Sixth-century Byzantium (and especially the reign of Justinian, 527-65) has been described as the last flowering of Antiquity. Writers still used classical models and inhabitants still expected the amenities of the classical city (for instance bathing and chariot races). It was also a time when classics could be ignored or were under attack (the closing of Plato’s academy in 529; increasing importance of icons; pillar saints). It was both a period of confidence and huge achievement (codification of Roman law; building of Hagia Sophia; reconquest of Vandal Africa and Gothic Italy, invention of AD dating), but also of fear and pessimism (Procopius’ Secret History, major riots, plague, invasions, predictions of the end of the world). In looking at the successes and failures of the period, I will ask if we can find an explanation for the end of Antiquity and the beginnings of Mediaevalism.

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