

HIST 585-008: Special Topics in History:
(cross-listed with MESAS 570-003)

Topic: Cultures on Display

Instructor	Day(s)	Time(s)	Maximum Enrollment
Ruprecht, Jr.	W	3:00 – 6:00 pm	12

Semester Description:

ABSTRACT

The Early Modern period was a time of unusual revolutionary activity in many areas, and especially in the Mediterranean basin. Whereas a great deal of attention has been paid to the Renaissance and Reformation roots of the rights revolutions and modern political change, less attention has been paid to equally revolutionary developments in art, art history and archaeology. In this course, we will examine an emerging culture of encyclopedic display as it developed in modern archaeology and the public art museums created to house treasures newly excavated and/or looted. What we see is, first, that the gunpowder empires rapidly took their rivalry in a new aesthetic direction, vying with one another for the best art collections, and second, that national and imperial museums created a new way of seeing such art objects, as common heritage and public treasure. Both archaeology and museums were put in the service of displaying the nation, and in the case of the last great empire of Islam, displaying the empire itself. In each case, museums tell a politically and culturally meaningful story, often through a profound re-creation of the past.

RATIONALE

Museums and archaeology have been the subject of intensive scholarly scrutiny for the past thirty years, though scholars of religion were somewhat slow to join in this new line of enquiry. Museums and what we might call the modern "culture of display" really entered the field of comparative religion in the late 1990s, with the publication of important new books on religion and the arts and the creation of new study groups at the American Academy of Religion. The idea here is that a new way of seeing--and imagining, and displaying--world cultures emerged with surprising suddenness in the early nineteenth century. It involved a rather "encyclopedic" way of seeing, juxtaposing a series of world civilizations and their religions in a relatively linear historical manner: China, Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, and so on. The Carlos Museum at Emory is one excellent example of such a choreography, and we will take a guided tour of that museum in the middle of the semester. It is worth noting that the field of comparative religion--as opposed to Christian theology, biblical studies and church history--was organized in a very similar manner at this same time, such that the world's religions were examined in an encyclopedic way designed to look at them first as spiritually and geographically distinct, and then to draw subtler comparative connections between them. That is to say, the Early Modern "culture of display" has a great deal to do with the emergence of modern disciplines like Classics, History, Religious Studies, as well as a variety of Area Studies programs that are such an important part of the academic landscape today. We think within these categories, we teach within these categories, and these are the categories that encyclopedic museums first placed on public display.

That is not all that was placed on display, however. A distinctive way of seeing and of imagining both religion and politics that emerged at this same time, in these same institutions. We will devote considerable attention to the way in which our modern culture of museological display emerged from out of a religious institution--the Vatican--and how it was politicized, especially after the French Revolution and its violent aftermath. Not only religions and cultures were placed on public display by modern archaeologists in the museums that were designed to house their treasures; it was also the people, the nation, or the empire. We will thus be tracking three interrelated and simultaneous developments born in the nineteenth century: archaeology, museums, and nationalism. Both archaeology and museums place a certain conception of history and a certain image of the national past on display, and that history is then put to political use. In this course, we will look at how these complex interrelations developed in four rather different Mediterranean contexts: Italy, Greece, Egypt and Turkey.

Course Particulars:

We will meet in alternate weeks on the Emory and Georgia State University campuses; a shuttle bus will be provided for students to get back and forth to the class.

GSU undergraduates may enroll in this course with the Instructor's permission. Undergraduate students will submit weekly on-line writing assignments. Undergraduates will have the option of submitting a final seminar paper, if this better suits their programmatic needs; they should arrange this in the first week with the Instructor. Graduate students will prepare a 15-page seminar paper at the end of the semester, and will be responsible for one brief in-class presentation during the semester.

Georgia State University is hosting the Modern Greek Studies Association's (MGSA) biannual meetings in mid-October (October 15-18, 2015) and the Keynote Speaker is Yannis Hamilakis, professor of Archaeology at Southampton and a world-renowned scholar of the links between modern archaeology and nationalism. It is my hope that he will join our seminar when we read his work. Attendance at his Friday evening Keynote Address is strongly encouraged.

Modern Cultures of Display: Archaeology, Museums and Nationalism in Italy, Greece, Egypt and Turkey

New Course in Fall 2015
Emory University MESAS 570 / HIST 585
Georgia State University RELS 8210



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Thanks to the GSU Center for Hellenic Studies, Honors College, and College of Arts and Sciences, as well as Emory University's Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies and Department of History.