

HIST/ARTH 347 | The Worlds of Medieval Greece: Tracing Byzantine, Islamicate, Slavic, Jewish, and Frankish heritages in the Aegean Fall 2026

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Course Description

Was there life in Greece after the Classics? What happened to the Greek lands after the Classical period and until Early Modern times? Who were the Byzantines and why did they call themselves Romans? And if Byzantines identified themselves as Romans, then who were the Latins from Italy, France and the rest of Western Europe who conquered much of Greece in the 13th century? What were the fortunes of the indigenous Jewish communities in Greece during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages and how the expulsion of Jews from Spain in the 15th century resulted in a sprawling Jewish community in Thessaloniki? Did you know that an Islamic Emirate ruled much of the Aegean for two centuries? And that many placenames even in the southmost of Greece originate from the Slavic language spoken by migrating population in these areas in the early Middle Ages? Or that the Ottoman sultan in 15th c. Istanbul was regarded by many Greek speaking as the continuation of the Byzantine emperor?

The course examines the history and material culture of Greece during the expanded Middle Ages from the 4th to the 16th century by focusing of the different cultures and ethnic groups that flourished on the lands of modern-day Greece. We will follow the historical evolution from the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, through the remarkable growth of Late Antique culture to the great crisis that the Great Migrations in the Balkans and the Rise of Islam in the East initiated during the 7th century. We will trace the traditions of the Greek speaking Romaniote Jews and the newly arrived in the 15th century Sephardic Jews in Greece. We will hear the subaltern voices of the non-Greek and non-Roman Slavic populations or the Arab raiders that settled in the Peloponnese and the Aegean during the Early Middle Ages. We will see in detail the *Reconquista* effort of the official Byzantine/Roman state to rule back and control the lands of Greece by Christianization and military force and the subsequent period of the Greek High Middle Ages (10th-12th c). We will move on to the Crusades period and the Latin presence in the Greek peninsula in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade (1204) and the division of the Byzantine lands among Frankish princes and Italian states. Finally, we will reach the times collapse of Byzantine and Latin rule in the wake of Ottoman conquest and the Early Modern formation of the Balkans. In addition to in-class lectures and discussions, the course will also include substantial on-site teaching, with field trips to archaeological sites and museums evidencing the presence of these groups in Medieval Greece and marking their material culture and historical heritage (such as the Byzantine and Christian Museum and the Benaki Museum in Athens, the Athens Acropolis and Roman Agora, the Byzantine monastery of Delphi).

Learning Goals

This course will introduce students to the history and archaeology of the Middle Ages in the Greek peninsula and its wider area and primarily teach them to:

- Identify forms of material and ideological representation by Byzantine, Latin, Slavic and Arab medieval societies as they develop in the wider Aegean region.
- Enrich their understanding of the Middle Ages as a global phenomenon that overarches beyond the confine of euro-centric narration.
- Explain the value of Greek Middle Ages both for its contemporaries and for our world today, as a crossroad between Southeast Europe, Middle East and North Africa.
- Use textual and material evidence to understand the Middle Ages in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond.
- Examine the way the Greek landscapes and urbanscapes change in a millennium-long process.
- Analyze and evaluate the diverse ways in which different populations in different time-frames express their culture and ideas.
- Reflect on the value of co-existence or understand the mechanisms of confrontation between the medieval polities and the various ethnic groups.
- Problematize over the uses and abuses of Medieval history and archaeology in the national and international confrontations of today.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Worlds of Medieval Greece is designed for students of all levels, some background in history or art history would be desirable but not a pre-requisite.

Attendance, Class Contribution, and Moodle posts 25% – Attendance at all scheduled meetings is required. Class Contribution includes physical and mental presence in the classroom, arriving on time, preparation, participation in class

discussions, and posting occasionally on the moodle forum. Reading assignments are to be completed before each class session. CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential. 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.

Midterm 20% – Identification of images and monuments shown in class; analysis of historical sources in translation; and evaluation of select historical events.

Two Written Assignments 30% – Topics and instructions will be given in advance. 3-5 pages each.

Final 25% – Identification of images and monuments shown in class; analysis of historical sources in translation; and evaluation of select historical events.

