

A THEORETICAL HISTORY OF BYZANTIUM

Masaryk University, Brno (Spring Semester, 2019)

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Instructor

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Language of Instruction

English

Class Schedule (Bi-weekly classes, Tuesday 14:00-17:30)

19 th February	Late Byzantine Historiography <i>Reading Break</i>
19 th March	Postmodernism
2 nd April	Narratology
16 th April	Gender and Queer Theory
30 th April	Social History
14 th May	Postcolonialism

Abstract

This course will introduce students to late Byzantine history and historiography through the examination of critical theoretical approaches to its study. The class set text is the *Chronikē syngraphē* (Χρονική συγγραφή) or *History* of George Akropolites, which narrates the fifty-seven-year period of exile, which followed the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade in 1204. In each class, we will examine a different theoretical approach to historiographical analysis, with reference to key passages of the *Chronikē syngraphē* (read in English translation). These topics will include Postmodernism, Narratology, Gender and Queer Theory, Social History, and Postcolonialism.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will

- have read and gained a better understanding of an example of a Byzantine historiographical narrative, the *Chronikē syngraphē* of George Akropolites (in English translation)
- have read and critically analysed important works related to key theoretical, philosophical, and methodological problems related to the study of historiography and the past

- be able to relate these theoretical readings to the study of Byzantine historiography in sophisticated ways

Assessment

1. In-class participation (10% of the final grade)

Each session includes mandatory readings, as announced in the syllabus. In order to initiate discussion in class and to show evidence of engagement with the reading, students are expected to prepare questions and remarks related to each reading. Grading will be based on depth of analysis and originality. This part of the grade is based on presence and active participation in class, especially oral contributions to class discussions on the basis of assigned readings.

2. In-class presentation (30% of the final grade)

During the class all students are expected to present on an additional reading related to one of the five topics discussed in the classes. Students are expected to prepare a handout and/or PowerPoint presentation to accompany their presentation and analysis. Presentations should be approximately 10-15 minutes.

3. Extended Essay (60% of the final grade)

The essay (approximately 2,000 words) tackles a question or a topic related to one or more of the themes of the course. It can explore in depth a text or passage in relation to a theoretical area treated in class. They may also select a different text, in consultation with the instructor. The essay should include a critical assessment of existing scholarship. Students with a working knowledge of Greek are encouraged to take into account readings of primary texts. Please consult with the instructor about your topic.

Session One: Late Byzantine Historiography

This session will constitute an introduction to late Byzantine history and its historiography. The focus of this class will be on the central text, around which this course will revolve, namely the *Chronikē syngraphē* (Χρονική συγγραφή) or *History* of George Akropolites, a thirteenth-century Byzantine historiographical narrative. We will consider modern historiography and scholarship on the period covered by the *Chronikē syngraphē*, namely the period between 1204 and 1261.

In addition, we will discuss the format and assessment of the class and assign presentation readings and topics for later sessions.

Suggested reading:

- Angold, 'The Greek Rump States and the Recovery of Byzantium', 731-58.
- Neville, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*, 226-31.

Reading Break

During the reading week students should familiarize themselves thoroughly with the set text, so that they can bring their own ideas about where and how the theoretical readings for the subsequent classes might be brought into conversation with the *Chronikē syngraphē*.

Mandatory reading:

- Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History*.
- Wild On Collective, 'Theses on Theory and History', 1-11.

Further reading:

- Laiou, 'Political Historical Survey, 1204-1453', 280-94.
- Neville, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*, esp. 1-44.
- Gardner, *The Lascarids of Nicaea*.
- Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile*, esp. 9-33.
- Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros*.
- Eastmond, *Art and Identity in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium*.
- Ducellier, 'Balkan Powers: Albania, Serbia and Bulgaria (1200-1300)', 779-802.
- Madgearu, *The Asanids*.
- Korobeinikov, *Byzantium and the Turks in the Thirteenth Century*, esp. 7-20.
- Macrides, 'The Historian in the History', 205-24.
- Macrides, 'The Thirteenth Century in Byzantine Historical Writing', 63-76.
- Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, esp. 1-25.

Questions to think about:

- What and who are most important in the history?
- Who tells the story and how?
- What ideological positions motivate the telling of the history?
- What/who is (and is not) represented?
- How does Macrides' introduction and commentary influence your understanding of the text?
- Does the sort of history that the Wild on Collective are calling for match the type of history offered by Macrides in her introduction to the *Chronikē syngraphē*?

