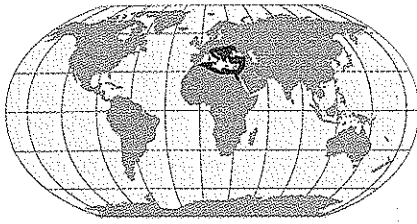


Byzantines and Slavs



Chapter Themes

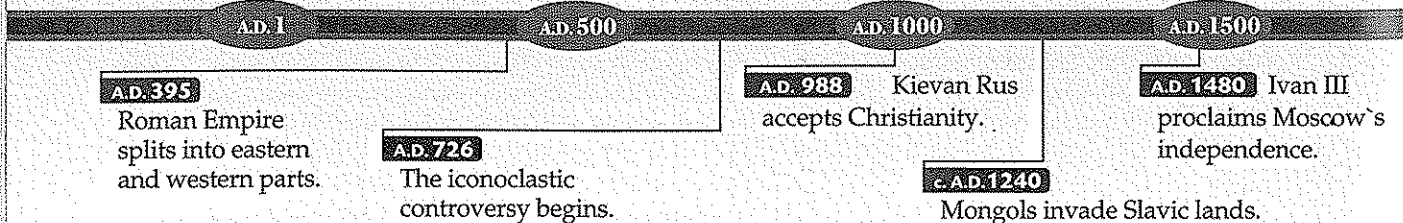
- ▶ **Conflict** Byzantines fight off invaders and struggle over use of icons. *Section 1*
- ▶ **Innovation** Byzantines develop Eastern Orthodox theology and distinctive art forms. *Section 2*
- ▶ **Cultural Diffusion** Trade routes and invasions spread beliefs and ideas. *Section 3*

The Storyteller

The awestruck visitor arriving in A.D. 600 in the city of Constantinople in southeastern Europe scarcely knew where to turn. Splendid public buildings as well as simple private homes lined the streets; the scent of rare spices perfumed the air; people dressed in fine silk thronged the church of Hagia Sophia. "One might imagine that one has chanced upon a meadow in full bloom," the Greek historian Procopius wrote about the newly built church. "For one would surely marvel at the purple hue of some [columns], the green of others, at those on which the crimson blooms, at those that flash with white, at those, too, which nature, like a painter, has varied with the most contrasting colors." The church's grandeur reflected that of Constantinople, "city of the world's desire," capital of a prosperous empire that controlled east-west trade and laid the basis for the Greek and Slavic cultures of modern Europe.

Historical Significance

What cultural achievements did the Byzantines pass on to western Europe? How did their civilization affect the development of the peoples of eastern Europe?



AD. 330 Constantine builds city of Constantinople.

AD. 527 Justinian becomes eastern Roman emperor.

AD. 787 Church council at Nicaea approves use of icons.

AD. 1054 Eastern and Western Churches split.

Section 1

The New Rome

Setting the Scene

- ▶ **Terms to Define**
clergy, laity, icon, iconoclast, schism
- ▶ **People to Meet**
Constantine, Justinian, Theodora, Leo III
- ▶ **Places to Locate**
Byzantine Empire, Constantinople

Find Out ▶ What made the Byzantine Empire rich and powerful?

The Storyteller

Byzantium [Constantinople] was in flames. A mob was screaming insults at Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora. The emperor swiftly ordered the imperial treasury loaded onto ships to prepare for escape. Half crazed and without hope, Justinian held a final council of a few loyal friends; Theodora was present. After the military generals expressed their fears, Theodora suddenly rose and broke the silence. "I do not choose to flee," she said. "Never shall I see the day when



I am not saluted as the empress.... You have the money, the ships are ready, the sea is open. As for me, I shall stay." Hearing her, the others took heart. That day, Theodora saved Justinian's throne.

—adapted from *Theodora, Empress of Byzantium*, Charles Diehl, 1972

Theodora, detail of mosaic

After the Roman Empire was divided in A.D. 395, the eastern half became known as the **Byzantine Empire**. At its height in the A.D. 500s, the Byzantine Empire included most of the Balkan Peninsula, Italy, southern Spain, Asia Minor, Syria and North Africa. Its major population group, the Greeks, lived mainly in the central part of the empire. Also included in the empire were Egyptians, Syrians, Arabs, Armenians, Jews, Persians, Slavs, and Turks. These varied peoples and cultures gave Byzantine civilization an international character.

Byzantine Foundations

The location of **Constantinople**, the Byzantine capital, reinforced this multicultural character. The city was located near the centers of early Christianity as well as on major trade routes.

A Strategic City

In A.D. 330 the Roman emperor **Constantine** built Constantinople at a strategic place where Europe and Asia meet. Located on a peninsula, Constantinople overlooked the Bosphorus, the narrow strait between the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. A second strait, the Dardanelles, connects the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean Sea, which leads to the Mediterranean. These straits gave the occupiers of the peninsula control over movement between the Mediterranean and the Black Seas and, as a result, over the routes leading east to Asia and north to northern Europe. The site of Constantinople itself offered natural protection from attack at a time when Germanic invaders were assaulting Rome to the west. Water protected the city on three sides, and triple walls fortified the side open to attack by land. Eventually a huge chain was strung across the narrow mouth of the deep harbor on Constantinople's north side for still greater protection.

and Western
split.

Empire was divided
Western half became
Byzantine Empire. At
Byzantine Empire
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crossroads for trade. By
A.D. 400 the Byzantine cap-
ital had become the wealth-
iest part of the Roman
Empire, handling rich car-
goes from Asia, Europe,
and Africa.

