A brief history of the Byzantine Empire

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Wednesdays, April 18th - May 23rd
1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Room 124, Leeds House Building

Schedule of topics:

Week 1

The "Byzantine Empire"

Constantinople

Constantine the Great

Barbarians outside

Heretics inside

The emperor Constantine gave the Roman Empire a new capital city by turning Byzantium into Constantinople; he gave it a new state religion by adapting Christianity, an ecumenical religion for an ecumenical empire, as his own. And he took the decisive steps to both in 324.

Week 2

The Age of Justinian

Justinian and Theodora

Recover the rest of our Empire

The Codex Justinianus

The Greco-Roman Christian civilisation

The emperor Justinian made the last successful attempt to reunite under the rule of one man all the provinces of ancient Rome, to reconstitute the undivided and universal Empire of Augustus and the Caesars. Some have called it the last century of the Roman Empire.

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Week 3

The Threats from the East

Heraclius

Islam

Iconoclasm

Decline

When the emperor Heraclius mounted the throne in 610, the Byzantine Empire was still a recognizable approximation of what the Roman Empire had been. The Empire stretched from the Euphrates to Gibraltar, and within its boundaries the old Greco-Roman way of life continued.

Week 4

The Age of Conquest

A dominion without end

The "Macedonian Dynasty"

Expansion

Basil II

According to Byzantine imperial theory, the new rulers in Constantinople were the rightful inheritors of all the old Roman Imperial dominion, this universal Roman sovereignty over Europe and Asia. From the middle of the ninth century to the middle of the eleventh the Byzantine Empire attempted, the last time, to recover what was, in the sight and by the decree of God, their own.

Week 5

The disasters and survival

Manzikert

The Crusades

Hellenes and Romans

1204
In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Empire was put to its most severe test since the Arab wars and brought to the brink of extinction, but it emerged once more as guardian of Orthodoxy and of an antique tradition. In some ways the Empire, which Western Crusaders regarded as a tiresome and anachronistic survival from the ancient world, was the most youthful state in Europe.

Week 6

The siege and fall

Latin Empire

West and East

The Union

The Fall

The capture of Constantinople in 1204 by the Fourth Crusade disrupted the Christian East. The Greeks lost their capital city, but they did not surrender. They regained Constantinople in 1261 and their Emperor Michael VIII accepted the Latin faith, but their Church not. Facing the East, Byzantium had borne the brunt of the Arab and Turkish onslaughs. The fall of Constantinople was the tragic close of a long and glorious history.
**Recommended readings for continued learning:**


**Other interesting resources:**