Class contribution is one of the most important factors for determining your grade for the semester. I expect all of you to come prepared, engage in our discussions, ask questions, and voice your opinions in class. If you are extremely uncomfortable speaking in front of a large group of students, you may send your opinions or afterthoughts in writing via email. If you never participate in class and do not send any thoughts by email, your contribution grade will be low.

Details about assignments and exams will be given in advance. I will accept no late assignments or make-up exams unless discussed with me in [advance](#). If you are unable to come to class, please let me know beforehand.

CYA Regulations and Accommodations

Attendance Policy

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential. 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, via the form available in the Student Portal.

Policy on Original Work / Plagiarism

Plagiarism is literary theft. As such, it is a serious offence 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. (Check the Student Handbook).

Policy on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In this course, Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Grammarly, etc.) are recognized as supportive resources, but they cannot replace your own critical thinking, historical analysis, and engagement with the material culture of the medieval Eastern Mediterranean.

Permitted Uses: You are permitted to use AI tools as an assistant for the early stages of your work. This includes brainstorming paper topics, organizing outlines, overcoming writer's block, and checking grammar, syntax, or spelling.

Prohibited Uses: The core objective of our written assignments and exams is to develop your own academic voice. Therefore, you are strictly prohibited from using AI to generate the text of your essays or to analyze historical sources. Furthermore, you must not use AI for bibliographic research; AI language models frequently fabricate ("hallucinate") historical facts, dates, and non-existent academic citations. You are fully responsible for the factual accuracy and validity of any information you submit.

Transparency and Grading Impact: If you use an AI tool in the preparation of your assignments (even for permitted uses like outlining or grammar), you must transparently disclose it. Please include a brief footnote or acknowledgement at the end of your paper detailing which tool was used and exactly how it assisted you.

If a specific AI use is not expressly addressed in this syllabus, you must assume that it is NOT allowed and you should consult with me before proceeding. Presenting AI-generated text as your own original work is fundamentally dishonest and constitutes academic plagiarism. In accordance with CYA regulations, plagiarism on an examination or in a paper will result in an F for the course. If there is suspicion that AI was improperly used, you may be asked to orally explain and defend your submitted work.

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.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Class Day	Day/Date/ Place	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due
1	Mon, Sep 7	Introduction to the course and the syllabus In the first meeting of our course, we will have the opportunity to be better introduced and discuss the aims of our course and the method in order to achieve it.