Cultural Blend

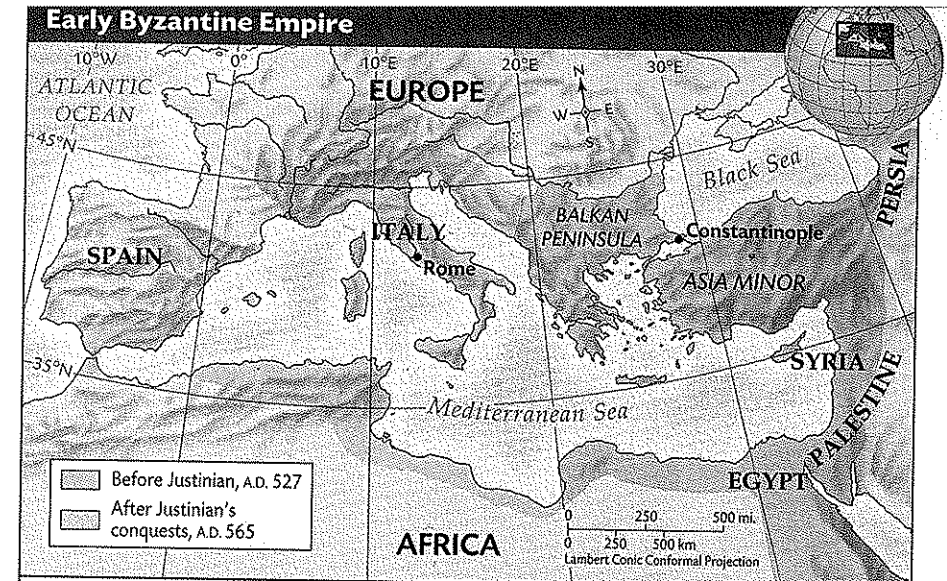
After Rome's fall, the
Byzantine Empire was
regarded as heir to Roman
power and traditions.
Constantinople was known
as the New Rome because
its emperors were Romans
who spoke Latin and many
of its wealthy families
came from Rome. Despite
these ties, the Byzantine
Empire was more than a
continuation of the old
Roman Empire.

Lands once part of the
Greek world formed the
heart of the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine peo-
ple not only spoke Greek but also stressed their
Greek heritage. Eventually Byzantine emperors
and officials also used Greek rather than Latin.
Religious scholars expressed their ideas in Greek
and developed a distinct form of Christianity
known today as Eastern Orthodoxy. In addition to
the Byzantine Empire's classical Greek heritage and
Christian religion came cultural influences from
eastern civilizations such as Persia. This mixture of
cultures created a distinct Byzantine civilization.
Between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1200, this civilization
was one of the most advanced in the world and had
a higher standard of living than western Europe.

TURNING POINT

Justinian's Rule

At its height the Byzantine Empire was ruled
by **Justinian**, the son of prosperous peasants from
Macedonia in the western part of the empire. While
a young man in the court of his uncle, Emperor
Justin I, he worked late into the night at his studies.
Justinian's enthusiasm for knowledge and hard
work continued after he became emperor in A.D.
527, at age 44.



Map Study Emperor Justinian's conquests extended Byzantine rule in the West, including Italy and parts of northern Africa and Spain. Region What effect did Justinian's conquests have on the Byzantine Empire?

