

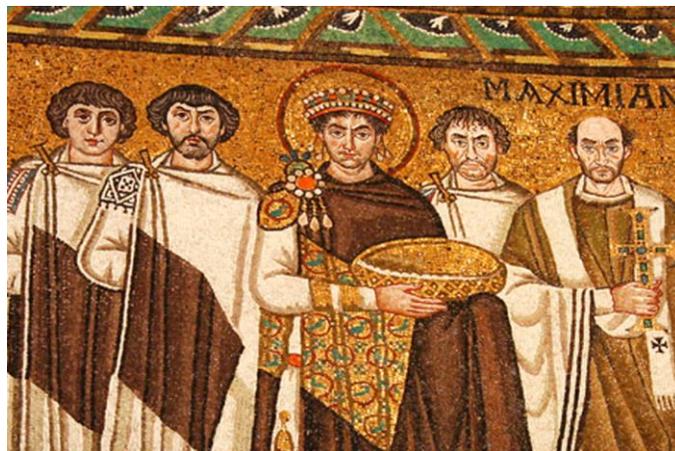
ETERNAL SPLENDOURS AQUILEIA, RAVENNA & TORCELLO

TUESDAY 1 – SATURDAY 5 OCTOBER 2019 (5 DAYS)

LECTURER: CHARLES FREEMAN

£1685

- **Unique opportunity to come to terms with the world of late antiquity and early Christianity**
- **Ravenna offers the finest mosaic cycles reflecting the religious tensions of the late antique world**
- **Magical Aquileia & Torcello included**
- **Other sites usually neglected, such as Grado & Pomposa, will be visited**
- **Tour led by renowned authority on late antiquity, Charles Freeman**



Justinian I, Ravenna, Basilica of San Vitale

OVERVIEW

This is the ideal introduction to the world of the late Roman Empire. The situation in Italy was fraught as the church had come to replace the Imperial system as a source of power and wealth. One of the great invading tribes from the north, the Ostrogoths, took over large parts of northern Italy, only to be challenged by the arrival of Byzantine troops sent by the great Emperor Justinian. The visual arts mirrored the often rapid changes of ruler and his version of Christianity, leading in time to the emergence of what became the accepted visual shorthand of medieval religious art. These changes will be brought vividly to life through a series of guided walks around and introductory lectures on, the splendours of ancient Ravenna, Torcello, Aquileia, Grado and Pomposa.

Ravenna was a Roman settlement linked to the nearby important Adriatic naval base founded by the Emperor Augustus at Classe. In the fifth century AD it became the sometime capital of the Roman Empire in the West, ruled by a succession of Governors, Emperors, Kings, Exarchs and Bishops, reflecting the changing pattern of authority. Through all these phases, it was visually enriched by a succession of churches all of which were decorated in the characteristic fashion of the time with vast areas of wall and ceiling mosaics, expensive marble wall and floor panels and a splendid array of marble sculptures, usually in the form of sarcophagi.

Aquileia was an equally important Roman city which enjoyed Imperial patronage under Augustus and his successors. The scene of sieges, murders and sundry other events in late Imperial history, it suffered all sorts of indignities during the period of the Barbarian invasions. Grado is, in contrast, a busy fishing port and once replaced nearby Aquileia as a centre of late Roman power in the area. Torcello, now semi-abandoned, has one of the finest early medieval churches in the Veneto, with wonderful mosaics. We shall also visit Pomposa, which sits just on the Adriatic coast, its monastery an oasis of calm.

The visit will be led by Charles Freeman, whose recent books, *A New History of Early Christianity* and *Holy Bones & Holy Dust, A History of Relics* (both published by Yale University Press) contain a wealth of material which he will weave into the tour. We spend two nights in Grado at the 4* Hotel Metropol. We then move to Ravenna, staying at the modest 4* NH Ravenna Hotel (formerly the Jolly) in the centre of the town.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Tuesday 1 October – We fly from Gatwick to Venice, arriving mid afternoon. We then drive up to **Grado** and check into our hotel, the **4* Hotel Metropol**. There will be a group dinner in a local restaurant – wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Wednesday 2 October – In antiquity **Aquileia** was a bustling Roman city which in time became the seat of a Patriarch, a church official of great importance. This twin heritage of secular Roman and early Christian endeavour is reflected in a splendid array of sites. The most interesting include the marvellous **Basilica** which has the most important mosaic pavement of its type in Italy. There is also a good example of an early **Baptistry** and the **Museum** is especially rich in Roman glass and amber. After a group lunch we return to **Grado**, an important fishing town on the Adriatic, but in antiquity it too played an important role in history, reflected in a group of simple early churches. All in all, today will be a magical introduction to a mysterious world and the evening will be free.

Day 3: Thursday 3 October – We leave Grado and drive to **Cavallino** for our transfer by boat to **Torcello**. Jan Morris memorably described Torcello as existing in “a positive ecstasy of melancholia” and it is a world away from the hustle and bustle of Venice. There are a few palaces, the small church of **Santa Fosca** and above all, the **Cathedral**. My, what a splendid place: here we shall find some marvellous mosaics – a gentle Madonna, a not so gentle Last Judgement and much else. After a group lunch we return to our coach and continue to Ravenna for a two-night stay at the modest **4* NH Ravenna Hotel** (formerly the Jolly) in the town centre and a free evening.

Day 4: Friday 4 October – The Emperor Honorius moved the western imperial capital of the Roman Empire from Milan to Ravenna in 401 and his sister, Galla Placidia, was an important patron of the arts. Our visit will begin at her so-called **Mausoleum** as it has the earliest surviving mosaics, of fifth century date, in Ravenna. A few yards away the most splendid church of the city, **San Vitale**, dominates its surroundings. Consecrated in 547 by Archbishop Maximian, the great glory of the place are the spectacular mosaics decorating the choir and apse. These include the famous images of the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora, as by then, this part of the western empire had been conquered by the Byzantines. The other great church in Ravenna, **Sant’ Apollinare Nuovo**, contains two great mosaic processions marching up the nave arcade towards the High Altar. It was built early in the sixth century when Ravenna was ruled by Theodoric the Ostrogoth. As with San Vitale, the church contains many sarcophagi and other important early Christian artefacts. There are many smaller buildings of importance which will be included on our walks, such as the **Neonian Baptistry**, **Theodoric’s Mausoleum** and the two important **Museums**, both of which contain important treasures, such as Maximian’s magnificent ivory throne. We have a group dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 5: Saturday 5 October – On leaving Ravenna we visit **Sant’ Apollinare in Classe**, where the apse has marvellous mosaics. We then continue on to the ninth century **Abbey of Pomposa**, a site of great beauty and peace with fine frescoes in its dining hall and a wonderful floor in the main church. After an early lunch (not included) we continue to Venice Airport for the return flight to Gatwick.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £1685

Price without flights £1550

Deposit £275

Single Supplement £150 (Double/Twin Room for Sole Use)

Hotel 2 nights with breakfast at the 4* Hotel Metropol in Grado; 2 nights with breakfast at the 4* NH Ravenna Hotel, Ravenna

Flights British Airways

Outward: BA2586 Depart London Gatwick **1335** arrive Venice **1650**

Return: BA2585 Depart Venice **1735** arrive London Gatwick **1845**

Price includes 2 dinners & 2 lunches with water, wine & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, services of Charles Freeman & our tour manager, James Hill

Not included Travel to/from Gatwick, 2 dinners & 3 lunches



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