

ARCT/ARTH 364 | Byzantine Art and Architecture Spring 2026

Course Instructor: Dimitra Kotoula
CYA E-mail: dimitra.kotoula@cyathens.org

Course Description

The course aims to explore the Byzantine artistic production from its origins in the catacomb frescoes of second-century Rome and the Syro-Palaistine region, to the art produced during the last centuries of the empire. It aims to provide an introduction to the varied physical remains left behind by the Byzantines: architecture (urban as well as rural), painting (mural decoration, icon painting and manuscript illumination), luxury objects of the so-called minor arts, as well as objects destined for everyday use. The study of the material will not be confined to the examination of the evolving 'styles' and 'iconographies' –the pictorial languages of these artefacts- but also hopes to survey: a) the role of the image in Byzantium as a complex product of specific historical, social, theological and broader political influences considering its use both in religious and secular contexts; b) matters of gender and patronage; c) the cross-cultural exchanges in the Mediterranean basin during the Byzantine era. To what extent did art reflect the ideology of an empire that projected an image of timelessness and unchanging order, while, at the same time, accomplishing astonishing transformation and innovation that allowed it to compete with and relate to its neighbours to the East and the West at key moments in its long history?

Part of the course will examine the various ways through which the Byzantine culture influenced the new humanism of early-Renaissance Europe, as well as modern perceptions of Byzantium.

Class sessions combine lectures, discussions, and guided tours and focus on visual and literary material, in order to provide a holistic introduction to the culture of the Byzantines.

Course Approach

This course relies heavily both upon in-class lecturing and discussions as well as museum and site visits, field study and, if needed, active interaction with faculty and students from related disciplines as well as professionals in the arts. The students have the opportunity to access the material themselves and acquire first-hand experience of production methods and the technical means through which art becomes possible, while studying artworks in their original context. For example, visiting the collections of the Byzantine Museum helps the students contextualize artifacts discussed in class or known to them basically through the bibliography. Each artistic product is set within a group of diverse artifacts that reflect the particularities of their era of production, the ideologies that have influenced it, exposing the students, at the same time, to a wide array of curatorial proposals and trends that largely influence our perception and understanding of art. Thus, the students, working individually or in groups, can articulate the artifact as a product not only of specific socio-political and economic circumstances but also of a cultural and artistic milieu that is still very much present.

Learning Objectives

During this course, the students are expected to:

- understand the art object, its era and conditions of creation and production;
- contextualize the original use and later re-evaluation, appropriation, or even dismissal of the art object;
- familiarize oneself with diverse ways of thinking about, creating and displaying art, informed by a historical as well as anthropological approach to art;
- last but certainly not least, to draw analogies with the current era and think beyond the conventional way of art-historical thinking as well as acknowledge any tacit biases and prejudices in a critical and self-reflective manner.

Course Requirements

No previous knowledge of art history is required.

The requirements for this course (a 300 level CYA course) are:

- A mid-term exam (15% of the final grade)
- A critical review on a book chapter or article (15% of the final grade)
- Attendance, participation in class discussions, presentations, fieldtrips, museum or site visits and/or other short assignments (i.e. production of a museum/archive file for an art object, 20% of the final grade)
- A final exam (25% of the final grade)

- A final essay (25% of the final grade, around 2000 words, 4-5 pages if spacing is 1,5 and font size 12 Times New Roman)

Further details about the above requirements, as well as critical review, essay rubrics and evaluation criteria, will be given throughout the course.

Please note:

- A final paper of around 1000 words could be submitted, on condition that a short (up to 12 minutes) presentation is scheduled on any of the topics that will be discussed in class. This could be an individual or group presentation/discussion on a source, book, object, site related to the course that could be done in class or at a museum/site.
- Regular on-time attendance in class and on-site is obligatory. Unjustified absences are recorded and have consequences. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office. If such a case occurs, you are strongly advised to send an e-mail directly to me in the above e-mail address. Otherwise, your absence will be recorded.
- Close supervision and guidance (rubrics, bibliography, instructions on structure, content and style) will be provided for the essays and presentation. The visual material discussed in class, as well as the power points, will be available on-line (through Moodle).
- This is a 300level course. If you wish to take this course at 400level, additional readings and assignments will be required, after consultation with the instructor.

Policy on Original Work

Plagiarism is literary theft. As such, it is a serious offense which will not be tolerated either at your home institution or at CYA. Plagiarism on an examination or in a paper will result in an F for the course. You must cite the author of any and all ideas that you use that is neither common knowledge nor your own idea. If you are in doubt, it is safest to cite the source. Your work should be original and reflect your own ideas and thoughts. If you are unsure about what counts as original work, please consult your professor and check the Student Handbook.