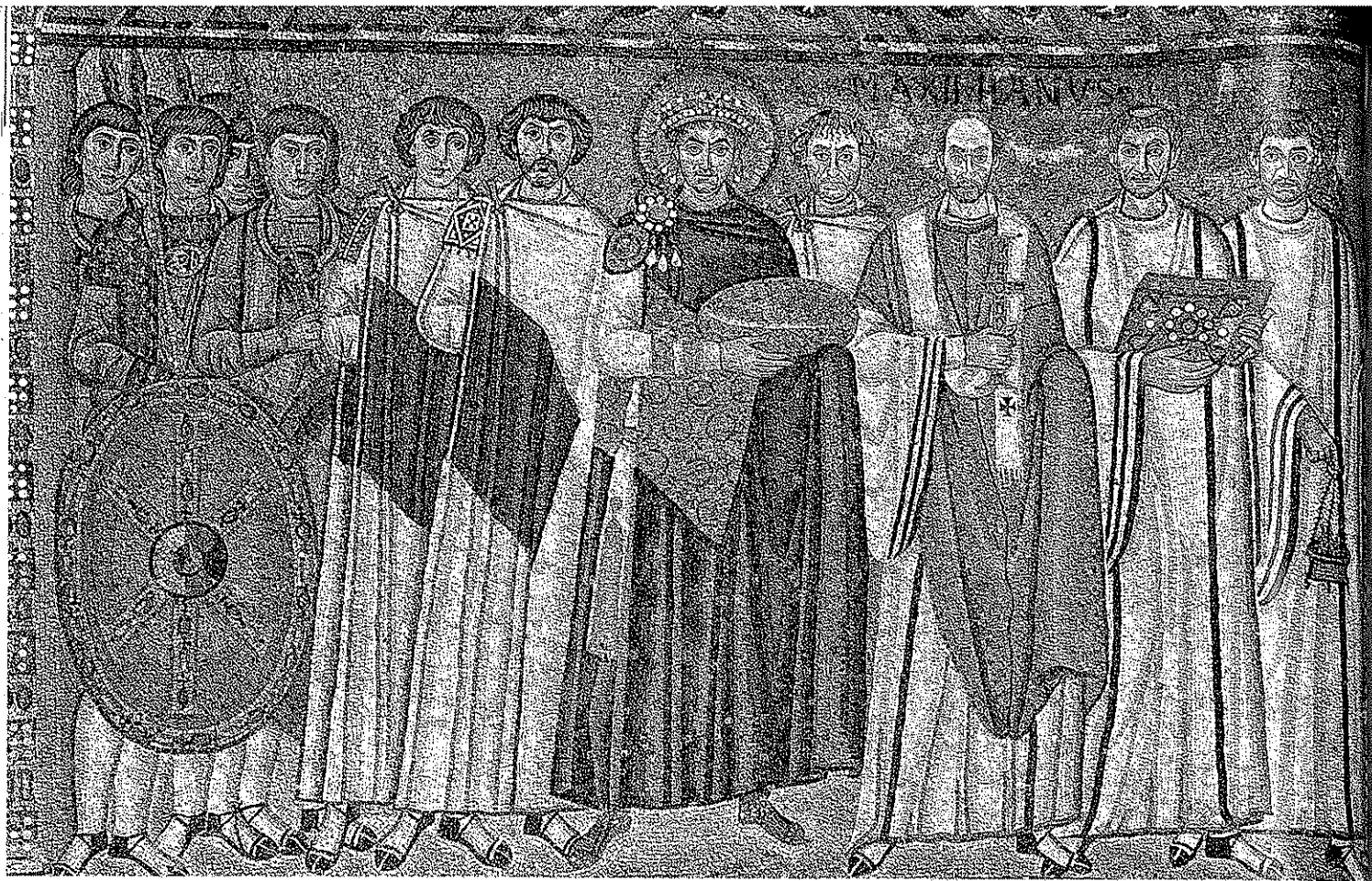
Theodora's Support

Justinian's wife, **Theodora**, was beautiful, intel-
ligent, and ambitious. Justinian had married her
in spite of court objections to her occupation as
an actress—a profession held in low esteem in
the empire. A capable empress, Theodora partici-
pated actively in government, rewarding friends
with positions and using dismissals to punish
enemies.

Theodora was especially concerned with
improving the social standing of women. She per-
suaded Justinian to issue a decree giving a wife the
right to own land equal in value to the wealth she
brought with her at marriage. This land gave a
widow the income she needed to support her chil-
dren without the assistance of the government.

In A.D. 532 Theodora's political talents helped
save Justinian's throne. When a revolt of taxpayers
in Constantinople threatened the government,
Justinian's advisers urged him to leave the city. As
flames roared through Constantinople and the
rebels battered at the palace gates, Justinian pre-
pared to flee. Theodora, however, persuaded him to
remain in control.

Inspired by his wife's determination, Justinian
reasserted his power. His army crushed the rebels,
killing 30,000 people. From that time until his death
in A.D. 565, Justinian ruled without challenge.



The Emperor Justinian, a mosaic from the A.D. 500s from Ravenna, Italy.
What architectural landmark did Justinian build?

Military Campaigns

During Justinian's reign, the Byzantines faced a serious military threat from the East. The Sassanian Empire of Persia, under Chosroes (kaz•ROH•eez) I, grew in strength and threatened to conquer the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantines rallied their forces and threw back the Persians. Justinian gained a brief period of security for the eastern borders by agreeing to pay tribute in return for peace.

Justinian dreamed of restoring the Roman Empire. In A.D. 533 he began the reconquest of Italy, North Africa, and Spain—Roman lands that had fallen to Germanic invaders. Under the general Belisarius, the Byzantine armies were strengthened and reorganized. Between A.D. 533 and A.D. 555, they fought a series of wars against the Vandals in North Africa, the Ostrogoths in Italy, and the Visigoths in southern Spain. The Byzantines conquered these Germanic groups and extended Byzantine rule in the west.

The successful reconquest, however, proved costly for the empire. The wars exhausted most of the Byzantine resources. Funds were low for defending the eastern borders, which faced attack by an

expanding Persian Empire. Justinian's conquests did not last. Within a generation of his death, the empire lost many of its outlying territories.

Code of Laws

Justinian's legal reforms did last, affecting Western law even today. Shortly after becoming emperor, Justinian appointed a commission to codify, or classify, the empire's Roman laws. For centuries, these laws had accumulated without organization or classification.

The commission was made up of 10 scholars headed by a legal expert named Tribonian. For more than 6 years, the commission collected and organized vast numbers of laws. It threw out the ones that were outdated, simplified many, and put the remainder into categories. The commission's work was recorded in a collection of books known as the *Corpus of Civil Law*, or the Justinian Code. This massive work preserved Rome's legal heritage and later became the basis for most European legal systems.

The Arts

Under Justinian, Byzantine art and architecture



thrived and achieved their distinct character. The emperor ordered the construction of new roads, fortresses, aqueducts, monasteries, and other buildings. His most famous project was the church of Hagia Sophia, "Holy Wisdom," in Constantinople. The largest and most beautiful church in the empire, Hagia Sophia still stands today as one of the world's great architectural landmarks.

Byzantine Religion

Strong ties linked Byzantine emperors and the Church. The emperors were regarded as God's representatives on earth. Starting in the A.D. 400s, Byzantine emperors and empresses were crowned by the patriarch of Constantinople and took an oath to defend the Christian faith.

Church and State

Byzantine emperors frequently played a major role in church affairs. They appointed church officials, defined the style of worship, and used the wealth of the Church for government purposes.

