In “Waking to Constantinople,” Turkish poet Lale Müldür travels back in time -- to the same city under a different empire. Sitting by the waters of the Bosphorus, it is easy to embark on an imaginary journey back in time even today. If we could “rewind” history, we too would see caravans of traders, various armies, diplomatic entourages, and individuals -- pilgrims and artists and travelers -- coming to the city of the world’s desire.

Istanbul is still a mecca for trade and travel, history and archaeology. It is a crossroads of civilizations, with a convergence of many languages, goods, customs, practices, and cultural artifacts. For centuries, trade and conquest brought together people from diverse cultures – peacefully and otherwise – making Istanbul a place where dragomans (translators), adventurers, ambassadors, artists and intellectuals gravitated. These include the writer James Baldwin; the scholar Erich Auerbach, fleeing Nazi Germany; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, British author of the Turkish Embassy letters, and her diplomat husband; the 19th-century French novelist Pierre Loti; and the modern artists, musicians, poets and writers who have chosen Istanbul as their home.

In Istanbul, we experience the past as a lived and present reality: through its monuments and edifices; mosques and churches; fortresses, gates, and ancient walls. We can still see the place where a fleet of ships would arrive at the golden gates, the entrance to the city, the golden portal of Byzantium, which became Constantinople, and now Istanbul, where the remnants of the walls that protected the city can still be seen. Now the skyline of Istanbul is marked by domes, minarets, and high-rise buildings jostling for space.

As a city that is in both Europe and Asia, Istanbul has been described as the meeting point between East and West. Despite the influence of European culture, it is an Eastern city in many ways, and at times has boasted more wealth and luxury than the emerging European city-states. Until 1453, Istanbul was Constantinople, under the aegis of Eastern Orthodox Christianity; today, it is primarily Muslim, but the Orthodox Patriarch still lives there. The Ottoman Empire has left its linguistic and cultural legacy, as has Ataturk’s struggle for independence, democracy, and modernity. Today Turkey plays an active role in global economics and geopolitics, ever-changing and yet of great importance geographically and strategically.
Istanbul: Summer of 2012

In the summer of 2012, the Istanbul program will be led by Dr. Elizabeth A. Pallitto, who has taught at Kadir Has and Bosphorus Universities and has lived in Istanbul for years. Among other highlights, we will go on site excursions within Istanbul and beyond. We'll be based on the European side, with Asia just a ferry ride away.

We will explore the city as we learn about its history. A typical day might begin with a class or an excursion to one of the many sights to see within Istanbul. During the 3rd week the group will travel to the Aegean coastal region to visit sites of historical importance. Troy, Ephesus, Assos, Pergama (Bergama) are locales for possible trips. Optional weekend trips to destinations such as Cappadokia, Çatal Hüyük, or Antakya (Antioch) will be offered.

Unlike traditional classes, we will experience a lot of learning by being and seeing. Students should think of this as a class with a “lab” component, except that the lab is Istanbul! The class will be interdisciplinary by nature, drawing upon archaeology, history, sociology, literature, and the arts. There are no prerequisites except an open mind and stamina. Students will have the opportunity to meet other English-speaking students at Turkish universities.

Grades will be based upon a combination of participation, student presentation, and a brief written report involving a cultural phenomenon or historical site. Students will earn three college credits for the course.

Class Participation: 10%
Daily journal: 40%
Student presentation: 25%
Written essay on a cultural/historical topic 25%

Entries in the daily journal will draw from assigned readings, class lectures, and site visits. For the site reports, students will be assigned a topic while still in the U.S., in order to begin reading and research before departing for Turkey. Topics could include a building, a work of art, or a cultural phenomenon, such as the Mevlevi sema, the performance of the “whirling dervishes,” and its spiritual significance. Students will speak on the topic at or close to the site itself: What is it? What is its background? What does it reveal about the culture of which it was, or is, a part? Such presentations should last around fifteen minutes. Later, students will write up their remarks in a brief (five-to-six page) paper, to be turned in within a month of returning to the U.S.

Required readings include the following (additional readings may be distributed as PDFs):

Essential Texts:

Excerpts of essential texts that will be provided (as PDF files):


Recommended Texts:


*I might choose between these books or just use some of the chapters.