Use of Laptops

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

CYA Attendance Policy

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential, so attendance at all scheduled meetings is required. All absences are recorded and have consequences that may affect your grade. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office, via the form available in the Student Portal.

Academic Accommodations

Students are required to submit an official letter from the office at their school that handles academic accommodations (generally the Office of Disability Services), or to have that office send a letter. Students who have submitted such a letter to CYA should also talk to their professors individually to discuss how these accommodations will work in each specific course.

Course Materials

Course books

R. Cormack, Byzantine Art, Oxford 2000.

J. Lowden, Early Christian and Byzantine Art, London 1997.

L. Rodley, Byzantine Art and Architecture, Cambridge 1994

Please, consult primarily the above two on cultural and artistic issues.

Dictionaries/Handbooks

Late Antiquity, A Guide to the Postclassical World, G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar (eds), Cambridge, Mass., London (Harvard University Press) 1999.

The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies, E. Jeffreys, R. Cormack, J. Haldon (eds), Oxford 2008.

A Companion to Byzantium, L. James (ed.), London (Blackwell) 2010.

The Byzantine World, P. Stevenson (ed.), London (Routledge) 2010.

The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity, O. Nicholson (ed.), Oxford (OUP), 2018.

Please note that for each class additional updated bibliography will be available online (through moodle)

Class Schedule

Day #	Date	Day / Field Study / Holiday
	Jan 22-24	FS Delphi & Ancient Olympia
1	Jan 26	Introduction: a general introduction to an empire, which negotiated its survival over the course of a millennium. Overview of the massive changes in society, culture, religion, as well as in geography and ideology during the course of these centuries. Part of the class will be devoted to a short introduction to key terms that will be used regularly throughout the course.
2	Jan 28	Defining Byzantine Art-Exhibiting Byzantium: what is our perception of Byzantium nowadays? How do we define Byzantium and how did the Byzantines define themselves and their culture? Readings: Cormack, pp. 1-6. Lowden, pp. 4-8. Further reading: -R. Nelson, 'Living on the Byzantine borders of Western art', Gesta 35(1996), pp. 3-10. -H. Maguire, 'Byzantine art history in the second half of the twentieth century', in A.E. Laiou, H. Maguire (eds), Byzantium: A world civilization, Washington DC 1992, pp. 119-55.
		The Clash of Gods: the 'new' art of the 'new' Roman Empire: what were the origins of Byzantine art? The class aims to explore in two sessions the so-called 'Byzantine question', whether the origins of Byzantine art could be traced to the art of the East or the West. Special attention will be given to the nature and role of the icon in Byzantium as a complex product of specific historical, theological, political and broader cultural significances.
3	Jan 30	1. From the mummy portrait to the Byzantine icon. Readings: -Thomas F. Mathews, The Art of Byzantium, London 1998, pp. 43-71. -The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies, E. Jeffreys, R. Cormack, J. Haldon (eds), Oxford 2008, pp. 758-69 (M. Vassilaki, Icons). -Byzantium 330-1453, R. Cormack, M. Vassilaki (eds), London 2008, pp. 250-54 (N. Chatzidaki, Icons). Further readings: L.Ouspensky, Theology of the icon, New York 1988, pp. 39-59. H. Belting, Likeness and Presence: A history of the Image before the Era of Art, Chicago 1994, pp. 78-101.
4	Feb 2	2. The origins of Christian iconography. Readings: Cormack, pp. 12-35. Lowden, pp. 11-33. Further reading: -Byzantium 330-1453, R. Cormack, M. Vassilaki (eds), London 2008, pp. 46-50 (Th.F. Mathews, The Beginnings of Christian Art). -Thomas F. Mathews, The Clash of Gods, Princeton 1993, pp. 3-22. - J. Elsner, Art and the Roman viewer, Cambridge 1995, pp. 271-287 (for the decoration in the catacombs).
		From Constantine to Justinian: Christian art in the service of a Christian society: the class aims to examine in three sessions and one museum visit the crystallization of Christian art as the official artistic expression of the newly-founded empire.
5	Feb 4	1. Constantine's city: examining the topography, embellishment and character of the new capital of Byzantium. How cosmopolitan Constantinople was? Its Classical/pagan past and Christian present, or, rather, vice versa? Readings: Cormack, pp. 6-12 and 37-41. Lowden, pp. 63-71. Thomas F. Mathews, The Art of Byzantium, London, 1998, pp. 16-41. Further reading: -H.G. Beck, 'Constantinople. The rise of a new capital in the east', in Age of Spirituality, A Symposium, K. Weitzmann (ed.), New York 1980, mainly 29ff. -C. Mango, 'Antique sanctuary and the Byzantine beholder', Dumbarton Oaks Papers 17(1963), pp. 55-75.

