

# Constantinople: from Rome to Istanbul

The East Roman (“Byzantine”) Empire persisted for a thousand years, and yet we know very little about its history.

To make a history out of this little, we historians rely on the art of narrative, of story-telling.

But while *we* know we only have a “believable” story, we allow our students to *hear* what we say as “fact.”

What if, rather than simply getting students to internalize the current story, we taught them to *make* the story?

What if, in doing so, we were able to not just teach students *about* a history, but taught them how history is made?

What if, in doing so, a class of undergraduates with no prior knowledge of the subject actually engaged in *making* a new history?

*Shouldn't we do that, if we could?*

This course works to make this switch – to do away with students as *absorbers* of history and empower them as *creators* of history.

**First**, your professor gives up control of the narrative and instead introduces you to the Byzantine story as a series of problems and questions.

**Second**, we work together on how to think of Byzantine events and persons and things as happening *in a place* more than as occurring *along a timeline*. We will work together on how to make our primary object of study the *place* of Constantinople, rather than the *story* of its empire.

**Third**, students will choose and take ownership over specific texts and material artifacts (pick the things you become interested in: palaces; mosaics; eunuchs; silks; greek fire; circus factions; traders; nuns; icons; etc., etc.) and insert them into a space: a digital map of Constantinople.

**Finally**, students propose and complete, as a final project, an analysis of the data we have collaboratively produced about Constantinople.

The project you propose should fit your own interests and skill set. You decide: a data-visualization project, a Story Map website, three-dimensional modelling, a written piece of work (whether “creative” or “analytical”), or an alternative.

## This course focuses on these goals:

- Understand : the dominant approaches to, and major issues of, Byzantine history; the importance of narrative to the practice of history
- Master skills of an archive historian: research, catalogue, and multiple artifacts and/or texts
- Master skills of historical analysis and synthesis: create an argument using a selection of our multitude of pieces of historical evidence.
- Demonstrate historical presentation and communication: create a finished product that can be absorbed, appreciated, debated.

## IMPORTANT STATEMENTS

I am committed to making my classroom accessible. This expresses itself in a number of policies, including but not limited to:

- accommodations of technology in the classroom. I allow devices that, in students' opinions, are important aids to their learning. I ask, however, that you briefly discuss with me the device you would like to use, and how. Devices not discussed are not permitted.
- accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have not already, please help me by contacting Dean Patey here: [www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/disabilities\\_notification.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/disabilities_notification.html) (rather than copying this, click link on moodle page)
- accommodations for athletics schedules. At Wesleyan student athletes must make *both* their professors and coaches aware of conflicts from the beginning of the semester. This must be done both verbally, and in writing. Updates (i.e., playoffs) must be given ASAP.
- accommodations for diversity of belief, identity, background, and body are the responsibility of all of us. I pledge to do what I can to model and maintain an atmosphere where ideas and paradigms are debated and challenged, while we all maintain respect for difference.
- an open and ongoing invitation to discuss with me how to improve these statements, and a classroom atmosphere that is both challenging, and communal, and projects a sense of belonging and welcome.

## ASSIGNMENTS

- |  |   |                          |  |
|--|---|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Active Preparation and Participation    | = | <i>Basic Expectation</i> |  |
| 2. Mid-term (Feb 24)                       | = | 30%                      |  |
| 3. Reflection Paper (Mar 10)               | = | 10%                      |  |
| 4. Research Projects (April 8, 15, 22, 29) | = | 30%                      |  |
| 5. Final Project (May 19)                  | = | 30%                      |  |

## REQUIRED TEXTS

**All readings are available digitally on the course Moodle Site.**

**If a print reader is desired, this will be made available the second week of classes.**

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **Part I: Condensed Survey of Byzantine History (Lecture and Discussion Format)**

- 1.27 *Introduction & Orientation*  
Follow-up: T. F. Matthews, "The Imperial City of Constantinople" (1998)
- Historical Overview Week 1: Early Byzantine State**
- 1.30 *Foundlings: Constantine to Theodosius – Something New or Something Old?*  
Follow-up: Treadgold, *Concise* (pp. 1-36) on Diocletian through Theodosius
- 2.1 *Revolution and Revival: Theodosius to Justinian – Divine Conduit or Demon on the Throne?*  
Follow-up: Maas, *Justinian* (pp. 3-27) on Justinian
- 2.3 *All Things Change: Heraclius, Persia, and Islam – Is this the End?*  
Follow-up: Hoyland, *Islam* (pp. 120-128); Haldon, "Transformation," *Byzantium* (pp. 15-32)
- Historical Overview Week 2: Middle Byzantine State:**
- 2.6 *Middle-Byzantine Political Power – To Icon or not to Icon?*  
Follow-up: Brubaker, *Iconoclasm* (pp. 32-55; 90-106)
- 2.8 *Middle-Byzantine Life & Culture – Renaissance or Wikipedia?*  
Follow-up: Sevckenko: Constantine Porphyrogenitus
- 2.10 *Imperial Centuries: Macedonian Bureaucrats and Generals – The Powerful! The Poor!*  
Follow-up: Shepard, "Equilibrium to Expansion: 886-1025," *Empire* (pp. 493-536)
- Historical Overview Week 3: Late Byzantine State**
- 2.13 *Imperial Centuries: Comnenians & Crusaders – Who asked Who?*  
Follow-up: Gregory, "The Komnenoi," *History* (pp. 257-281)
- 2.15 *The Neglected Twelfth Century – Manzikert or Myriokephalon?*  
Follow-up: Magdalino, "Komnenoi: 1118-1204" (pp. 627-663)
- 2.17 *Sack of Constantinople in 1204 and the Successor Principates – Byzantium without Constantinople?*  
Follow-up: Haldon, "Medieval Empire: 741-1453," *Byzantium* (pp. 33-52)
- Historical Overview Week 4: Late Byzantine State**
- 2.20 *Home Again, and Not: Reconquest, the Palaiologoi – Constantinople without Byzantium?*  
Follow-up: Reinert, "Fragmentation" (pp. 248-283)
- 2.22 *Sack of Constantinople in 1453, and after – Is this the End?*  
Follow-up: Review, Rethink
- 2.24 *Midterm Buffet: Oral Exam, Written Exam, Essay, or Other*