Justinian strengthened this control over the

Church by intervening in disputes over church beliefs. He also tried to unify the empire under one Christian faith, a practice that sometimes led to persecution of Jews and non-Greek Christians.

Religious Controversy

Both Byzantine clergy—church officials such as priests and bishops—and laity—church members who were not clergy—were intensely interested in religious matters. In their homes, markets, and shops, Byzantines often engaged in heated religious discussions. Visitors to Constantinople saw shoppers in the marketplaces having lively discussions about such topics as the exact relationship of Jesus the Son to God the Father. Such arguments often became political issues and led to fights and riots.

In the A.D. 700s, a dispute broke out over the use of icons (EYE•KAHNZ), or religious images, in worship. Although Christians had disagreed about this practice since the A.D. 400s, the use of icons in churches became a political issue by the A.D. 700s.

Those who objected to the use of icons in Christian worship argued that the Bible, in the Ten Commandments, prohibited such images. Defenders stressed that icons were symbols of

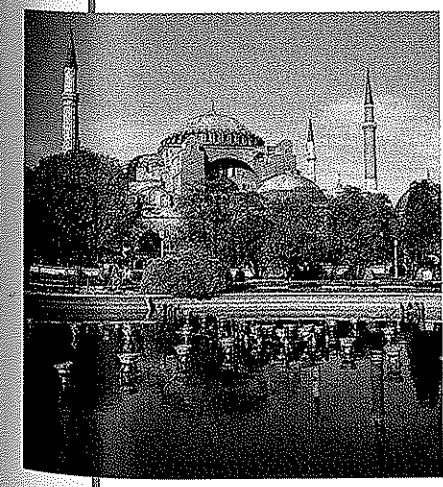
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CONNECTIONS The Arts

Byzantine Architecture

Hagia Sophia, completed in A.D. 537, was built to symbolize both Christianity's importance in the Byzantine Empire and the Byzantine emperor's authority. It also represented the beginning of what became known as the Byzantine style of architecture.

Hagia Sophia



Early Byzantine churches featured a central dome on a flat roof supported by four arches springing from columns or piers. Often the dome was pierced by windows and covered with glittering mosaics. Light streamed into the church from all directions and reflected off the decorated surfaces.

The Byzantine style eventually spread to other lands, such as Ukraine and Russia, that accepted Eastern Christianity. Architects in these lands modified the original Byzantine model to suit their own needs. For example, the Russians, who lived in a cold climate with a

lot of snow, replaced the flat roof and large central dome with sloping roofs and onion-shaped domes.

Today, Eastern Christians throughout the world still use some form of the Byzantine style. In cities and towns of North America, the descendants of Eastern Christian immigrants who came during the late 1800s and early 1900s have sometimes combined traditional Byzantine architectural principles with modern ones in their churches.

Linking Past and Present ACTIVITY

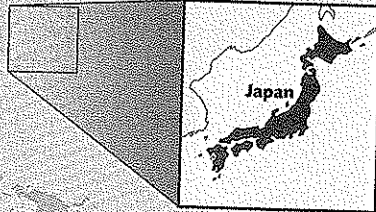
Examine a church or other building in your community that is built in the Byzantine style. What elements of its architecture do you think reflect the basic Byzantine model? What elements do you think are modern or come from other cultural traditions?



Simplified Alphabet Becomes Popular

Japan, A.D. 860

The Japanese alphabet, hiragana, became popular around A.D. 860. It consisted of characters developed by simplifying the Chinese alphabet. Hiragana was popularized by women of the Heian court, who used the system in writing poetry, diaries, and novels. It was called "letters of women" because men continued to use kanji, or the Chinese system.



God's presence in human affairs. The leading champion of icons was the Byzantine theologian John of Damascus. Although a resident of the Islamic Empire, he wrote many religious articles defending the use of icons.

Believing that icons encouraged superstition and the worship of idols, in A.D. 726 Emperor Leo III ordered all icons removed from the churches. The emperor's supporters—mostly military leaders, government officials, and many of the people in Asia Minor—became known as iconoclasts, or image breakers.

Church leaders and other Byzantines resisted the order, and were supported by the Church in Rome, which was as important a center of Christianity as Constantinople. The Roman pope's involvement in the controversy strained relations between the Eastern and Western Churches.

Feeling his authority was being challenged, Leo asserted his power and suppressed demonstrations in favor of icons. Although several later emperors followed Leo's lead, they were not supported by

the people. In A.D. 787 a church council at Nicaea approved the use of icons. Soon after, the Empress Irene—the first woman to hold the Byzantine throne in her own right—allowed the use of icons as long as they were not given the worship due to God. The Eastern Church further settled the issue in A.D. 843, allowing the use of pictures, but not statues, in worship.

Conflict With Rome

Since the A.D. 300s, the Eastern and Western Churches had disagreed on a number of religious and political issues. As centuries passed, the disagreements intensified.

The iconoclastic controversy was but one of many reasons that divided the two churches. The most serious issue concerned the source of religious authority. The pope in Rome and the patriarch of Constantinople did not agree on their roles in the Christian Church. The pope stated that he was supreme leader of the Church; the patriarch of Constantinople opposed this claim. The two church leaders also disagreed over points of doctrine. They challenged each other for control of new churches in the Balkan Peninsula.

Relations between Eastern and Western Churches worsened in the A.D. 700s when the Germanic Lombards invaded central Italy. When the Byzantine emperor refused to give the pope in Rome military protection, the pope turned to the Franks, a Germanic Catholic people in western Europe. After the Franks defeated the Lombards, the pope gave the Frankish leader, Charlemagne, the title of emperor—a title which only the Byzantine ruler could legally grant. This action made the Byzantines even more bitter toward the pope and the Western Church.

