

Academic and professional background

I am a first year PhD student at the University of Birmingham, working on the history of the Empire of Trebizond. Let me begin with a few words about my background. I have always been passionate about medieval history, but prior to working on Trebizond, I explored the map of the medieval world to its widest extent. During my school years, medieval Western European history was my main interest, which led me to study Latin for six years and translated forty poems by Hildegard of Bingen for my secondary school dissertation.

After school, I wanted to explore some other fields of my interests and spent one year in France studying Humanities and Politics at a '*Classe Préparatoire pour les Grandes Ecoles*'. After this, I returned to Finland and took undergraduate courses on History, Geography and sciences, as well as some Russian and Greek. At this time, I wanted to gain work experience and travel before returning to studies and an academic life, and so I took a position as a travel guide. This deepened my interest in medieval history outside Europe and I wanted to pursue it further by specialising as an excursion guide. Thus, I was guiding at Late Antique and Byzantine sites in Bulgaria, such as Nessebar, Sozopol and Varna. I designed and guided for two seasons a biweekly excursion from Bulgaria to Istanbul, where I guided at the Hagia Sophia, the Hippodrome and Ottoman sites such as the Sultanahmet mosque and Topkapi palace. I also worked six months in Thassos in Greece and conducted excursions on the island and to the town of Xanthi. Finally, I spent one season as guide in India, which made me interested in Asian culture and notably, revealed some intriguing connections with what I had learnt so far.

I decided to commence my studies in London, where I had the opportunity to combine South Asian history and languages, Byzantine and Middle Eastern history into my undergraduate degree. Eventually, Byzantine history came to be my primary interest and it provided an opportunity for me to explore a fairly little studied area compared to Western medieval history, and to use the skills and knowledge I already had. Last year, during my Masters in Oxford, I learnt Classical and Medieval Greek and Armenian. My interests concentrated on Late Byzantine history, which is when I came to know how little Trebizond has been studied and what fascinating material there was to discover.

I wrote my Masters essays last year on the Citadel of Trebizond and on prophecies on the Fall of Constantinople. Currently, my PhD thesis is on the Empire of Trebizond – in context. I have so far translated the chronicle by Michael Panaretos and I plan to include a discussion on it as a source in my thesis. During my Masters and PhD studies, I have also taken courses on Archaeology and Numismatics, Byzantine Gender studies and done some basics on History of Art. My aim is to study the Empire of Trebizond as a Late Byzantine state in its Anatolian, Caucasian, Byzantine and Black Sea context and interacting with its neighbours of multiple languages and cultures.

Summary of research project

Historians have become increasingly aware of how much the period from the late thirteenth to the early fifteenth centuries stands out as a distinctive era in the history of western Eurasia – an age of small states (see for example J. Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500*, Cambridge, 2009). Understanding how they worked and why they were so successful is one of the keys to the development of new ways of looking at medieval political history. Much of the work to date has concentrated on Western Europe, but the empire of Trebizond presents a remarkable opportunity to look at a well-documented non-Latin small state outside the European world, and one that prospered in a particularly difficult environment for over two centuries. As opposed to relatively well studied Byzantine sources written in Constantinople, Trebizond enables us to understand the rise of Ottomans in Anatolia, written from a Byzantine periphery – which was at the same time a Pontic centre.

Founded by the Georgian Queen Tamar in 1204, when Constantinople was occupied by Latin crusaders, and ruled by direct descendants of the Comnenian emperors, Trebizond became a contender for the rule in Constantinople. Although Trebizond lost this contest, it lasted as its own entity for two and a half centuries, outliving Constantinople by eight years. Its emperors were faced with the challenge to manoeuvre their complex situation. On a local level, their state was surrounded by pastoral Turkoman tribes migrating between summer and winter pastures and cohabiting with the local population. On a regional level, it was situated in the patchwork of small states in Asia Minor, an eclectic mix of Christians and Muslims of various kinds, representing a multitude of languages and ethnicities. On a trans-regional level, Trebizond had thriving trade and diplomatic relations with East and West, from Mongol and Turkmen rulers to Italian city states.

My thesis is an attempt to shed light on large, long-term developments in the 14th and 15th centuries in Anatolia and in the Eastern Mediterranean by writing the history of Trebizond and focusing on the challenges it faced and how it survived them. This region had been marked by a moving frontier between large empires – but the late medieval period shows the result of a fragmentation that was visible before and after the Battle of Manzikert and increasingly accelerated after the Fourth Crusade in 1204. My study focuses on the years between 1261, when Michael Palaiologos re-captured Constantinople, and the fall of Trebizond to the Ottomans in 1461, which marks an end to this era of small states. There has been a tendency to dismiss this period as a time of ‘decline and fall’ with little to offer to historians of any particular domain. However, this is a historical context that needs to be re-assessed. One approach that I wish to take in my research is to apply the concepts found in the model of self-organisation, referred in social and political sciences (see the work of Niklas Luhmann, for example *Essays on Self-Reference*, New York 1990), to the context of fragmentation of the Byzantine empire and the emergence of a patchwork of small states on its former territories.

