The late Middle Ages defined its normative communities—Europe, Christendom, and the Roman Empire—through the exclusion of Byzantium, decried as a schismatic and contumacious state. Yet the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 ruptured old channels of thought and debate. This talk explores the political and ideological consequences of Byzantium’s imperial demise in Europe. Examining crusade oratory, apocalyptic fantasies, elaborate artistic projects, and humanist historiography in the context of contemporary politics, this paper argues that western intellectuals appropriated Byzantium’s imperial legacy in surprising ways after the empire’s destruction. In doing so, they sketched distinctive and enduring frontiers for European, Christian and Roman imperial identities and invested Byzantium with a renewed relevance for early modern Europe.

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