch. 1
Cameron, Ch., 4
Reading Packet #1

Topics: The basic structures of the late antique empire: empire, bureaucracy, military system, cities and councils, land and social classes. What was the role of law in the Byzantine Empire? What do Justinian's law codes show about his conception of empire, the role of the church and bureaucracy in the sixth century? What kinds of evidence do they provide for: the emperor as law-giver; provincial bureaucrats; women and children; public safety?

Recommended reading: Brown *The World of Late Antiquity*; Browning, *Justinian and Theodora*

Sept. 14 Justinian and Theodora Cameron Ch. 5
Procopius, *Secret History*

Topics: Was Justinian a monster or a brilliant ruler? Could his reconquest have survived? Can you believe anything Procopius says in the *Secret History*? What and why? What kind of person was Procopius, and why did he write the S.H.?

Recommended reading: Cameron, *Procopius*

Sept.21 Orthodoxy and the Rise of the Saint Cameron, Ch. 3,6
Life of St. Nicholas of Sion

Topics: How Christian was Byzantium in the early Christian period? What was a service in an imperial church in Constantinople like in the sixth century? What economic and social roles did monks like Nicholas of Sion play in the countryside in the sixth century? What can you tell

about their religious customs and the piety in the period from the Life of Nicholas ? Why did saints perform miracles ?

Recommended Reading: Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*; Brown, “The Rise of the Holy Man” in *Studies in Late Antiquity*

Sept 28: The end of antiquity:
 the city and the invaders: Cameron, 7,8
 Arab and Slavic Invasions; Browning, “Withdrawal”
 Seventh Century Crisis Reading #2,3

Topics: What did the late ancient city look like ? How did it differ from the classical city? Did it disappear ? How have archeologists described the decline of cities ? What arguments are there over the fate of cities in the early middle ages ? How did Byzantine cities compare with western cities in that period ? Why was Islam so successful in taking over Byzantine territory? How much did the repeated invasions of the seventh century affect the basic population and economy of the empire? What differences allowed the Slavs to eventually become part of the “Byzantine Commonwealth”?

Recommended reading: Haldon, *The Seventh Century*; H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*; Obolensky Ch. 2

Oct. 5: Iconoclasm and the Medieval World Reading #4

Topics: What were icons, and why did they become the basis for a major crisis in the empire? Was iconoclasm related to developments in Islam or the west ?What were the social and political bases of iconoclasm? How can we figure out the Iconoclast side of the story ?

Recommended reading: Cormack, *Writing in Gold*

October 12 Midterm exam distributed Reading: Browning, “Golden
 The Macedonian Era: Imperial Recovery Age”; Reading #5

Topics: What did Charlemagne and early medieval popes mean to Byzantium? “Byzantine” Italy and Rome. What is a “renaissance” ? Was there one in Byzantium in the 9-10th centuries? How did Byzantine recovery compare with Justinian’s empire? What can we believe in Liudprand’s account? What does it tell us about Byzantine imperial ritual and relations with the west?

Recommended reading: Jenkins, *Byzantium, The Imperial Centuries*; Lemerle, *The First Byzantine Humanism*

October 19: Midterm Exam due
Byzantium and the west in the early middle ages
Art in the middle Byzantine period

October 26: Society and Economy Reading: Reading #6
Kazhdan, Chapter 2

Topics: Did the middle Byzantine period see the development of “feudalism” and “manorialism” comparable to western Europe? What were the bases of power for the wealthy and ambitious? What do we know about the middle Byzantine family? Was there a commercial middle class? (What kinds of possessions did Eustathios Boilas have? What does the Book of the Prefect tell us about Byzantine crafts, commerce and customers?)

Recommended reading: Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire*; Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 1990: *Symposium on the Byzantine Family*

November 2: The Byzantine Commonwealth Reading: Obolensky,7,9,10,11

Topics: Why did Byzantium win the “conversion competition” with the west? What has been the historical significance of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission in eastern Europe? What elements of Byzantine culture were transmitted to the Slavic world and which were not? Why? Is there a modern legacy of the conversion? (Russia, Serbo-Croatia)

Recommended reading: Obolensky, other chapters; *Balkan Ghosts*

November 9: Eleventh Century Crisis Reading: Psellus, Books 4-6
Kazhdan, Ch. 3,4

Topics: What caused the crisis of the eleventh century? Was this a period of economic and cultural decline or expansion? Was the loss of Anatolia due to politics or deeper causes? Must political, economic and cultural flowering be simultaneous in a society?

Recommended: Angold, *The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204*

November 16: The Comnenian Era and the West Browning, “Challenge”
The Fourth Crusade Kazhdan, ch. 5,6

Topics: How did the state of Alexios Comnenos differ from that of the Macedonians? Was this a “long slow decline toward disaster”, or could his system have succeeded against the west? How “barbarous” were the western barbarians?

Recommended: Villehardouin, *Chronicle of the Crusade*; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*

November 23: Thanksgiving Holiday

November 30: The Late Byzantine Empire Browning, "Defeat"
Culture of the Late Byzantine Period

Topics: Could there have been a viable Byzantine state that wasn't an empire ? Did Orthodoxy replace the emperor as the focal point of society ? Did Byzantium share in late medieval European cultural, economic or technological developments ?

Dec. 7 Papers or Projects Due
The Byzantine Heritage
The Ottoman State

Topics: What made the Ottoman advance successful ? Why did Europeans not respond to the fall of the empire? How did Byzantine civilization survive in: Ottoman practices; the Orthodox world; the Italian renaissance; modern Greece?

Final Examination: Thursday, Dec. 14 7:15-9:15