Session Two: Postmodernism

In this class, we will discuss postmodernism, a movement/collection of critical approaches that developed from the late 1950s across a range of disciplines, including history. Our focus will be to examine the relationship between postmodern critiques of knowledge and history writing. Essentially we will ask 'What can we know about the past on the basis of history?'. We will then try to relate the questions raised by postmodern critiques to both what we do when we read a narrative like the *Chronikē syngraphē* and what these texts claim to be doing. In thinking about the claims made by the text, we will focus on the *prooimion* (preface) of the *Chronikē syngraphē*.

Mandatory reading:

- Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History*, 105 (§1) and ???.
- Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 6-32.
- Macrides, 'How the Byzantines Wrote History', 257-63.
- Wild on Collective, 'Pandering to the Timid', 1-5.

Presentations:

- Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 86-105.
- Treadgold, 'The Unwritten Rules for Writing Byzantine History', 277-92.

Further reading:

- Haldon, J., 'Jargon' vs. 'the Facts', 95-132.
- Kaldellis, 'The Manufacture of History', 293-306.
- Lillie, 'Reality and Invention', 157-210
- Macrides, 'Editor's Preface', ix-xi.
- Kukkannen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of History*, esp. 1-13.
- Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, esp. 33-69.
- White, *Metahistory*, esp. 1-42.
- White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', 5-27.
- Pihlainen, *The Work of History*, esp. xiii-17.
- Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.
- Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.
- Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology*.

Questions to think about:

- What is the relationship between history, historiography, and the past?
- What can we claim to know about Byzantium from reading the *Chronikē syngraphē*?
- What does the *prooimion* of the *Chronikē syngraphē* claim that the text is doing?
- How far do Macrides and Jenkins' conceptions of history match up? What are the differences?

Session Three: Narratology

In this class, we will examine approaches drawn from narratology (the study of narrative), a sub-field of literary criticism and a domain of research in its own right. In particular, we will discuss what narratology offers the historian of Byzantium. We will start by examining some of the basic constituent elements and qualities of narrative texts and histories (e.g. narrators, plot, events, characters). We will then examine in detail characters, before asking how a narratological approach to character and characters might impact on the reading of Byzantine historiography. Together, we will ask what a narratological reading of the characters found in the *Chronikē syngraphē* might mean for the sort of things scholars say about people from the Byzantine past, using that text as evidence.

Mandatory reading:

- Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History*, 270-1 (§52), 305-8 (§63), and ???.
- Bourbouhakis and Nilsson, 'Byzantine Narrative', 263-74.
- Jannidis, 'Character', 1-12.
- de Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, 3-6 (§1.1), 17-19 (§2.1), and 37-42 (§2.7-9).

Presentation:

- Margolin, 'Characterization in Narrative', 1-14.

Suggested reading:

- Bal, *Narratology*.
- Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*.
- Messis, Mullett, and Nilsson, *Storytelling in Byzantium*, esp. 1-5, 71-87.
- Genette, *Palimpsests*.
- Herman, *et al.*, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*.
- de Jong, *Narratology and Classics*, esp. 167-95
- Cupane and Krönung, *Fictional Storytelling*.
- Roilos, *Medieval Greek Storytelling*, esp. 115-30.
- Kristeva, *Desire in Language*.

Questions to think about:

- What does narratology suggest about the representative potential of historiography?
- Should we treat the people presented in histories as representations of humans from the past or should we treat them as characters?
- What are the consequences of this decision for historical analysis, both in theory and practice?

Session Four: Gender and Queer Theory

In this class, we will discuss gender, sex, and sexuality as categories and objects of historical analysis. We will discuss various critical approaches to gender and sexuality, before analysing the potential of gender and queer theories for historiographical examination. In particular we will examine both contemporary practice in Byzantine historiography and critically read passages from the *Chronikē syngraphē* featuring female characters/women. In addition, we will consider discourses of power, which underpin the text, focusing especially on compulsory heterosexuality.

Mandatory reading:

- Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History*, 123-4 (§8), 132-3 (§11), 169-70 (§23), 222-3 (§42), 246 (§48) and ???.
- Mikkola, 'Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender'.
- Ballif, 'Re/Dressing Histories', 91-8.
- Kaldellis, 'The Study of Women and Children, 61-71.