By A.D. 1054 doctrinal, political, and geographical differences finally led to a schism (SIH-zuhm), or separation, of the Church into the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Eastern Orthodox Church in the East. The split further weakened the Byzantine Empire, which had faced attacks from numerous peoples since its founding.

SECTION I REVIEW

Recall

1. **Define** clergy, laity, icon, iconoclast, schism.
2. **Identify** Constantine, Justinian, Theodora, Leo III.
3. **Locate** Constantinople on the

map on page 247. Why was Constantinople's location significant?

Critical Thinking

4. **Analyzing Information** How were Byzantine emperors and

the Christian Church linked?

Understanding Themes

5. **Conflict** How did religious disputes, such as the iconoclastic controversy, affect Byzantine political affairs?

AD 550 Byzantines send expedition to China.

AD 863 Cyril develops alphabet for the Slavs.

AD 1184 Queen Tamara begins her reign in Georgia.

AD 1453 Constantinople falls to Ottoman Turks.

Section 2

Byzantine Civilization

Setting the Scene

► Terms to Define

theology, regent, mosaic, illuminated manuscript, monastery, missionary

► People to Meet

Cyril, Methodius, the Seljuk Turks, the Ottoman Turks, Tiridates III, Tamara

► Places to Locate

Venice, Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Serbia

Find Out

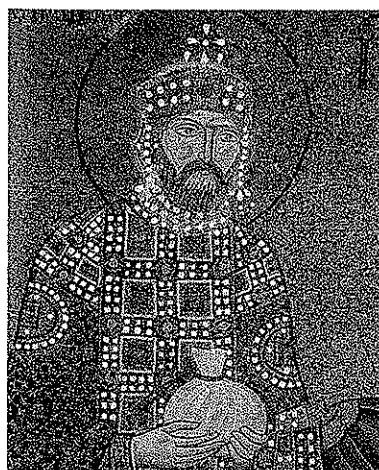
What role did Christianity play in Byzantine and neighboring societies?

The Storyteller

A bishop from Italy wrote home describing the Byzantine court: "In the audience-hall sat the Emperor on a throne before which stood an artificial tree, all gilded, on whose branches mechanical birds perched, singing. To either side of the throne stood a mighty lion, which, as the visitor approached, lashed the ground with its tail and from whose open jaws ... there came a terrifying roar." The visitor threw himself to the ground three times, and looking up beheld the Emperor raised by an invisible

mechanism to the roof of the hall, where he sat glittering among his jewels.

—adapted from Istanbul, Martin Heurilmann, 1958



Emperor Constantine IX

From A.D. 500 to A.D. 800, when western Europe was in decline, the Byzantine Empire was a brilliant center of civilization. Its scholars preserved Greek philosophy and literature, Roman political and legal ideas, and Christian theology, or religious teachings. The Byzantines also created new art forms and spread the religion of the Eastern Orthodox Church into eastern Europe.

Byzantine Life

Byzantine society was divided into a hierarchy of social groups. Yet, there were few barriers to prevent a person from moving from one group to another. This flexibility brought variety and change to Byzantine life.

Family Life

The family was the center of social life for most Byzantines. Both the Church and the government supported marriage as a sacred institution. Divorce was difficult to obtain, and the Church generally forbade more than one remarriage.

Byzantine women were expected to live partly in seclusion, and so rooms in homes and churches were set aside for their sole use. Nevertheless, women had gained some rights through Theodora's efforts. Like the empress herself, some women became well educated and influential in the government. Several governed as regents, or temporary rulers, and a few ruled in their own right as empresses.

The Economy

Most Byzantines made a living through farming, herding, or working as laborers. Farmers paid heavy taxes that supported the government.

Although the base of the Byzantine economy was agricultural, commerce thrived in cities such as Constantinople, which was the site of a natural crossroads for trade. Byzantine ships loaded with cargo sailed between the Mediterranean and Black Seas by way of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. At the eastern shore of the Black Sea, goods could be shipped overland through Asia. Rivers such as the Dnieper, which flows from the Baltic region south to the Black Sea, provided access to northern Europe.

Merchants traded Byzantine agricultural goods and furs and enslaved people from northern Europe for luxury goods from the East. To Constantinople's busy harbor, called the Golden Horn, ships brought cloves and sandalwood from the East Indies; pepper, copper, and gems from India and Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka); and silk from China.

The major Byzantine industry was weaving silk. It developed after A.D. 550, when Justinian sent two monks to China, the center of the silk industry.

On a visit to a silk factory the monks stole some silkworm eggs, hid them in hollow bamboo canes, and smuggled their precious cargo out of China. Brought to Constantinople, the silkworms fed on mulberry leaves and spun the silk that made the empire wealthy.

Byzantine Art and Learning

Among the products of Byzantine culture were beautiful icons, jewel-encrusted crosses, and carved ivory boxes for sacred items. These art forms were adopted by eastern Europe and also influenced western Europe and the Middle East.

