

# International Conference

## Remembering Romes:

### Refugee Memory and the Formation of Identity in Imperial Cities

**Swedish Institute at Athens, 22-23 June 2023**

Mitseon 9, 11742 Athens

[www.remembering-romes.com](http://www.remembering-romes.com)

As Rome and, later, various 'New Romes' succumbed to their enemies, their citizens became refugees, carrying with them memories and wounded identities. There has so far been no diachronic examination of the ways the falls of ancient Rome (410, 476, 537), Constantinople (1204, 1453), and Renaissance Rome (1527) create discursive memories in which the literature, material and visual culture, and architecture of each conquest informed the experience and representation of subsequent conquests. While previous research has primarily portrayed collective elites as memory bearers and identity makers, this conference seeks to introduce the concept of refugee memory, in which accounts of non-elite or ordinary people driven from their homes become the main source for the formation of new imperial identities after a conquest. The conference aims to explore refugee memory by exploring how those who witnessed the conquests of 'New Romes' — including Constantinople (1204 and 1453), and Renaissance Rome (1527) — interpreted the fall of ancient Rome and how this may have played a role in the formation of a refugee identity in the new imperial cities which claimed to be the 'New Rome'. But how did individual refugees describe their traumatic experiences and preserve the memories of empires? How were expatriation and displacement portrayed in words and images? Which Greco-Roman, Jewish, Christian, or Ottoman discourses of destruction and rebirth affected their accounts? How do individual grief and loss differ from shared remembrance? What kinds of new identities emerge as a result of a military victory and who are their bearers? This conference aspires to create a dynamic new understanding of the written and visual rhetoric and broader consequences of refugee narratives.

# Programme

## Day 1: June 22

10:00-10.30. Registration and Coffee

10:30-10:40. Welcome

10:40-11:10.

Introduction: Creating a Roman Refugee Identity

Adam Goldwyn (North Dakota State University), Trojan Memories of Rome/Roman Memories of Troy: Odysseus and Aeneas as Paradigms of the Refugee-Narrator

11:15-13:00. Panel 1

Creating a Roman Refugee Identity

Peter Heather (King's College London), Sacks, Falls & Restorations: Rome in the fifth & sixth centuries

Cédrik Michel (Durham University), Moulding Barbarians and Mitigating Loss: Augustine and Orosius on the Sack of Rome of 410

Gavin Kelly (The University of Edinburgh), Poetic Responses to the Sacks of Rome in the Fifth Century

13:00–14:15. Lunch: SIA Terrace

14:15-16:00. Panel 2

The Falls of Constantinople: 1204 and 1453

Foteini Spingou (Universities of Edinburgh and York), The Voice of 1204: Niketas Choniates and his 'Rome'

Eleni Kefala (St Andrews University), Strangers No More: Constantinople, Tenochtitlan, and the Trauma of the Conquest

20:00. Speakers dinner

## Day 2: June 23

9:00-9.30. Coffee

9:30-10:45. Panel 3

Roman Memories of Rome after 1527

Jessica Goethals (The University of Alabama), Translatio: Shifting Literary Communities after the 1527 Sack of Rome

Bobby Xinyue (University of Leicester), Trauma, Consolation, Recovery: A Renaissance Humanist's Experience of the Sack of Rome (1527)

10:45-11:00. Coffee break

11:00-12:10. Panel 4

New Identities After the Fall I.

Constantinopolitan Refugees in Renaissance Italy

Ferhat Kurtoglu (Boğaziçi University), Copying Chalkokondyles: Greek Manuscript Production in Early Modern Venice

Daniele Bianconi (La Sapienza, University of Rome), A Spartan refugee in fifteenth-century Rome. Demetrios Raoul Kabakes and his manuscripts

12:10–12:20. Coffee break

12:20-13:40. Panel 5

New Identities After the Fall II.

Between Memory and Erasure

Çiğdem Kafescioğlu (Boğaziçi University), Hagia Sophia, Theotokos Mouchliotissa: Structures and Narratives of Memory and Erasure in Early Modern Istanbul

Olof Heilo (Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul), The Last Days of Mankind and the Third Man: Post-Imperial Vienna between Nostalgia and Utopia

13:40–15.00.

