

## Week 1: Byzantium – the Empire and its Reception

Purpose of unit: look into diff aspects of life of empire – little bit more than a whole millennium. Rome was successful but Byzantium more so.

- Focus on continuity but also discontinuity. 3 empires had capitol in Constantinople.
  - Imperial expansions and contractions – rel with imperial periphery and frontier zones.
  - Religion
  - Sources- written, architecture, etc.
  - Ideology.
  - Little bit of chronological structure but not strictly in order.
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- Do not study anything before looking at and studying the sources.
  - Imperial core – Constantinople. Symbolises imperial power.
  - Why did east survive and roman west disintegrate.
  - From Justinian to Heraclius
  - Rise of Islam and Arab invasions – bring Byzantines to knees for a while.
  - Byzantium, Sclavenes and Avars – new ‘barbarians’
  - 7th century change – passage from late antiquity to early middle ages
  - Byzantium and Crusades/Carolingians
  - Woman in Byzantium
  - The byzantine Outsider
  - Iconoclasm in Byzantium
  - Byzantium and Balkans I 500-1025 and II 1025-1453
  - Art and architecture

No lectures or tutorials in week 8.

*Assessment* – minimum of 10 articles and book references for major, 5 for tutorial paper.

Quizzes- 20 multiple choice and short answer for 20 minutes. Week 8 and week 13. Based on lectures and tutorials wk1-7 and wk9-13.

For referencing: author name, title of book/article/chapter, title and volume of journal, editors name and title of book

Do not reference url of book or article downloaded unless it is only published electronically avoid outdated references like things earlier than 1920 but there are some things from early that are important.

### *Empires as a social phenomenon*

- What is an empire? Complex social network and network of power that transcends politics.
- Michael mann 4 overlapping sources of social power.

- Particular parts and core: heart and periphery that are dominated by the core. Core where political power concentrated. Dominates peripheries due to power.
- Frontiers are interesting, not always directly controlled by empire and usually by a threat of power – behave or else. Controlled by friendly kings/vassals/etc. connected to the empire.
- Empires not always ruled by emperor – Venice, Roman Republic, USSR.
- Empires need consensus to some degree – people will rebel if ruled by evil dictator emperor.
- Need friendly elites and allow those in periphery to participate in power networks.
- Empires never ruled and composed of only one ethnicity and identity. Transnational. Transform time and space – one political power does everything to extinguish pirates, etc. and makes roads, remodelling conquered lands.
- They expand, consolidate and shrink – conquer directly or indirectly.
- Maritime and land empires – depends on main power source lies. Roman started land and then went to maritime, Athens and Venice were maritime.
- Byzantium is both but leans towards maritime

Negative reception of Byzantium empire in public perception – seen as corrupt, decadent, over sophisticated, prone to treachery, autocratic, tyrannical.

Comes into western discourses

Balkanism and Orientalism – Balkanism writing described in negative way, gets stuck in discourse. Western Europe gets history from roman west but Byzantium was not roman west.

Negative perception in conflict with crusaders and Gibbon's book Fall of the Roman Empire; he was the authority for over a century- Christians caused fall of empire and Byzantines were corrupt.

Globalised world of classical antiquity broke into 3 parts – medieval west, byzantine empire and Islamic world. All three had important claims.

### *Longue duree approaches*

Foundations –

- Successor to roman empire as it developed in the east.
- Constantine I (the Great) – moved imperial power to the city of Byzantium/Byzantion and renamed Constantinople in 330. Very hard to rule an empire from one place which was part of why the roman empire broke into parts. History shows he made a new empire, he just wanted to move the capitol from Rome.
- Division became permanent in 395 and in 476 eastern empire was the only functioning part of the empire left. West was a political network but east had a real empire.
- Most valid claim as successor to the roman empire – spoke Greek not Latin.

### *Periodisation*

Several periods:

- Early Byzantine empire 395-630
- Dark ages (imperial contraction) 630-800 – lost a lot of their lands – most significant time of change from late antiquity to middle ages.
- Middle byzantine empire 800-1204 – recovering and expanding, strong political power at times, never really went back into Africa but moved further into Europe.
- Empire in exile 1204-1261 – crusaders involved, sacked Constantinople twice. Empire broke up into several parts. Crusaders made own empire.
- Late byzantine empire 1261-1453

It is questionable whether we speak of a single empire, or succession of empires claiming the same name and institutions.

See map on slides for empire ca600. Really shrinks in dark ages, massive contraction – lost richest provinces of Egypt and near east. West mainly generate goods, timber and metal. When Basil II died they firmly held southern Europe and Italy. Defeated Hungarians a little later. Control black sea and move a bit into the near east. Miraculous recovery.