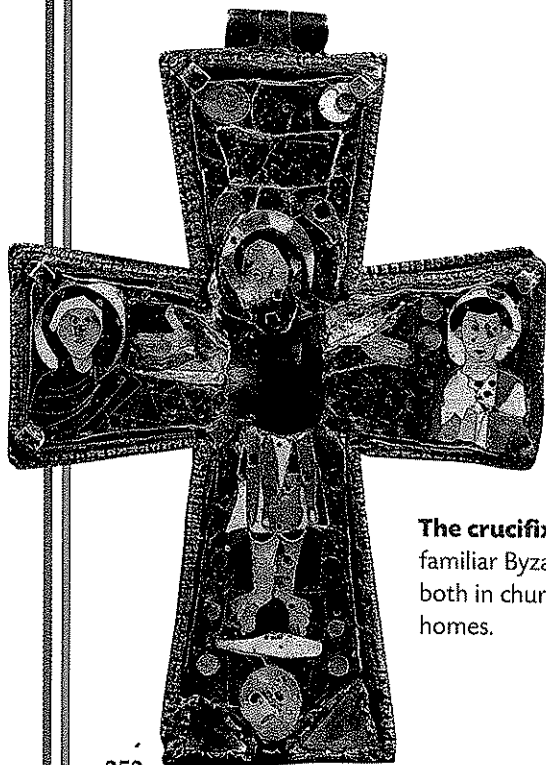
Art

Religious subjects were the sources of most Byzantine art. Icons, the most popular art form, portrayed saints and other religious figures. Icons were displayed on the walls of churches, homes, and shrines. Magnificent churches were

Images of the Times

Byzantine Art

Byzantine art reflected the strong influence of Christianity.



The crucifix was a familiar Byzantine icon both in churches and in homes.

The Byzantine church of St. Kosmas at Loukas, Greece, displays a colorful mosaic.



monks stole some
bamboo canes,
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Learning

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embellished with gold and silver, polished and carved marble, ivory, and jewels, as well as icons and other religious images.

The Byzantines also excelled in the art of mosaic, or pictures made of many tiny pieces of colored glass or flat stone set in plaster. The most masterly mosaics captured the finest gradations of skin tones and textures of clothing—a skill even painters found difficult to master. Byzantine emperor Constantine VII, historian, painter, and author, described one mosaic:

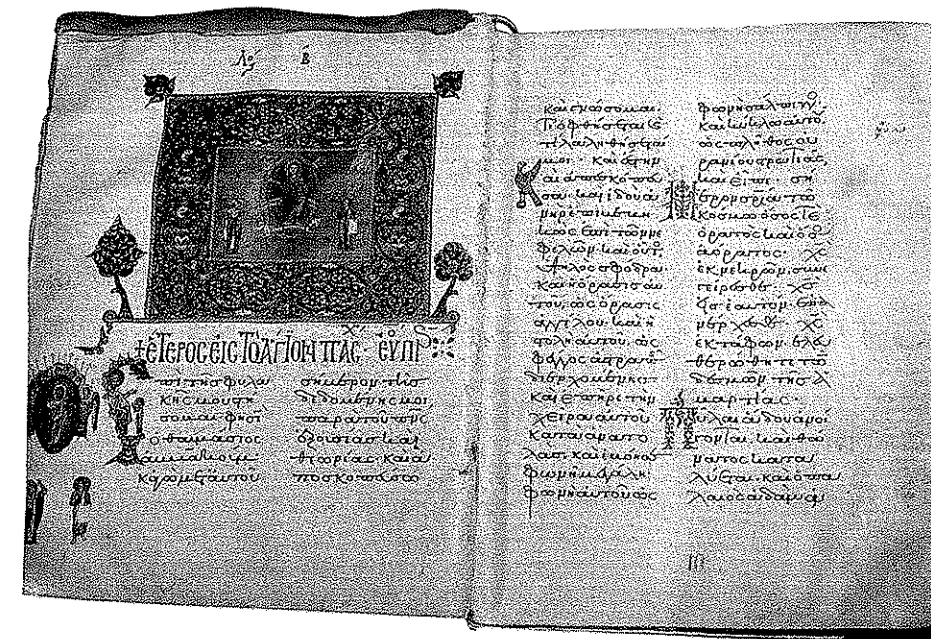
“As you move, the figures seem to move, too. You could swear that their eyes are turning and shining and that their garments are rustling ... the Byzantine mosaicist has succeeded in creating the illusion that his jig-saw puzzle has come to life.”

Religious scholars of the Byzantine Empire created another art form, the illuminated manuscript.

These were books decorated with elaborate designs, beautiful lettering, and miniature paintings. The brilliantly colored paintings portrayed religious themes as well as scenes of Byzantine daily life. Adopted in western Europe, the art of illuminating manuscripts provided a vivid record of daily life between A.D. 300 and A.D. 1200.