**PART II: Condensed “Method & Theory” Seminar (Discussion Format)**

- 2.27 (M) | **DISCUSSION:** What is space? What is place?  
How do we know where something happens? How do we know how? What is “mapping”?  
Have Read: M. de Certeau, “Spatial Stories” (selection)
- 3.01 (W) | **DISCUSSION:** Who makes space? Place? What is Movement? (Discussant: C. Cobb)  
Have Read: M. de Certeau, “Walking the City” (1984)
- 3.03 (F) | **DISCUSSION:** What is Constantinople’s Space? When?  
Have Read: Mango “The Disappearance and Revival of Cities” (1984)  
Herrin, “The City of Constantine” and “The Largest City in Christendom” (2007)  
Have Studied: Constantinople as Palimpsest (database); Byzantium1200
- 3.06 (M) | **DISCUSSION:** What is place, historically? Experientially? (Discussant: C. Cobb)  
Have Read: W. Benjamin, “Paris, Capital: 1935”
- 3.08 (W) | **DISCUSSION:** What is place in relationship to political power?  
Have Read: H. Lefebvre, “Space and the State” (1978)
- 3.10 (F) | **DISCUSSION:** What is the place, and space of Constantinople? What is its relationship to political power?  
Have Read: R. Ousterhout, “Constantinople and the Construction of an Urban Identity” (2010)
- DUE (Friday, 3.10): 3-page (single-spaced; ca. 2000 words) informed (readings-based) reflection:  
*What are we trying to do here, to accomplish?*  
*What do you envision?*  
*How will you walk the City?*  
*Why so?*

**SPRING BREAK**

**PART III: Project Time -- Creating and Mapping Your Own Content**

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| 3.27 (M) | <b><u>LECTURE:</u></b> "Monuments of the City": Surviving remains of the medieval capital, Constantinople  |
| 3.29 (W) | <b><u>CLASS EXERCISE:</u></b> Creating a "pin": the reading process, the thought process: The Obelisk of Theodosius<br><b><u>Have Read:</u></b> Texts of Processions (handout) |
| 3.31 (F) | <b><u>ORGANIZE:</u></b> Creating a "pin": the logistics. (Presenter: Nadja Shannon-Dabek)  |

**Process, Together**

Project Week 1  
(Topic: TBD)  
(M) 4.03, 4.05,  
4.07

For the month of April, this course will enter full "workshop" mode, where "students" become full collaborators. These weeks will proceed along the following pattern (subject to modification as needs arise).

**Each Week will have a "topic"**. This topic will have been decided based on a democratic process before Spring Break. (To give an example, a previous version of this course chose the following: *"Encounter the Holy": icons in and through the city; Statues and their settings; Everyday Life and Economy: Early Empire; Everyday Life and Economy: Later Empire*)

Project Week 2  
(Topic: TBD)  
(M) 4.10, 4.12,  
4.14

Based on this topic, over the weekend, each collaborator will study a (*short*) "primary source" reading that gives us something that can be "entered" into our Constantinople as Palimpsest database.

**On Mondays.** We will then discuss together how this item *should* be entered into the database as the "Professor's pin". All collaborators (students) will then receive their own assignments (if they have not found one themselves already).

**On Wednesdays.** Class will be devoted to workshopping individual or group research projects, and converting these into pins, lines, or polygons in the Constantinople as Palimpsest Database. The GIS Assistant (Nadja Shannon-Dabek), the TA (Connor Cobb), and Prof. Torgerson will work as resources and aids.

Project Week 3  
(Topic: TBD)  
(M) 4.17, 4.19  
4.21

**On Fridays.** By midnight (i.e., 12:00am, the very first minute of Friday), pins must be uploaded to the database.

Class later that morning will consist of brief (90-seconds each) presentations of each new pin added.

Collaborators will offer corrections, and suggest improvements. A general discussion will ensue.

Project Week 4  
(Topic: TBD)  
(M) 4.24, 4.26  
4.28

**Over the Weekend.** Pins updated (if needed) and finalized, based on the in-class suggestions from co-collaborators.

These finalized pins are due by end-of-day, Saturday. Collaborators will then grade each others' submissions based on a random assignment, and according to a rubric. Grading will take place by Monday morning's class.

Collaborators will study a new (*short*) "primary source" reading related to our next topic (as above).

The entire process then repeats.