2	Wed, Sep 9	<p>What is into the Middle Ages: Late Antiquity, Dark and Middle Ages: names and their meanings. (<i>Transition to Christianity Exhibition Catalogue</i>, 21-36; Herrin, <i>Margins and Metropolis</i>, ch. 1)</p> <p>What is really the period we call 'Late Antiquity' and how does it relate or precede the 'Middle Ages'? Even more what is so 'Dark' about the 'Dark Ages'? In this second introductory class, we will discuss in detail the way we are using periodization and how do we ascribe names to the medieval past, especially in connection with the lands of the Greek peninsula.</p>
3	Mon, Sep 14	<p>A general introduction to post-classical Greece (Curta, <i>History of the Greeks</i>, ch. 1)</p> <p>In our third class we will explore the main characteristics of post-classical and Late Antique Greece from the 4th to the 6th century CE as part of our understanding of a changing world. We will discuss the cities and provinces of Greece and some of the main monuments that shed light to the society of the period.</p>
4	Wed, Sep 16	<p>Urban character of Late Antique Greece: visit at the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens</p> <p>Our class will be held as part of a visit at the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, that holds one of the richest collections world-wide of Eastern Roman, Byzantine and Medieval artifacts from the general area of Greece.</p>
5	Mon, Sep 21	<p>Jewish culture in Late Antique Greece (De Lange, <i>Jews in the Byzantine Empire</i>)</p> <p>In the melting pot of Late Antiquity the Jewish community of Greece, Greek-speaking and with deep roots in the local society, the later-called Romaniotes, played an important role, sometimes antagonistic to emerging Christianity, other times complementary to the culture of the new empire. In this class we will examine some of the better known and documented Jewish communities in Late Antique Greece and their monuments.</p>
6	Wed, Sep 23	<p>Late Antiquity Crisis and Natural Disasters: the Great 365 CE Earthquake (Kelly, <i>Great Tsunami</i>; Stefanakis, <i>Archaeoseismology</i>)</p> <p>The Eastern Roman Empire and the Late Antique Mediterranean constituted a cultural and political space that from the 4th century to the 6th century flourished and exhibited a remarkable resilience. Some of the major adversities faced by the Empire came from the natural world and the challenging environmental threats, showing the close relationship between social and environmental. In this class we examine the results of the most severe seismic sequence recorded in historical times, that of the 365 CE earthquake that dealt a strong blow to societies and settlements across the Eastern Mediterranean. As part of our class we will discuss in detail one of the few cities from mainland Greece that the effects of the 365 earthquake were severe and can be archaeological documented,</p>
7	Mon, Sep 28	<p>Late Antiquity Crisis and the Environmental factor: the Justinianic Plague (Meier, <i>Justinianic Plague</i>; Mordechai & Eisenberg, <i>Rejecting Catastrophe</i>)</p> <p>As part of our exploration of the nature of the Crisis of the Late Antique world in this class we will examine one of the most famous pandemics of historical times before the Great Plague, the Justinianic Plague that hit the Byzantine Empire in the middle sixth century and its results in the society and culture of the times.</p>
8	Wed, Sep 30	<p>A post-Roman world - Late Antiquity Crisis and the Great Migrations and the collapse of Byzantine rule south of the Danube (Wright, <i>Barbarian Tides</i>, Haldon, <i>Fate of Late Roman Elite</i>, Pohl, <i>Rome and the Barbarians</i>)</p> <p>We continue exploring the nature of Crisis in the Late Antique world and we move from the natural environment to the issue of ethnic migration and displacement. The Great Migrations is a European-wide phenomenon that has been largely identified as definitive in the shaping of Europe in the Middle Ages and all the way to today. Further on, in this class we are examining how the various factors of Crisis affected the Eastern Roman Empire and especially its Balkan provinces and the Greek peninsula. Demographic and social change along with a huge change in the role that urban centers had for the Empire will be put in scrutiny.</p>
9	Mon, Oct 5	<p>Non-Romans and Post-Romans in 7th and 8th c.: Slavs in Greece (Curta, <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i>; Curta, <i>History of the Greeks</i>, ch. 4; Vryonis, <i>Slavic Society</i>)</p> <p>By the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th century the numerous episodes of conquest and expansion of the Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire seemed to be a faded memory. The Empire is at the verge of collapse and areas traditionally part of the core lands were now being lost or abandoned. In our 10th class we are examining the process of dissolution of Byzantine rule in Greece and the emergence of new social structures with the appearance of migrating populations from the North. We will be following the process of how Greece from a peaceful province becomes the Wild West of Byzantium.</p>
10	Mon, Oct 12	<p>The Rise of Islam in Eastern Mediterranean. Arab-Byzantine wars: the never-ending frontier (Eger, <i>Sowing the Teeth</i>)</p> <p>In the 7th century a new important player in the political, ideological and religious scene of the Mediterranean world appears, Islam. With its origins in the Arabic peninsula and after the unification of a number of arabic tribes an Arab Muslim political entity appeared with claims of much wide dominion. Islam spread through military conquest, trade, pilgrimage, and missionaries. Arab Muslim forces conquered vast territories and built imperial</p>

structures over time. Most of the significant expansion occurred during the reign of the Rashidun from 632 to 661 CE, which was the reign of the first four successors of Muhammad. Much of its early spread happened in encounters with the Byzantines that up to that moment ruled most of Eastern Mediterranean. A new frontier was created by the 7th and 8th century that span across much of Asia Minor and the Middle East.