After 4th crusade – disintegration of byzantine empire – empire of Nicaea is most direct successor. Latin empire, despote of Epirus, etc. Latin empire will disintegrate and byzantine will re-emerge. Late empire is tiny, on the last reserves – Ottoman empire is beginning and one of them will capture Constantinople –ending the empire. No one knows what happened to the last empire – either died in battle or hung himself when city is invaded.

Constantine I est empire – Constantine XI was the last.

### *Geography*

- Constantinople – core. Controls maritime passage from Aegean sea to Black sea. Very strategic place, everyone who hates you can get there easy but very good place for trade.
- Anatolia – heartland, giving soldiers, tax revenue, etc. very hilly so easy to defend.
- Armenia – buffer zone, very important. Many soldiers and emperors come from there.
- Near east and Egypt – briefly part of empire
- Euro-Asian Steppes – social networks not developed here. Nomads live here eg Huns be careful to est a direct control but does not happen here.
- Greece and Balkan peninsulae – very important for control of Aeagean sea and islands.
- South-eastern Europe – hilly and mountainous but there is a passage through to the Steppes which is risky. It is trouble. Very important to defend it.
- Adriatic Sea – very long time they were interested in controlling it. Controlled Venice and other places for a while. Istria and Ravenna were directly controlled
- Italy and Sicily - western empire, needed to fight caliphates.

Byzantine Commonwealth – Russian Scholar Dimirty Obolenski came up with this. He wanted to include Russian past in byzantine past. 'family of nations' He was criticized by Anthony Kaldellis – points of 'Greek ethnic chauvinism' constructed between roman, greek and Christian

#### pillars

- Ideology:
- Claim to be rightful successor of rome after the disintegration. Big conflict with Charlemagne who claims the crown of the west. First pillar is this claim to be the successors. Claim to past is powerful
- Christianity – integrated in society and submerged to the will of the ruler (in the west it was the opposite due to Pope). Emperors depicted in company of saints, Mary, etc.
- Claim to be 'civilising force' coming from roman imperial ideology. Even britain claimed to be this type of force. Basil II 'The Bulgar-slayer'
- Economics"
  - Inherited more developed part of roman empire that produced more tax revenue
  - Strong monetary policy – remained on gold standard while the west, depleted of gold, used silver standard in times of Charlemagne
  - Based on maritime trade – cheaper transport of goods than over land.
  - Role of state in economy diminished in 'dark ages' and enabled more substantial liberalisation of markets in Middle Byzantium.
  - Centralised state and bureaucracy enabled better management of economy, internal safety and more efficient taxation. Gold invested in minting gained back in taxes
  - Strong mixed economy from 10-13th century that combined state control with liberalisation and prevented accumulation of too much wealth in hands of individual
  - 14th century crisis- fragmentation of empire; wars with Turks, and competition from Italian traders.

Gold coinage more for tax than everyday use. Silver and bronze coins for everyday use.

#### 3. Politics

- Autocratic state with emperor on top – if there is rebellion against then there may be two. Or some name a relative as co-emperor. Blinding emperors was a humane punishment as if blind then couldn't lead.
- Emperor chooses successor from family. No constitutional way to claim succession.
- Some elements of roman government were copied such as Senate. Power diminished in the Middle Byzantine period but still prestigious.
- Court and imperial advisers (eunuchs and non-eunuchs). Eunuchs seen as safe as can't have children.
- Army
- Low involvement in provincial affair – will intervene in big things but local governments know best for their area

Important titles – see slide

#### 4. Military

- Strong military and capable diplomacy were key and went hand in hand
- Problems – lack of manpower especially after 1st contraction. War is bad for the economy esp trade. Became more and more profesionalised and in middle Byzantium comprises number of mercenaries and foreigners. Need short wars and quick victories to preserve economy. Imperial guard consisted of Varagians.
- Military strategy was based on avoiding battle until victory is certain – sneak attacks, destroy enemy communication, etc. Try to reach the balance of power
- Use of diplomacy to avoid war and gain allies
- Reliance on light cavalry and small units of elite heavy armoured cavalry *kataphraktoi*
- Navy is their strength – new type of ship called *dromon*, that did not use rams like old Roman ships. Ships harder to destroy
- Strong navy enabled more efficient protection of overseas possessions and Constantinople. But they were usually matched by the Arab navies so hard for either to establish supremacy
- Decline of navy after western (esp Italian) fleets entered eastern Mediterranean.
- Greek fire – survived so many sieges because of this.