

THE ROMAN PALIMPSEST

Artistic and Urban Metamorphosis from Antiquity to the Modern Era

Fall Semester 2009, Cornell in Rome
Professor: Lila Yawn, Ph.D.

Description

Palimpsest /palimpsest/ • **noun** 1 a parchment or other surface on which writing has been applied over earlier writing which has been erased. 2 something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form: *the house is a palimpsest of the taste of successive owners*. — ORIGIN from Greek *palin* 'again' + *psestos* 'rubbed smooth' (*Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.askoxford.com/worldofwords/oed/oedonline/?view=uk>).

Capital of empires for more than two millennia and continuously inhabited for well over three, Rome presents itself to the well-informed observer as a palimpsest in space, a three-dimensional page written upon, cleaned of its writing (though never entirely), and re-inscribed in the visual and material idioms of later eras, often multiple times in the same location. This course investigates the history of Roman figurative art, architecture, and urban change through first-hand study of Rome's most important historic palimpsests: buildings erected on top of earlier buildings; sculptures and paintings reworked to serve new figurative purposes; works appropriated and assigned new meanings; and art collections formed, installed, dismembered, and reassembled in response to changing tastes, representational needs, and economic conditions.

The course takes place entirely on location in Rome, at the monuments and museums. Students may opt to audit the course or to register for three hours of credit.

Course Requirements

Students who register for the course for three credit hours are required to attend and participate in each class meeting and to write weekly entries in a presentation notebook, to be reviewed by the professor once at midterm and once at the end of the course.

Suggested contents: a summary of the day's site visits, their content and your reflections on the two; sketches; summaries of any optional readings that you choose to study in order to enrich the experience; brochures, hand-outs, photographs; and anything else that you consider valuable and informative as a document of the experience. Auditors—that is, students attending the class meetings/site visits without registering for credit—are also welcome and are not required to submit a notebook.

Suggested readings

Belting, Hans, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott, University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Crook, John, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West, c. 300-1200*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.

The Donation of Constantine, from Brunner-Zeumer, "Die Constantinische Schenkungsurkunde," trans. In Ernest F. Henderson, *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, London: George Bell, 1910, pp. 319-329, transcribed in the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* (Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies) at: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/donatconst.html>.

Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Conversion of Constantine*, from *Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, New York: Christian Literature Co., 1990, Vol. 1, 489-91, transcribed in the *Internet Medieval sourcebook* (Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/conv-const.html>.

Gabucci, Ada, et al., *The Colosseum*, trans. Mary Becker, Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000.

Galerius & Constantine, *Edicts of Toleration*, from Lactantius, *De morte persecutorum*, chs. 3-4 & 48, *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European history*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press [1897?-1907?]), Vol 4:, 1, pp. 28-30, transcribed in the *Internet Medieval sourcebook* (Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/edict-milan.html>;

- The Holy Bible* (Douay-Rheims version), London: Burns and Oates, 1914, excerpts: Excerpts from Books of Genesis, Numbers, Ezekiel, Daniel, Matthew, Luke & Revelation (Apocalypse).
- Jacopo da Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, vol. II, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Kessler, Herbert L., and Johanna Zacharias. *Rome 1300: On the Path of the Pilgrim*. New Haven and London, 2000.
- Mathews, Thomas, *The Clash of Gods*, rev. ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Milburn, R., *Early Christian Art and Architecture*, Aldershot: Scholar Press / Wildwood House, 1998.
- Nees, Lawrence, *Early Medieval Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Nichols, Francis Morgan, ed. & trans., *The Marvels of Rome (Mirabilia Urbis Romae)*, 2nd ed., Italica Press, 1986.
- Shelton, Jo-Ann, *As the Romans Did. A Sourcebook in Roman Social History*, 2nd ed., Oxford Univ. Press, 1988.
- Snyder, James, *Medieval Art*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989.
- Further optional readings TBA

Meeting points

Unless indicated otherwise in the roster of class meetings at the end of the syllabus, all classes begin at Cornell in Rome, at the sarcophagus near the entrance of Palazzo Lazzaroni, and end on location in the city. Because we will often have special, timed appointments, we will depart promptly at 9 am (or at 8:30 on our S. Maria Antiqua day, and possibly one or two others, to be announced).

Philosophy and Method

The twelfth-century philosopher and theologian Hugh of St. Victor summed up our learning ideal: “*Omnia discere. Videbis postea nihil esse superfluum. Coartata scientia iucunda non est.*” Learn everything. Afterward you will see that nothing is superfluous. Knowledge narrowed down is not a joyful thing (*De historia, et libris in ea legendis*, Book VI, chapter 3). The goal implicit in Hugh’s dictum lies not in knowing absolutely everything, which is impossible, but rather in unleashing the insatiable curiosity and inquisitiveness that lead to exhilarating, bountiful, and often unexpected learning.

Class No.	Unit	Theme	Sites / Monuments
1		Palimpsests: parchment, bronze, stone, plaster, earth	Capitoline Hill & Museums: S. Maria in Ara Coeli, Palazzo dei Conservatori, Palazzo Nuovo (Vespasian exhibition)
2	Urban palimpsests	The Colosseum, from theater of death to hanging garden	Roman Forum (Curia, w/ Vespasian exhibition), Palatine Antiquarium, Colosseum; time allowing, Baths of Trajan & Domus Aurea (exterior façade on the Oppian)
3		The Caelian, pt. 1: martyria, inhabited aqueducts	Roman Houses of SS. Giovanni e Paolo; Arch of Dolabella; S. Tommaso in Formis & Aqua Claudia; S. Stefano Rotondo, S. Maria in Domnica
4		Esquiline & Aventine	S. Pudenziana (church & excavations), S. Maria Maggiore, S. Prassede, SS. Alessio e Bonifazio, S. Sabina, Piorato di Malta (exterior)
5		The Caelian, pt. 2: mint, house, mithraeum, church	Church & excavations of S. Clemente; SS. Quattro Coronati & St. Sylvester Chapel
6		The Roman and Imperial Fora, medieval to modern	S. Maria Antiqua, SS. Cosma e Damiano, Forum of Nerva (medieval houses), Markets of Trajan & Torre delle Milizie, Crypta Balbi Museum
7		Head and Mother Church of the City and of the World: the Lateran Complex	Lateran Baptistery, Basilica, Cloister, SS. Sanctorum Chapel

8		Forum Boarium & Trastevere	S. Maria in Cosmedin, S. Nicola in Carcere, S. Cecilia in Trastevere, S. Crisogono, S. Maria in Trastevere
9	Collections, objects, Installations	Europe's Oldest Museum, from Sixtus IV to Carlo Aymonino + The Roman National Museum	Capitoline Museums: Palazzo Nuovo & Epigraphic Collection; Museo Nazionale Romano of Palazzo Massimo alle terme
10		Palimpsests in parchment & stone + Renaissance/Baroque collections	Biblioteca Angelica; Palazzo Altemps
11		Antico moderno	Museo Montemartini, Pyramid of Cestius, Museo di Porta S. Paolo, Protestant Cemetery
12		House Museums OR the Vatican Collections, TBA	Museo Mario Praz; Museo Andersen OR Villa Torlonia/Casina delle Civette OR Vatican Museums (Gregoriano Profano, Braccio Nuovo, Pio-Clementino, Etrusco)