		-L. James, 'Pray not to fall into temptation and be on your guard: pagan statues in Christian Constantinople', <i>Gesta</i> 35(1996), pp. 12-20.
6	Feb 9	Visit to the Benaki Museum of Greek Art or the Byzantine Museum
	Feb 11-14	FS Northern Greece Visit to the Thessaloniki Churches of Hagios Dimitrios, Hagios Georgios (the Rotunda), the Acheiropoietos and Hagia Sophia <i>Strolling through Thessaloniki, for several centuries the second most important city of the Byzantine Empire, offers the unique opportunity to visit some of the most important monuments of the Late Antique and Byzantine world, all listed, like Daphni, Hosios Loukas and Mistras, as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The surviving mosaic and frescoes offer a vast colourful panorama of maybe some of the most recognizable and representative images of the Byzantium from as early as the 4th up until the 14th centuries.</i> (Bibliography: -E. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou, A. Tourta, <i>Wandering in Byzantine Thessaloniki, Athens: Kapon Editions, 1997</i> - <i>Mosaics of Thessaloniki, Ch. Bakirtzis, E. Kourkoutidou - Nikolaidou, Ch. Mavropoulou - Tsioumi (eds), Athens 2012.</i> - <i>The Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited, Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (eds), Athens 2017.</i>)
7	Feb 16	2. The emperor as a founder: imperial patronage in the 6th century: a thorough examination of the artistic production during the Justinian era that largely shaped the development of Byzantine art. How did the Byzantine emperor promulgate and maintain the ideology of the empire through art? Readings: Cormack, pp. 54-62. Lowden, pp. 127-135 (S. Vitale). Further reading: -R. Krautheimer, <i>Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture</i> , London 1986, pp. 259-271. -I. Andressu-Treadgold and W. Treadgold, 'Procopius and the imperial panels of S. Vitale', <i>Art Bulletin</i> 79(1997), pp. 708-23. -J. Elsner, <i>Art and the Roman viewer</i> , Cambridge 1995, pp. 177-189 (for the mosaics of Ravenna).
8	Feb 18	3. Towards an international art: pilgrimage to holy loci: the art of the people. To what extent Byzantine was a 'popular' art? Readings: Cormack, pp. 48-54. Lowden, pp. 72-79. <i>Byzantium 330-1453</i> , R. Cormack, M. Vassilaki (eds), London, 2008, pp. 358-363 (M. Vassilaki, R. Cormack, <i>The Monastery of St Catherine at Sinai</i>). Further reading: -P. Maraval, 'The development of holy sites in the Byzantine Orient between the 4 th and the 7 th c.', in <i>Egeria, Monuments of Faith in the Medieval Mediterranean</i> , Athens 2008, pp. 27-36. -K. Weitzmann, <i>Studies in the arts at Sinai</i> , Princeton 1982, pp. 5-19 (The mosaic of St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai). - <i>The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies</i> , E. Jeffreys, R. Cormack, J. Haldon (eds), Oxford 2008, pp. 741-749 (J. Elsner, <i>Art and pilgrimage</i>).
	Feb 23	Clean Monday [National Holiday - no Classes]
		Icon or Idol? Byzantine Iconoclasm: what was Byzantine iconoclasm about? The class examines in three sessions, the origins, history and development of 'image-breaking' in Byzantium. Similarities and differences between the Byzantine and later iconoclasms will also be examined.
9	Feb 25	1. Byzantine Iconoclasm I. Readings: Cormack, pp. 86-102. Lowden, pp. 147-184.
10	Feb 27	2. Byzantine Iconoclasm II. Further reading: -Glenn Peers, 'Icons' Spirited Love', <i>Religion and the Arts</i> 13(2009), 218-247. -R. Cormack, <i>Writing in Gold</i> , London 1985, pp. 95-140. -J. Elsner, 'Image and iconoclasm in Byzantium', <i>Art History</i> 11(1988), pp. 471-91. -E. Kitzinger, 'The cult of images in the age before iconoclasm', <i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> 8(1954), pp. 83-150. -O. Grabar, 'Islamic art and iconoclasm', <i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> 18(1964), pp. 69-88.
11	Mar 2	3. Byzantine Iconoclasm III. Debate: Iconophiles versus Iconoclasts.
12	Mar 4	The rediscovery of image after iconoclasm: the 'Macedonian Renaissance'. Still haunted by the classical past? Renaissance and renaissances in Byzantium. The class challenges contemporary and later receptions of the art of the Byzantines questioning the role of art history in study of Byzantine culture.