The Pontic world of Trebizond provides an opportunity to study the history of the Late Byzantine period from a frontier perspective as opposed to the majority of the sources available for this period, which were written in Constantinople, and which closely represent the view of the Byzantine Palaiologan emperors. The view from Trebizond complements our historical understanding of the final centuries of the Byzantine Empire, of its conflicts and alliances with Turkoman tribes and of the rise of the Ottomans. Furthermore, it gives a unique chance to study relations between Constantinople and Trebizond, two enclaves that both considered themselves 'Byzantine' and remained in predominantly Greek –speaking, Christian rule for two and a half centuries, in the middle of an increasingly 'Turkified' Anatolia. Trebizond had multiple identities: in addition to its self-perception as 'a Byzantine Empire', it formed the centre of a 'Pontic' world. This universe encompassed the shores of the Black Sea and it extended into Anatolia and the Caucasus. Pontic Trebizond dealt comfortably with Georgians, Armenians, Turks, Italians – it was in the middle of a variety of languages and religions. Its emperors were Greek –speakers, but its subjects were predominantly not. Considering this fact, it is all the more remarkable that the region of Trebizond, modern Trabzon, retains even today a strong Greek – or rather, 'Byzantine' character. Hence, Trebizond is a topic that attracts interest even today, especially in Greece but also elsewhere. The rich culture and folklore of its Greek population that moved to Greece in the 1920s is actively studied, as well as its Turkish Muslim population, who speak an archaic form of Greek (e.g. by Pietro Bortone). The formation of such a strong identity can be understood through the study of the Empire of Trebizond.

The history of Trebizond can be studied from a multitude of sources: a combination of literary, documentary, administrative and archaeological materials make it one of the best documented small states anywhere outside Italy. Yet, this topic remains relatively unexplored. Pioneering work of Russian scholars has led to the publication of some sources, such as F. Uspensky & V.N. Beneshevich's publication of the archive of the Vazelon Monastery (1927) and the editions of the chronicle by Michael Panaretos and the work of Andrew Libadenos by Odysseus Lampsides. Yet these, as well as the documents from the imperial chancery of the Komnenoi of Trebizond have not been subject to extensive modern study. Sergei Karpov and Rustam Shukurov have written the most recent scholarly works on the history of Trebizond. The art, archaeology, and material culture has been studied and recorded, notably by A. Bryer, D. Winfield, A. Eastmond and D. Talbot Rice. Similarly the rich series of early Ottoman *defters* have been studied by H. Lowry. Considering the field as a whole, there have been a number of interesting and often seminal studies, including those by S.P. Karpov, O. Lampsides, R. Shukurov and A. Bryer, but also by F. Uspensky, N. Oikonomides and A.G.K. Savvides but a large amount of available source material has remained unexploited. The extensive survey of the monuments of the Empire of Trebizond is an important resource that has not been tapped into. A. Bryer has presented important ideas in *The Empire of Trebizond and the Pontos*, (London, 1980). Likewise, Bryer and Heath Lowry's study *Continuity and Change in late Byzantine and early Ottoman society* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1986) has valuable insights – however, these are both collections of articles. A. Eastmond's work on art history (*Art and identity in thirteenth-century Byzantium: Hagia Sophia and the empire of Trebizond*, Birmingham, 2004) laid a basis for a more complete study of the empire, but it has not been followed up, especially for the 14th and 15th centuries.

The key to understanding this field is a careful reading of sources in Greek and other languages. Neither the only Greek historian, Michael Panaretos, nor the surprisingly rich surviving documentation has received close critical reading. The history of Trebizond has been written, but it lacks a context, which only can be provided by a comparative study with other late medieval small states – such as Cilician Armenia or the shrinking Byzantine empire. The completion of this thesis will integrate the history of Trebizond into the field of medieval studies and provide exciting new leads for future research not only for Byzantinists but also for scholars exploring other aspects of the medieval world.

The wider interest behind my research is to increase interest and awareness about Trebizond as a case study of a late Medieval small state. Trebizond provides excellent material for the study of Western Medieval, Byzantine, Eastern European, Black Sea, Caucasian and Middle Eastern History. I believe that participation in the 'Dynamic Middle Ages' workshop will provide me with debates and methodology from other areas of Medieval Studies. What I hope to contribute to the other participants is a well-rounded case study, which is likely to have some connections with the work of the other medievalists.