11	Wed, Oct 14	<p>Islamic presence in the Aegean: Emirate of Crete and its monuments (Randazzo, <i>Islamic Emirate of Crete</i>)</p> <p>Despite Byzantine dominance in the Aegean archipelagos the repeating attacks of the Islamic Caliphate's navies in the 7th and 8th century managed to secure certain dominions for the new empire from the East. The largest island of the Aegean, Crete, along with some smaller locales in the Cyclades and the Peloponnese from the late 820s become parts of Islamic expansion and the establishment of the Emirate of Crete, a little-known Arabic enclave in the Aegean. In this class we will examine the unknown history of the Emirate and the new conditions that the co-existence of Muslim and Christian populations in the island created.</p>
12	Mon, Oct 19	<p>Midterm Exam</p>
13	Wed, Oct 21	<p>Empire Strikes Back: The Byzantine Reconquista (Anagnostakis, Byzantium and Hellas; Curta, <i>History of the Greeks</i>, ch. 5; Herrin, <i>Margins and Metropolis</i>, ch. 2)</p> <p>In this class of ours after the break, we will examine the conditions pertaining to the re-establishment of Byzantine authority onto mainland Greece and the Aegean. After a long period that non-Roman populations settled areas of Greece while other regions fell to the hands of the Arabs, the Byzantine from the 9th century on mount a military, political and ideological initiative of re-conquering the Greek lands and establishing it again as a Roman/Byzantine province.</p>
14	Mon, Nov 2	<p>Medieval Christianity: The Soft Power of Byzantine presence in Greece (Walker, <i>Hosios Loukas</i>; Connor, <i>Hosios Loukas</i>; Cormack, <i>Daphni</i>)</p> <p>In this class we will discuss the role of Christianity and medieval orthodox missionaries in establishing Byzantine authority onto Greece. Centrally positioned in this discussion were important monasteries of the 10th and 11th centuries created in frontier zones that facilitated the creation of a new Byzantine hierarchical society. VISIT TO DAPHNI monastery</p>
15	Wed, Nov 4	<p>Middle Byzantine Greece: Economic Expansion and Artistic growth in the 11th-12th c. (Curta, <i>History of the Greeks</i>, ch. 6; Herrin, <i>Margins and Metropolis</i>, ch. 3)</p> <p>In this class we will examine the ways that Byzantine presence in Greece was signaled through economic expansion and re-integration of the Greek lands to a wider network represented by the new medieval version of the Byzantine Empire. New urban centers, cities of old, like Athens and Thebes re-emerge with a completely different character setting the tempo of artistic and cultural process in the Greek peninsula.</p>
16	Mon, Nov 9	<p>Byzantine Athens at a Time of Resurgence (Site visit)</p> <p>In this class we will visit some of the seminal Byzantine monuments of the city of Athens like the old Metropolis of Panagia Gorgoepikoos or the Kapnikarea church and discuss at site the Middle Byzantine expansion on mainland Greece.</p>
17	Mon, Nov 16	<p>Crusades and Crusaders in the East: stories and monuments (Riley-Smith, <i>History of Crusades</i>, ch. 1)</p> <p>The Middle Ages in the Eastern Mediterranean are marked after the 11th century by a much wider trend, the effort of western European Christian powers to create a foothold in the wealthy Levantine lands. This takes the form of Holy War and the name of the Crusades, with a proclaimed aim to liberate the Holy Lands from Muslim domination and create new Christian kingdoms in the Syro-palestine. In this class we will offer a general introduction to the Crusades and their aftermath in the region connecting once again the history and archaeology of the Greek lands with the European and Mediterranean medieval history.</p>
18	Wed, Nov 18	<p>The Fourth Crusade in 1204 and the unmaking of Byzantine Greece (Wickham, <i>Medieval Europe</i>, ch. 9; Riley-Smith, <i>Understanding the 4th Crusade</i>; Tsougarakis, <i>Latins in Greece</i>; Georgopoulou, <i>The Landscape of Medieval Greece</i>)</p> <p>For students of Byzantine history and culture the Fourth Crusade remains the most decisive for the evolution of the Eastern Roman State. In 1204 the campaigning through Byzantium western Latin forces after plotting and liminal decision making instead of attacking the Holy Lands they turned against the Byzantines, laying siege and capturing the capital city of Constantinople. This translated into a completely new situation for the geographical region of Greece as it was divided among the victors into smaller principalities and kingdoms, initiating Latin rule and the establishment of Latin elites into different regions of Greece. In this class we will examine the mechanisms of creation of these new Latin Greek states and their politics between them and with the remaining Byzantine Greek lands.</p>
19	Mon, Nov 23	<p>Frankish Peloponnese and South Greece: Latin Knights and Lords of a Greek Population (Shawcross, <i>Chronicle of Morea</i>, 1-30; Haines, <i>Songbook for William of Villehardouin</i>; Athanasoulis, <i>The</i></p>

triangle of power)