		<p>Readings: Cormack, pp. 129-142. Lowden, pp. 199-210 (for the manuscript production of the period). K. Weitzmann, 'The survival of mythological representations in Early Christian and Byzantine art and their impact on Christian iconography', <i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> 14(1960), pp. 45-68. Further reading: -H. Maguire, 'Epigrams, art and the 'Macedonian Renaissance'', <i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> 48(1994), pp. 105-15. -C.R. Morey, 'The Byzantine Renaissance', <i>Speculum</i> 2(1939), pp. 139-159.</p>
	Mar 5	Day Trip
13	Mar 9	<p>Displaying Byzantium in and outside Byzantium: the imperial use of art. The class examines the art produced by and for the imperial court as well as its use as a means for the empire to maintain its cultural and political integrity. Readings: Cormack, pp. 117-129. Lowden, pp. 188-199. Rodley, pp. 151-163. Further reading: -R. Cormack, 'Interpreting the mosaics of S. Sophia at Istanbul', <i>Art History</i> 4 (1981), pp. 131-49. -R. Cormack, <i>Writing in Gold</i>, London 1985, pp. 179-214. -The Glory of Byzantium, H.C. Evans, W.D. Wixom (eds), New York, 1997, pp. 182-192 (H. Maguire, Images of the court). -The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies, E. Jeffreys, R. Cormack, J. Haldon (eds), Oxford 2008, pp. 505-517 (J. Featherstone, Emperor and court).</p>
14	Mar 11	Midterms
		<p>The Middle Byzantine Church/the Monastery. The class examines in two sessions and a visit to the Daphni Monastery in Athens, religious, cultural and political issues related to the establishment and development of Byzantine monastic communities throughout the empire. Issues of gender and patronage will also be addressed in relation to the foundation of monastic communities both by religious and lay patrons.</p>
15	Mar 16	<p>1. Readings: Cormack, pp. 145-163. -The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies, E. Jeffreys, R. Cormack, J. Haldon (eds), Oxford, 2008, pp. 611-630 (J. McGuckin, Monasticism and monasteries and pp. 731-740 N.P. Sevcenko, Art and Liturgy). - J. Thomas, 'Imperial and Royal monasteries of the twelfth century', in <i>Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents</i>, pp. 607-620 on line on www.doaks.org -R. Ousterhout, 'Architecture, Art and Komnenian Ideology at the Pantokrator Monastery' in N. Necipoglou (ed.), <i>Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life</i>, (Brill, 2001), 133-153. -Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents (Typika) in the www.doaks.org webpage.</p>
	Mar 18-21	FS Abroad
16	Mar 23	<p>2. Outside Constantinople: the monasteries of Hosios Loukas in Phocis, Nea Moni in Chios and Daphni, Athens. Readings: Cormack, pp. 163-175. Lowden, pp. 229-270. R. Krautheimer, <i>Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture</i>, London 1986, pp. 379-94. The Glory of Byzantium, H.C. Evans, W.D. Wixom (eds), New York 1997, pp. 20-35 (T.F. Mathews, Religious Organization and Church Architecture). Further reading: -A. Wharton-Epstein, 'The middle Byzantine sanctuary barrier: Templon or Iconostasis?' in <i>JBAA</i>, 134 (1981), 1-28. -D. Mouriki, 'Stylistic trends in monumental painting of Greece during the 11th and the 12th centuries', <i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> 34-5(1980-1), pp. 77-124. -N.P. Sevcenko, 'Icons in the liturgy', <i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> 45(1991), pp. 45-57. -H. Belting, 'An image and its function in the liturgy: the Man of Sorrows in Byzantium', <i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> 34-5(1980-1), pp. 1-16. -E. James, 'Monks, monastic art, the sanctoral cycle and the Middle Byzantine church', in M. Mullet, A. Kirby (eds), <i>The Theotokos Evergetis and 11th-c Monasticism</i>, Belfast 1994, pp. 169-75.</p>
	Mar 25	Greek Independence Day [National Holiday - no Classes]
17	Mar 30	Visit to Byzantine church/es in Athens
		<p>The art of the Crusades: understanding the 'new realities'. What were really the Crusades about? The class aims to investigate in three sessions the military campaigns of the Crusaders, the art produced during the period, as</p>