The Fall of Empires and Refugee Memory

Concluding discussion over lunch

## **Day 1: June 22**

**10:00-10.30. Registration and Coffee**

**10:30-10:40. Welcome – Ingela Nilsson (Uppsala University)**

**10:40-11:10.**

### **Introduction: Creating a Roman Refugee Identity**

#### **Adam Goldwyn (North Dakota State University), Trojan Memories of Rome/Roman Memories of Troy: Odysseus and Aeneas as Paradigms of the Refugee-Narrator**

Though Roman imperial expansionism was the greatest maker of refugees in the ancient Mediterranean world, the Romans, ironically, believed themselves to be the descendants of refugees from the Trojan War. This paper will explore how the Homeric/Vergilian tradition of the post-Trojan War positioned refugees as the principal narrators of the imperial experience.

In particular, the paper will analyse how the conqueror-turned-refugee Odysseus' first-person narratives and his response to others narrating the Trojan War in the *Odyssey* become the primary means by which the events of the Trojan War are carried from the fallen city around the Mediterranean. As importantly, Odysseus as a refugee-narrator in the *Odyssey* becomes a central model for Vergil's narration in *The Aeneid*, and the paper will also examine how Aeneas follows in this tradition of refugee-narration for the founding of Rome—like Odysseus, both as narrator and audience for Trojan War narratives in the epic. As such, Homer and Vergil, through Odysseus and Aeneas, offer the literary paradigm of the refugee-narrator who carries imperial memory after the conquest of imperial cities for subsequent refugee-narrators in Rome.

#### **Discussion**

**11:15-13:00. Panel 1**

### **Creating a Roman Refugee Identity**

#### **Peter Heather (King's College London), Sacks, Falls & Restorations: Rome in the fifth & sixth centuries**

This paper will briefly review the chequered history of the city of Rome in the fifth and sixth centuries CE, encompassing multiple sacks, a contested loss of its imperial status, and multiple attempts at imperial restoration. It will begin by reviewing the available evidence for the longer-term physical and demographic effects upon the city of the many sacks and sieges it endured at the hands of Goths, Vandals, and East Romans. The main focus of the paper,

however, will be on the different phases of ideological and political response to the city's travails, briefly covering a range of reflections that runs from Augustine's eschatological reflections, to Theoderic's project to imperial restoration, to the renegotiation of the old imperial capital's status, which followed its definitive incorporation into the East Roman Empire.

### **Cédrik Michel (Durham University), Moulding Barbarians and Mitigating Loss: Augustine and Orosius on the Sack of Rome of 410**

This paper will explore the influence of the experience of refugees on the Christian writers Augustine and Orosius' portrayal of the sack of Rome of 410 CE.

In the years following the sack of Rome by Alaric, Augustine delivered sermons (81, 113a, 105 and 296) and circulated the first three books of *De civitate Dei* to an audience composed of refugees who had fled from Rome to North Africa. In these works, Augustine softened his unapologetic stance about the insignificance of the sack of an 'earthly' city by acknowledging the atrocities committed by Alaric's barbarians and reassured his audience that those who had died would attain eternal life if they were worthy.

Orosius, although apprenticing with Augustine in 414, took a different stance. He argued that Christianity was an agent for positive change: Christianity had caused the barbarians to spare Christians and only harass pagans unwilling to pretend that they were Christian. His account suppressed the trauma of Christians who had lost loved ones in Rome because these incorrigible pagans deserved death.

This paper will argue that Augustine and Orosius' different roles in mediating the first-hand account of Roman refugees can better contextualise the variance in their portrayals of the sack of Rome 410.

### **Gavin Kelly (The University of Edinburgh), Poetic Responses to the Sacks of Rome in the Fifth Century**

This paper will have a central focus on Latin poetic responses to Rome's vicissitudes in the fifth century in poets, above all Rutilius Namatianus' and Sidonius' responses to the sacks of 410 and 455. It will explore how they responded to and exploited the constraints of their genre to offer political analysis. It will show that one of the most enduring images with which the political situation was expressed, that of the feeble and decrepit goddess Roma, was the invention of the political poet Claudian in his *In Gildonem* over a decade before Alaric's sack of 410, and explore how a flashy conceit took on new meaning in the wake of political crisis. In a brief epilogue I will discuss the later reception of Claudian's image in subsequent poets of Roman crisis, including Francesco Petrarca.