Education

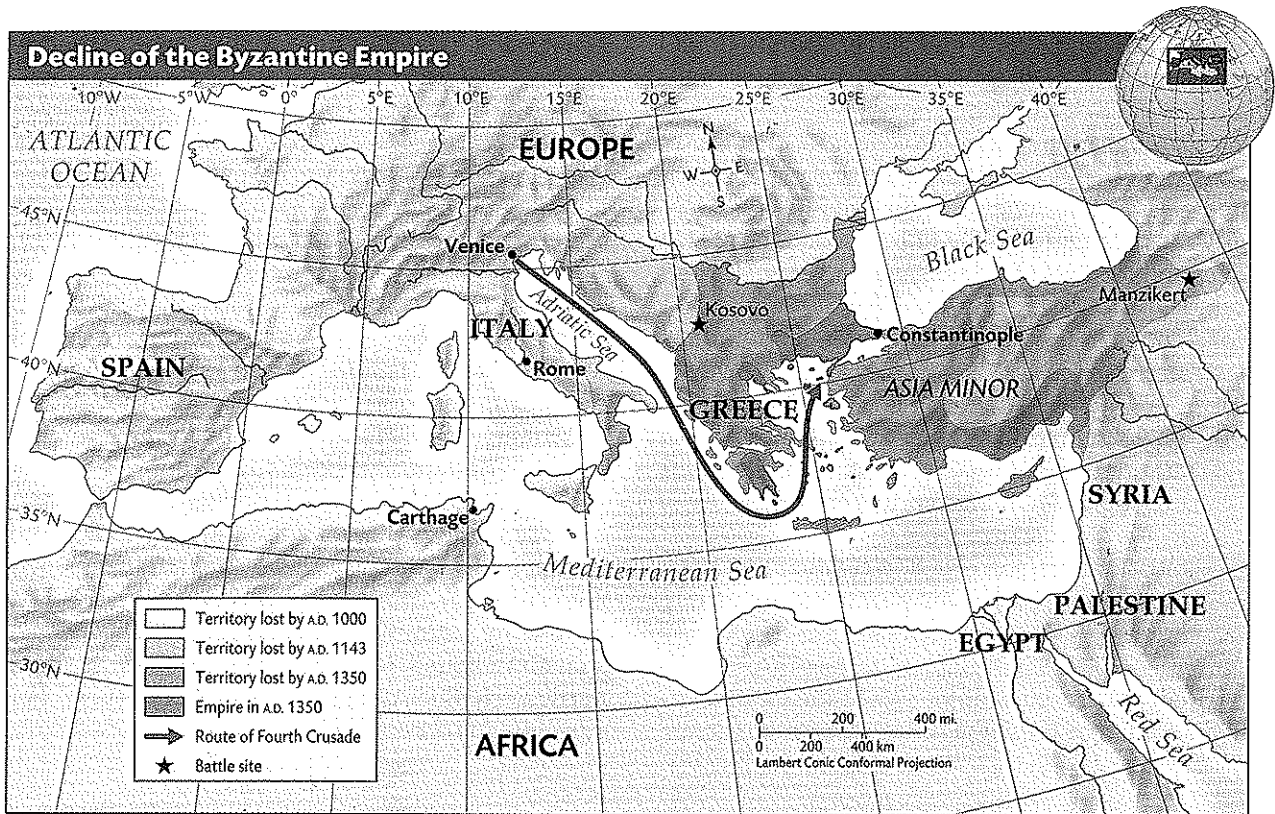
Schools and learning also played an important role in Byzantine culture. The government-supported University of Constantinople, established in A.D. 850, trained scholars and lawyers for government jobs; the Eastern Orthodox Church provided religious schools to train priests and theological scholars. Beyond the religious subjects that reflected the primary role of the Church, areas of study included medicine, law, philosophy, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, grammar, and music. Wealthy people sometimes hired tutors to instruct their children, particularly their daughters, who were usually not admitted to schools and universities.



Beautiful illuminated manuscripts, such as this from St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai, were the work of religious scholars. Monasteries were financed by the emperor and by wealthy citizens.

REFLECTING ON THE TIMES

1. How do these images reveal the prosperity of the Byzantine Empire?
2. Who paid to have much of the religious art at churches and monasteries created?



The Byzantine Empire began to rapidly decline after Justinian's death in A.D. 565, losing control of territory in Spain, Africa, Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor. Region Besides Justinian's death, what factors contributed to the weakening of the once great Byzantine Empire?

Byzantine literature focused on salvation of the soul and obedience to God's will. Writers composed hymns and poems in praise of Christ and his mother, Mary. Instead of popular fiction, Byzantine authors wrote books about the lives of the saints, which provided readers with moral lessons as well as accounts of the saints' miracles and adventures.

The foremost occupation of Byzantine scholars, however, was copying the writings of the ancient

Greeks and Romans. By preserving ancient works on science, medicine, and mathematics, the Byzantines helped spread classical knowledge to the Western world.

Spread of Christianity

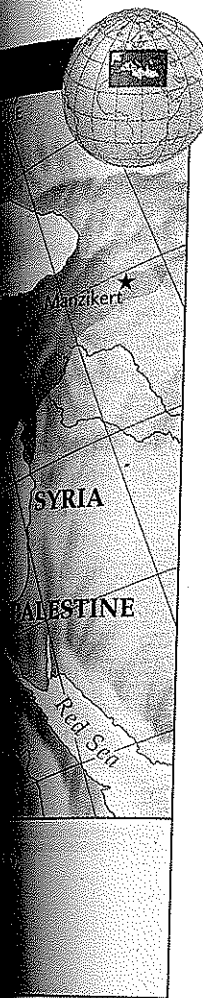
Near the end of the A.D. 300s, devout Christians throughout the Byzantine Empire formed religious communities called monasteries. In the monasteries, men called monks sought to develop a spiritual way of life apart from the temptations of the world. At the same time, they could help other people by doing good deeds and by setting an example of Christian living. Christian women who did the same were called nuns and lived in quarters of their own known as convents.

Monasteries and convents soon played an important role in Byzantine life. They helped the poor and ran hospitals and schools for needy children. They also spread Byzantine arts and learning. Monasteries also sent missionaries—people who carry a religious message—to neighboring peoples to convert them to the Christian faith.

Footnotes to History

Greek Fire

In fighting their enemies, the Byzantines used a terrifying weapon known as Greek fire, one of the earliest uses of chemicals in warfare. This chemical mixture exploded when it came into contact with fire or water. The formula remains a mystery; it probably included highly flammable oil, pitch, quicklime, sulfur, and resin.