		well as the role of Byzantium both as an ally and as a price of conquest for the Crusader Kingdoms. How crucial the social and political role of the art during the period was? How far Crusader art was an artistic hybrid?
18	Apr 1	<p>Readings: Byzantium 330-1453, R. Cormack, M. Vassilaki (eds), London 2008, pp. 275-306 (M. Bacci, Byzantium and the West). Cormack, pp. 187-194. K. M. Setton, A history of the Crusades, 6 vols, Madison-London, 1969-1989 (vol. 4, The art and architecture of the Crusader states, Madison, 1977). The Glory of Byzantium, H.C. Evans, W.D. Wixom (eds), New York 1997, pp. 388-391 (J. Folda, Crusader art). Further reading: - D. Jacoby, Studies on the Crusader states and on Venetian expansion, Northampton, Variorum Reprints, 1989. -J. Folda, The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, Cambridge, 1995. -J. Harris, Byzantium and the Crusades, London 2003, pp. 145-163. -Mediterranean Gothic Architecture, Athens 2007, pp. 75-157.</p>
	Apr 3-13	Spring Break [no classes]
19	Apr 15	<p>Readings: Lowden, pp. 349-385. J. Folda, 'The figural arts in Crusader Syria and Palestine, 1187-1291: Some new realities, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 58 (2004), 315-331. Further reading: - J. Folda, 'The Freiburg Leaf: crusader art and Loca Sancta around the year 1200, in P. Edbury-J. Phillips, The experience of Crusading, Cambridge, 2003, 113-134. - L-A. Hunt, 'A Woman's prayer to St Sergios in Latin Syria: interpreting a thirteenth-century icon at Mount Sinai', in Byzantium, Eastern Christendom ad Islam, vol. 2, London, 2000, 78-126. -A. Weyl-Carr, 'Byzantines and Italians on Cyprus: Images from art', Dumbarton Oaks Papers 49(1995), pp. 237-67. -K. Weitzmann, 'Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdoms', Dumbarton Oaks Papers 20 (1966), 325-86. -The Glory of Byzantium, H.C. Evans, W.D. Wixom (eds), New York 1997, pp. 434-450 (W.D. Wixom, Byzantine art and the Latin West).</p>
20	Apr 20	Crusades III: Towards the end.
	Apr 22-24	FS Peloponnese
21	Apr 27	<p>After Byzantium: Rebirth? Modern perceptions of Byzantium I. How did far the art and culture of the Byzantines influence the new humanism of early-Renaissance Europe? The class will also focus on the various perceptions of Byzantium in the modern times. Readings: -R. Cormack, Painting the soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds, London 1997, pp. 167-217. -Byzantium: Faith and Power, H.C. Evans (ed.), New York 2004, pp. 489-495 (M. Georgopoulou, Venice and the Byzantine sphere). -M. Georgopoulou, 'Late Medieval Crete and Venice: An appropriation of Byzantine heritage', Art Bulletin 77(1995), 479-96. -N. Chatzidakis, Venetiae quasi alterum Byzantium: From Candia to Venice: Greek Icons in Italy, 15th-16th c., Athens 1993- the Introduction. - J. B. Bullen, 'Byzantinism and Modernism', The Burlington Magazine, vol. 141, no. 1160 (Nov. 1999), 665-675. - K. Kourelis, 'Byzantium and the Avant-garde', Hesperia, vol. 76, no. 2 (April-June 2007), 391-442.</p>
22	Apr 29	Visit to the Byzantine Museum or the Church of Little Metropolis, Athens
23	May 4	After Byzantium: Rebirth? Modern perceptions of Byzantium II.
24	May 6	REVISION CLASS
	May 11-14	Final Exam Week

A Field trip to Daphni Monastery, Attica (3h) could be organized as part of this course: Visit to the monastery of Daphni, Attica. Besides the architecture and the art –the monastery preserves some of the most recognizable images of Byzantium, such as the Pantokrator mosaic in the dome- its history and the circumstances surrounding its establishment will be discussed, since these reflect the fate of the empire itself: the transition from paganism to Christianity, the period of stability and growth in the 10th/11th centuries, the Crusades and their impact, the last years of Byzantium, the period of the Ottoman Occupation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

(Bibliography:

- Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, Oxford 2000, pp. 163-175.

- Ernest Diez and Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece. Hosios Lucas & Daphni*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931)]