As a main episode of Latin Greece from the 13th and up to the 15th c. the most appealing often comes up the setting of the Principality of Morea (Peloponnese) by French princes establishing a court and planting cultural and administrative practices coming from mainland France. In this class we will focus on the cultural output of the Principality of Morea and examine the hybrid character of a Greco-Latin medieval feudal society.

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| 20 | Wed, Nov 25 | <p>The Regno di Candia: A Venetian Medieval Colony in Crete (Maltezou, <i>Crete under Venetian Rule</i>; Georgopoulou, <i>Venice's Colony</i>, ch. 2; Gratziou, <i>Cretan Architecture</i>)</p> <p>A different type of Latin dominion emerged mostly in the insular world of the Archipelago of the Aegean. In these areas a number of colonies by the emerging maritime superpower of the times, north-italian city of Venice, were established. Among these colonies the most renown and long-standing became the Kingdom of Crete, a venetian puppet-state, that endured for more than four centuries from early-thirteenth and until mid-seventeenth century. In this class we will examine the creation of the Kingdom of Crete and the rich artistic and cultural production of the island through the centuries.</p> |
| 21 | Mon, Nov 30 | <p>Beyond the Romaioi: Minorities, Encounters, and Coexistence in the Late Byzantine World (Georgopoulou, <i>Mapping Religious and Ethnic Identities</i>, Starr, <i>Athinganoi</i>, Soulis, <i>Gypsies in Byzantium</i>, Shukurov, <i>Byzantine Turks</i>)</p> <p>Although the Mediterranean world was in a constant state of political flux during the Late Middle Ages, the Greek lands remained deeply diverse. The Late Byzantine period was not a monolithic, exclusively Orthodox Greek society, but a vibrant, fragmented space where religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities negotiated their survival and identity. In this class, we will move beyond the traditional <i>Romaioi</i> narrative to examine the fortunes of the Romaniote Jewish communities, the nomadic Roma/Athinganoi, and the growing presence of Turkic/Muslim elements within the boundaries of the late Empire. We will explore how these groups interacted with the state, contributed to the urban and economic landscapes, and shaped the complex social realities of medieval Greece.</p> |
| 22 | Wed, Dec 2 | <p>The Rise of the Ottomans and the Unification of the Balkans (Kafadar, <i>Between two worlds</i>, ch. 1)</p> <p>The end of Medieval Greece comes with a completely new political reality and the con-quest of the entire Balkans area by the new great power of the 15th century, the Ottoman Turks. In this class we will try to understand the realities of Ottoman expansion in the Greek lands and consider how this new political reality upended on one hand the last poli-ties of the lands, Greek or Latin, but also facilitated the unification of areas that for long have been divided by different dominations.</p> |
| 23 | Mon, Dec 7 | <p>Looking Back at the Greek Middle Ages: an aftermath (Della Dora, <i>Mapping Melancholy</i>;))</p> <p>The Greek Middle Ages have had a legacy of their own in early modern and modern thinking. In this class we will try to approach some of the main ideas about Medieval Greece in the period between the 18th and 20th century and how these changed through time. [May 6th is CYA Day of the Student Conference – Students of our course are particularly encouraged to participate to the student conference as part of their class assignment]</p> |
| 24 | Wed, Dec 9 | <p>Recap of our trip through the Worlds of Medieval Greece</p> <p>In this last class of ours we will sum up the discussion and try to re-examine some of the main points that were exposed through our semester.</p> |

Dec 14-17 Final Exam

N.B.: The course schedule, in terms of subjects and readings, may be subject to change to benefit student learning and to keep up to date with current research.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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In addition to the above, further background or specialist reading material will be introduced to students at the beginning of each separate thematic entity. All readings and resources, including the relevant power point presentations are available on the Moodle page of this class.