Presentations:

- Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1-46.
- de Wet, 'John Chrysostom on Homoeroticism', 187-218.

Suggested reading:

- Laiou, 'The Role of Women in Byzantine Society', 233-60.
- Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women, 157-210.
- Clark, 'The Lady Vanishes', 1-31.
- Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, esp. 1-29.
- Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', 1053-75.
- Lanser, 'Gender and Narrative'.
- Lanser, *Fictions of Authority*.
- Cixous, 'The Character of "Character"', 383-402.
- Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*.

Questions to think about:

- Are there women or men? Are there women or men in Byzantine texts?
- Can we distinguish between sex and gender in Byzantine historiography?
- How does gender contribute to the last session's discussion of characters?
- How might it be useful to read Byzantine historiography as heteronormative?
- Who writes queer and gendered histories?

Session Five: Social History

In this session, we will start by introducing the various different types of analysis that fall under the broad category of 'social history', with a focus on political economy, historical materialism, and Marxism. After gaining a basic knowledge of the wider landscape of social history, we will focus on the analysis of non-elites in historiography. To this end, we will analyse the first sections of the *Chronikē syngraphē*, which describes the conquest of Constantinople, paying attention to the presentation of non-elites in the text and their role in the story of the city's capture.

Mandatory reading:

- Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History*, 106-115 (§2-5) and ???.
- Bernstein, *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*, 1-24.
- Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 11-17.

Presentations:

- Haldon, 'Towards a Social History of Byzantium', 1-30.
- Spiegel, 'History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text', 3-28.

Suggested reading:

- Spiegel, 'Towards a Theory of the Middle Ground', 44-56.
- Haldon, 'Social Elites, Wealth, and Power', 168-211.
- Cabrera, *Postsocial History*, esp. 1-18.
- Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, esp. 1-36
- Haldon, John, *State and the Tributary Mode of Production*, esp. 109-129.
- Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity*.
- Banaji, *Exploring the Economy of Late Antiquity*.
- Banaji, *Theory as History*.

Questions to think about:

- What makes a history social?
- Who/what is the subject/object of social history?
- Can historical narratives be sources of social and/or non-elite history?
- Are the non-elites in Byzantine historiography real?
- Is social history compatible with postmodern historiography?
- How do the topics covered in these readings intersect with the previous session of gender and queer theory?

Session Six: Postcolonialism

This class will focus on debate surrounding the seminal article of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. We will first try to understand the argument Spivak made, before discussing how this concept might (or might not) be relevant to readings of the history of late Byzantium and Akropolites' *Chronikē syngraphē* in particular. This session will draw on the knowledge students have acquired in previous classes about gender, social history, and postmodernism. Students will also be encouraged to think about Byzantine history in terms of critical analyses of orientalism, race, ethnicity, colonialism, postcolonialism, and imperialism and to consider the intersection of various discourses of power in the construction of Byzantine history.

Mandatory reading:

- Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History*, ???.
- Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', 271-313.
- Ashcroft, *et al.*, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London, 2006), 7-11, 36-44.

Presentations:

- Todorova, 'Balkanism and Postcolonialism', 175-95.
- Gaunt, 'Can the Middle Ages be Postcolonial?', 160-176.

Suggested reading:

- Maggio, *Can the Subaltern Be Heard?*, 419-43.
- Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', 27-58.
- Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*
- Spivak, *In Other Worlds*
- Young, *Postcolonialism*.
- Said, *Orientalism*.
- Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism*
- Mishkova, *Beyond Balkanism*
- Chakrabarty, 'Provincializing Europe'
- Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.
- Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*

Questions to think about:

- What is a subaltern?
- What is postcolonialism?
- Are these concepts relevant to Byzantine historiography?
- Can Byzantine studies be postcolonial?
- Is Byzantine studies fundamentally imperialist AND/OR colonialist?
- Is Byzantine studies/historiography a suitable place for contemporary politics?

Bibliography

Set Text

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- Dayantis, J. (trans.), *Acropolitès, Chronique du XIIIe siècle: L'empire grec de Nicée* (Paris, 2012).
- Panagiotou, A. (trans.), *Χρονική συγγραφή, Γεώργιος Ακροπολίτης: εισαγωγή, μετάφραση, σχόλια* (Athens, 2003).

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