## **Discussion**

**13:00–14:15. Lunch: SIA Terrace**

## 14:15-16:00. Panel 2

### The Falls of Constantinople: 1204 and 1453

#### **Foteini Spingou (Universities of Edinburgh and York), The Voice of 1204: Niketas Choniates and his 'Rome'**

Niketas Choniates stands as a luminary among Byzantine historians, having meticulously recorded the event leading to the catastrophic fall of Constantinople in 1204. He lived a life of multiple transitions—from an internal émigré hailing from Chonai, to ascending the ranks as a beacon of imperial bureaucracy, to becoming a significant political figure. However, his life took a sharp turn as he was transformed into a political outcast and then a refugee scholar filled with despair. In this paper, I aim to explore how Choniates, despite the shift in his geopolitical status, remained anchored to his roots in Constantinople. Reading not only his official scholarly work but also his personal notes on a manuscript's margins, I will delve into the intricacies of how Choniates navigated his dynamic yet unshakeable Constantinopolitan identity in an era of exile and hopelessness.

The identity of a refugee is often complex, shaped by the push and pull of the old and the new, the remembered and the forgotten, the lost and the found. Choniates' narrative provides a poignant portrayal of these conflicts and tensions and his refugee identity not only symbolises the struggle of displacement but also the resilience of self-identity amid dramatic sociopolitical changes. In essence, the exploration of Choniates' identity will shed light on broader issues of displacement, identity preservation, and the transformative power of memory and literary discourse.

#### **Eleni Kefala (St Andrews University), Strangers No More: Constantinople, Tenochtitlan, and the Trauma of the Conquest**

The Byzantines had long dreaded the year 1492 because, according to their calculations based on the Scriptures, it would bring the end of the world. In an eerie stroke of irony, they were right in their fears. Even though they were slightly off in the timing of the fall of Constantinople into the hands of the Ottomans, they anticipated with uncanny accuracy the end of the world as they knew it. Christopher Columbus's crossing of the Atlantic paved the way for the European colonisation of the Americas. But what is there in common between Byzantium and America beyond some bemusing serendipities? This paper approaches that question by rehistoricising the fall of Byzantine Constantinople (1453) and Aztec Tenochtitlan (1521), while looking at two sorrowful poems composed by anonymous Greek and Aztec authors soon after the conquest of the Byzantine and Mexica Empires.

#### **Discussion**

**20:00. Speakers dinner**

## Day 2: June 23

9:00-9.30. Coffee

9:30-10:45. Panel 3

### Roman Memories of Rome after 1527

#### **Jessica Goethals (The University of Alabama), *Translatio*: Shifting Literary Communities after the 1527 Sack of Rome**

Despite the many invasions and sieges that blighted the Italian peninsula during the decades of the Italian Wars (1494-1559), Renaissance commentators on the 1527 Sack of Rome drew parallels not with any recent events but instead with what they saw as the fate suffered by analogous cities of epic destruction: Troy, Jerusalem, Babylon, Carthage, and ancient Rome. After Rome's tragic fall at the hands of the imperial troops of Charles V, these voices from across Italy (as well as Spain and Germany) decried the violence inflicted on the city's inhabitants, sacred bodies, and cultural spaces, including libraries, while also beginning to position their homes as the 'new Rome,' heirs to a city no longer seen as culturally eternal whose poets, intellectuals, artists, and typographers were rapidly searching out alternative spaces. This paper considers the texts narrating Rome's ruin that circulated in the Sack's aftermath alongside such claims to translate—that is, to shift—literary and cultural centres elsewhere amidst a push towards vernacular, rather than Latin, writing. After an overview of this post-1527 phenomenon broadly, the paper will focus especially on the case of Venice and its robust publishing industry.

#### **Bobby Xinyue (University of Leicester), Trauma, Consolation, Recovery: A Renaissance Humanist's Experience of the Sack of Rome (1527)**

In the years after the Sack of Rome in 1527, there was an outpouring of literary texts (both in Latin and in the vernacular) that sought to make sense of this traumatic event. Amongst these, the works of one Latin poet, Ambrogio 'Novidio' Fracco, stood out. In the course of a tripartite poetic treatment – *De Adversis* (1534–1538), *Consolatio ad Romam* (1538), and *Sacri Fasti* (1547) – Fracco recounts in horrific detail his personal experience of the Sack and reflects on the enduring impact that this event has had on his life and on Rome's status as the *caput mundi*. A native of Lazio working in Rome as a Catholic priest and teacher, Fracco's comparatively ordinary background enabled him to produce a distinctive account of the Sack 'from the ground', which sets itself apart from other contemporary narratives written by those who were closely connected to the Papal court. At the same time, Fracco's desire to be a 'new Ovid' ('Novidio' = *novus Ovidius*) provides us with an unusual interpretive lens with which to examine the poet's articulation of his suffering and memory. This paper explores some of the ways in which Fracco casts himself as an 'exile' in his own country and the poet's attempt to imagine a future for Rome through varied dialogues with Ovid's poetry, in particular the *Tristia* and the *Fasti*.

