Venice and Istanbul, capitals of the Most Serene Republic and the Ottoman Empire, are two of the most iconic cities of the early modern age. Long seen as opposites locked in a life-or-death struggle, they were in fact connected by all forms of contacts: military conflict was one, but it rarely lasted long and altogether occupied a minority of the period. This MA option explores the history of the Mediterranean as a region of encounter, exchange and competition from the point of view of its two most important capitals. The period ranges from the capture of Istanbul by the Ottomans and their settlement there, to the fall of the Venetian Republic. The module is built to explore themes and topics comparatively in both cities/empires. To start, we will explore the ways in which the two cities worked as crossroads centres, the evolution of urban space and society, the co-existence of different minorities, and the political and cultural implications of running neighbouring Mediterranean empires. We will then move onto different kinds of trans-imperial exchange, such as trade, diplomacy and cultural/intellectual encounters, including key figures of go-between such as interpreters, converts, diplomatic agents, corsairs. Finally, we will consider aspects of competition and conflict between empires: from religious rivalry, to relations in border territories, diplomatic negotiations and war. We will focus primarily on Venice and Istanbul, and the empires they controlled, but will also look at selected frontier territories (such as Crete, Cyprus and the Morea) that passed from one empire to the other, to gain different insights into the ways in which encounter, exchange and competition could affect local populations. Through this module you will gain knowledge about Venice, Istanbul, their empires and the early modern Mediterranean, and also a sense of a crucial phase in trans-imperial and transcultural history.

Basic bibliography

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