

Byzantium: The Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages AD 500-1100

This course uncovers the dramatic story of Byzantium—the Eastern Roman Empire ruled from Constantinople—as it reshaped itself from an ancient empire into a vibrant medieval society. Far from being a pale shadow of Rome, Byzantium stands out as a unique case: a Graeco-Roman and multi-ethnic state that reinvented itself while western Europe and the Islamic world were moving in new directions.

We'll follow this world from its greatest territorial sweep under Justinian (AD 527–565), when the empire stretched from Spain to Mesopotamia, through the turbulence of the so-called “Dark Age,” and into the stunning revival and political expansion of the 9th–11th centuries. Along the way, we'll see how pilgrimage, monasticism, and Christian culture reshaped daily life.

Through archaeology, art, and contemporary texts, we'll trace shifting patterns of settlement, production, and trade. Our journey will take us to Ravenna, Venice, Cherson in the Crimea, and the rising capitals of Preslav and Kiev—sites where the legacy of Byzantium can still be felt today.

By the end, Byzantium will emerge not as a remnant of Rome, but as one of the most inventive and enduring powers of the medieval world.

Individual lectures:

1. General introduction to the period 500-1100
2. Cities from the End of Antiquity to the Middle Ages
3. Rural settlements and households
4. The Byzantine Dark Ages and Amorium
5. Byzantine Wall Paintings and Mosaics
6. Byzantine Pottery
7. Silver and ships