## Discussion

10:45-11:00. Coffee break

11:00-12:10. Panel 4

**New Identities After the Fall I.**

### **Constantinopolitan Refugees in Renaissance Italy**

#### **Ferhat Kurtoglu (Boğaziçi University), Copying Chalkokondyles: Greek Manuscript Production in Early Modern Venice**

Laonikos Chalkokondyles, one of the four contemporary Byzantine historiographers of the fall, composed his work in the early 1460s after the advancing Ottomans captured Constantinople and the remnants of the Byzantine Empire. His Herodotean treatise, the Demonstrations of Histories (Apodeixis Historion), gained considerable popularity in manuscript form during the first half of the 16th century before a Latin translation appeared in Basel in 1556. Two-thirds of 32 extant manuscripts are confirmed or likely to have been produced in Venice between 1540 and 1550. The purpose of the presentation is to contextualise this extensive copying activity centred around the 1540s in Venice. The paper will first examine the manuscript tradition of the Histories and the paratextual evidence found in manuscripts, then scrutinise the overall production output of the scribes and the collections of patrons or book merchants who were in possession of the manuscripts in question, and finally inspect the connections between the copyists and the patrons. By identifying the intellectual spaces in which the manuscripts of the Histories were placed, the study will reveal economic, social, and intellectual tendencies in mid-16th century Venice that popularised the Greek manuscripts of Laonikos Chalkokondyles' narrative of the fall of Byzantium and the rise of the Ottomans.

#### **Daniele Bianconi (La Sapienza, University of Rome), A Spartan refugee in fifteenth-century Rome. Demetrios Raoul Kabakes and his manuscripts**

The paper will focus on the figure of Demetrius Raoul Kabakes, a Greek copyist and scholar educated in Mistra at the 'platonic' circle of Georgios Gemistos Plethon and then a refugee in Rome. In the city of the popes, where Kabakes spent the rest of his life, he worked as a copyist of Greek manuscripts and, like some other Greek refugees, he linked his fortune to calligraphy. From personal annotations he wrote in the pages of his manuscripts, the regret for the homeland left behind, the memory of his youth spent in Sparta and the echo of the sad news coming from the East often emerge.

## Discussion

12:10–12:20. Coffee break



**12:20-13:40. Panel 5**

**New Identities After the Fall II.**

**Between Memory and Erasure**

**Çiğdem Kafescioğlu (Boğaziçi University), Hagia Sophia, Theotokos Mouchliotissa: Structures and Narratives of Memory and Erasure in Early Modern Istanbul**

This paper will address the presence and the absence of the Roman and Byzantine past in early modern Istanbul through considerations of structures of the *longue durée*, acts of translation, and notions of antiquarianism. It will consider historical imaginaries as reflected in textual traditions in Greek and Turkish, and architectural imagination pertaining to Byzantium as reflected in the visual culture Ottoman and Greek communities. I seek to highlight the multiple presences of Byzantium in the lives and imaginations of early modern Istanbulites of different standing and communal belonging (Turkish speaking Muslims and Greeks), alongside the silencing and erasure of Byzantine memory in post-Byzantine times. The discussion is anchored by a juxtaposition of the narratives of, and interventions to, two Byzantine monuments of very different scale and significance, but comparable longevity: the Hagia Sophia and the Theotokos Mouchliotissa in Fener.

**Olof Heilo (Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul), The Last Days of Mankind and the Third Man: Post-Imperial Vienna between Nostalgia and Utopia**

Most state constructions that carried the title 'Empires' into the modern period ceased to exist between 1912 and 1922. Three of them claimed, in one way or another, to represent continuity from the Ancient Roman Empire: the Romanov, Ottoman and Habsburg empires. All of them became objects of nostalgia in the post-imperial period but for different reasons. Imperial Vienna, the 1918 capital of a Habsburg rump state that was swallowed by Hitler's Germany in 1938, became an almost mythical place in the imagination of intellectuals and literary figures that, mostly due to their Jewish origins, ended up in exile all over the world, carrying with them visions of lost splendour, order, and safety as well as callousness, inefficiency, and morbidity.

**Discussion**

**13:40–15.00.**

**The Fall of Empires and Refugee Memory**

**Concluding discussion over lunch**