

COURSE PROSPECTUS
ARTH 2320: Byzantine Art & Architecture

Course Description

- This course offers a wide-ranging introduction to the art, architecture, and material culture of Byzantium—a Christian, predominantly Greek-speaking civilization that flourished in the Eastern Mediterranean for over a thousand years. Positioned between the Muslim East and the Latin West, Antiquity and the Early Modern era, Byzantium nurtured a vibrant and highly sophisticated artistic culture. With emphasis placed upon paradigmatic objects and monuments, we will examine an array of artistic media, from mosaic and panel painting to metalwork, ivory carving, book illumination, and embroidery. We will consider the making, consumption, and reception of Byzantine art in a variety of contexts—political, devotional, ritual, and domestic. Topics include the idea of empire and its visual articulation; court culture; the veneration of images and relics; patronage, piety, and self-representation; authorship and artistic agency; materiality and the sensory experience of art; the reception of the “pagan” Greco-Roman past; and the changing nature of Byzantium’s interactions with neighboring cultures.
- ARTH 2320 is an introductory survey course open to all undergraduate students regardless of their academic background.

Course Structure & Materials

- ARTH 2320 will meet on Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:15–11:44 am.
- Lectures will regularly incorporate group discussions of the materials assigned for that day, including articles, book chapters, primary sources in translation, podcasts, and videos.
- All the assigned readings will be available in electronic format via Canvas. Expect to read anywhere between 40 and 60 pages per week.

Course Assignments & Grading

- Your grade for the course will be assessed based on the following components: class attendance and participation (25%); one short quiz at the beginning of the term (5%); midterm exam (20%); non-cumulative final exam (20%); and final research project (30%).
- For the final research project you will be asked to create a virtual exhibition showcasing some aspect of Byzantine art and culture based on 5 objects selected from collections in the United States. The written component of this project will include an introductory essay, about 2,000 words long, and brief explanatory labels, about 100 to 150 words long, for each of the objects selected.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me at drpic@sas.upenn.edu.