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Among the most successful missionaries were the brothers **Cyril and Methodius**. They reasoned that Christianity would be more acceptable to the Slavic peoples who lived north of the empire if it were presented in their own language. About A.D. 863 Cyril devised an alphabet for the Slavic languages. Known today as the Cyrillic (suh•RIH•lihk) alphabet in honor of its inventor, this script is still used by Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Serbs. When Cyril and Methodius presented the Slavs with Cyrillic translations of the Bible and church ceremonies, they won many converts.

Decline and Fall

From its founding, the Byzantine Empire suffered frequent attacks by invading armies. Among them were Germanic Lombards, Slavs, Avars, Bulgars, Persians, and Arabs.

Unending Attacks

After Justinian died in A.D. 565, the Germanic Lombards took over most of Italy, the Avars attacked the northern frontier, Slavic peoples moved into the Balkans, and the Persians resumed their attacks in the east. By A.D. 626 the Slavs were at the walls of Constantinople. Although a brilliant counterattack stopped their advance, a new enemy—the Arabs from the Middle East—entered the scene. Followers of the new religion of Islam, the Arabs sought to spread their faith and acquire wealth. By the A.D. 630s, they occupied Syria and Palestine and had expanded into Persia and across North Africa. The Byzantines stopped the Arabs at Constantinople, but could not regain the lost territories in the Middle East and North Africa.

By A.D. 700 the Byzantine Empire was reduced to the territories that were primarily Greek. The loss of the non-Greek lands actually helped strengthen the empire because it now had one religion, one language, and one culture.

Christian Conquest

In A.D. 1071 northern European people called Normans seized the Byzantine lands in southern Italy. **Venice**, an Italian trading city on the Adriatic Sea, agreed to help the Byzantines' effort to regain the lands in return for trading privileges in Constantinople. The attempt failed, however, and the Byzantines soon lost control of trade, badly weakening an economy already strained by war.

In the same year, the **Seljuk** (SEHL•JOOK) **Turks**, who had come from central Asia and converted to Islam, defeated the Byzantines at the town



Visualizing History

St. Jacob holding script in the Cyrillic alphabet, a modified form of the Greek alphabet. What peoples use the Cyrillic alphabet today?

of Manzikert. As the invaders advanced, the Byzantine emperor asked the pope's help in defending Christianity. Expeditions sent by the pope against the Islamic forces were more interested in taking over Palestine.

In A.D. 1204 Christian soldiers from western Europe agreed to help the Venetians attack Constantinople. For three days the attackers burned and looted the city, stealing and destroying priceless manuscripts and works of art. Their actions were so brutal that Pope Innocent III publicly condemned them:

☞ These defenders of Christ, who should have turned their swords only against the infidels [followers of Islam], have bathed in Christian blood. They have respected neither religion, nor age, nor sex.... It was

not enough for them to squander the treasures of the Empire and to rob private individuals, whether great or small... They have dared to lay their hands on the wealth of the churches. They have been seen tearing from the altars the silver adornments, breaking them in fragments, over which they quarrelled, violating the sanctuaries, carrying away the icons, crosses, and relics. ”

The western Christians established “a Latin empire” in Constantinople. The Byzantine people resisted this rule successfully and reestablished their own culture in A.D. 1261.

Fall of Constantinople

The years of fighting had severely weakened the Byzantine Empire. Soon Serbs and Bulgars took over Balkan territory. New invaders from central

Asia, the Ottoman Turks, attacked the eastern provinces. By the late A.D. 1300s, the Byzantine Empire consisted of only Constantinople and part of Greece.

About 100,000 people still lived in the capital; food was scarce, and wealth was gone. In A.D. 1453 the Ottomans laid siege to Constantinople. For six weeks their huge cannon blasted away at the city’s walls. The Byzantines fought fiercely until their last emperor was killed.

For a thousand years, the Byzantine Empire had protected the Christian lands to its north. With the fall of Constantinople, central Europe lay open to attack by Islamic forces. Despite the empire’s fall, the Byzantine heritage lived on in the civilization developed by the Eastern Slavs.

Neighboring Kingdoms

During the time of the Byzantine Empire, four neighboring kingdoms went through periods of prosperity and decline. Northeast of the empire, and south of the Caucasus Mountains between the Black and Caspian Seas, lay the kingdoms of Armenia and Georgia. Northwest of Byzantine territory, in Europe’s Balkan Peninsula, arose two other realms—Bulgaria and Serbia.

Armenia

Located at a crossroads between Europe and Asia, Armenia struggled against foreign invasions. Settling the area in the 700s B.C., the Armenians within 300 years had become part of the Persian Empire. When Alexander the Great conquered Persia in the 330s B.C., his armies acquired Armenia but allowed it some freedoms. King Tigran II, who came to power about 95 B.C., built an independent Armenian kingdom stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. The Romans, however, defeated Tigran in 69 B.C., and Armenia became part of the Roman Empire.

In the early A.D. 300s, the Armenians, under King Tiridates (TEER•uh•DAH•teez) III, accepted Christianity. This decision made Armenia the first officially Christian country in the world. Christianity gave Armenians a sense of national identity.

Mesrob (MEH•zroh), an Armenian scholar-monk, developed the Armenian alphabet in the early A.D. 400s. In A.D. 451, the Armenians successfully



Visualizing History

Portrait of Sultan Mehmet II, who conquered Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul. How long did the Byzantine city hold out against the sultan’s siege?