



The Byzantine Empire

MAIN IDEA

RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS After Rome split, the Eastern Empire, known as Byzantium, flourished for a thousand years.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Byzantine culture deeply influenced Orthodox Christianity, a major branch of modern Christianity.

TERMS & NAMES

- Justinian
- Justinian Code
- Hagia Sophia
- patriarch
- icon
- excommunication
- Cyrillic alphabet

SETTING THE STAGE As you learned in Chapter 6, the Western Roman Empire crumbled in the fifth century as it was overrun by invading Germanic tribes. By this time, however, the once great empire had already undergone significant changes. It had been divided into western and eastern empires, and its capital had moved east from Rome to the Greek city of Byzantium. The city would become known as Constantinople after the emperor Constantine, who made it the new capital in A.D. 330. (Byzantium would remain as the name of the entire Eastern Empire.) For nearly a thousand years after the collapse of the Western Empire, Byzantium and its flourishing capital would carry on the glory of Rome.

A New Rome in a New Setting

Roman leaders had divided the empire in 395, largely due to difficulties in communications between the eastern and the troubled western parts of the empire. Still, rulers in the East continued to see themselves as emperors for all of Rome.

In 527, a high-ranking Byzantine nobleman named **Justinian** succeeded his uncle to the throne of the Eastern Empire. In an effort to regain Rome's fading glory, Justinian in 533 sent his best general, Belisarius (beh-luh-SAIR-ee-uhs), to recover North Africa from the invading Germanic tribes. Belisarius and his forces quickly succeeded.

Two years later, Belisarius attacked Rome and seized it from a group known as the Ostrogoths. But the city faced repeated attacks by other Germanic tribes.

Over the next 16 years, Rome changed hands six times. After numerous campaigns, Justinian's armies won nearly all of Italy and parts of Spain. Justinian now ruled almost all the territory that Rome had ever ruled. He could honestly call himself a new Caesar.

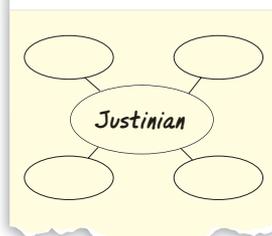
Like the last of the old Caesars, the Byzantine emperors ruled with absolute power. They headed not just the state but the church as well. They appointed and dismissed bishops at will. Their politics were brutal—and often deadly. Emperors lived under constant risk of assassination. Of the 88 Byzantine emperors, 29 died violently, and 13 abandoned the throne to live in monasteries.

▼ A glittering cross from the 11th century, Byzantine Empire



TAKING NOTES

Clarifying Use a cluster diagram to show Justinian's accomplishments as emperor of the New Rome.



Life in the New Rome

A separate government and difficult communications with the West gave the Byzantine Empire its own character, different from that of the Western Empire. The citizens thought of themselves as sharing in the Roman tradition, but few spoke Latin anymore. Most Byzantines spoke Greek.

Having unified the two empires, Justinian set up a panel of legal experts to regulate Byzantium's increasingly complex society. The panel combed through 400 years of Roman law. It found a number of laws that were outdated and contradictory. The panel created a single, uniform code known as the **Justinian Code**. After its completion, the code consisted of four works.

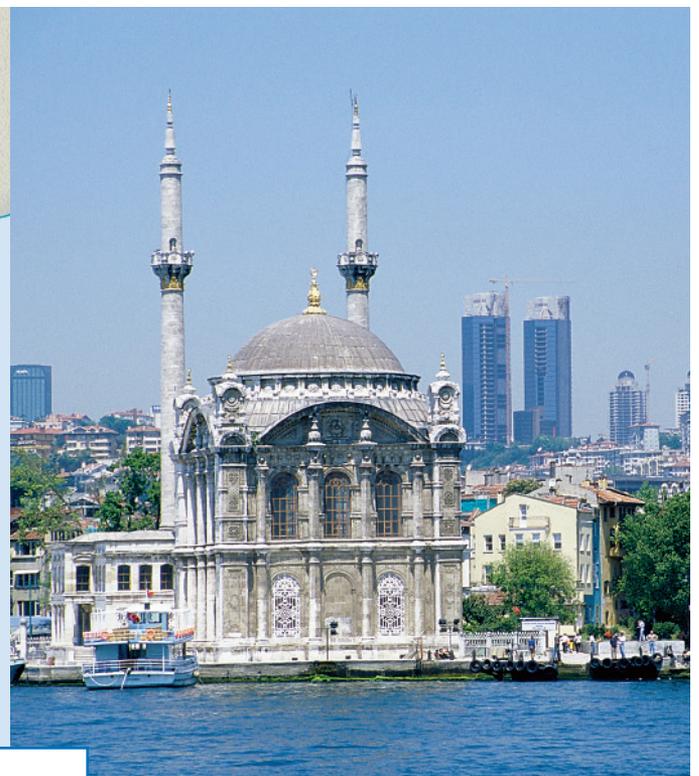
1. The *Code* contained nearly 5,000 Roman laws that were still considered useful for the Byzantine Empire.
2. The *Digest* quoted and summarized the opinions of Rome's greatest legal thinkers about the laws. This massive work ran to a total of 50 volumes.
3. The *Institutes* was a textbook that told law students how to use the laws.
4. The *Novellae* (New Laws) presented legislation passed after 534.

The Justinian Code decided legal questions that regulated whole areas of Byzantine life. Marriage, slavery, property, inheritance, women's rights, and criminal justice were just some of those areas. Although Justinian himself died in 565, his code served the Byzantine Empire for 900 years.

Creating the Imperial Capital While his scholars were creating the legal code, Justinian launched the most ambitious public building program ever seen in the Roman world. He rebuilt the crumbling fortifications of Constantinople, as workers constructed a 14-mile stone wall along the city's coastline and repaired the massive fortifications along its western land border.

Vocabulary

A *code* is a general system of laws, and it stems from the Latin word *codex*, meaning "book."



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

Human-Environment Interaction What aspects of Constantinople might slow an invasion from the west?

▲ The Ortakoy Mosque towers above modern-day Constantinople, now called Istanbul.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

A Why do you think governments so often build magnificent buildings like Hagia Sophia?

Church building, however, was the emperor's greatest passion. Justinian viewed churches as the most visible sign of the close connection between church and state in his empire. The crowning glory of his reign was **Hagia Sophia** (HAY•ee•uh soh•FEE•uh), which means "Holy Wisdom" in Greek. A church of the same name had been destroyed in riots that swept Constantinople in 532. When Justinian rebuilt Hagia Sophia, many visitors hailed it as the most splendid church in the Christian world. **A**

As part of his building program, Justinian enlarged his palace into a vast complex. He also built baths, aqueducts, law courts, schools, and hospitals. By the time the emperor was finished, the city teemed with an almost visible excitement.

Beneath such excitement, a less obvious but vitally important activity took place: the preservation of Greco-Roman culture. Byzantine families valued education—specifically classical learning. Basic courses for Byzantine students focused on Greek and Latin grammar, and philosophy. The classics of Greek and Roman literature served as textbooks. Students memorized Homer. They learned geometry from Euclid, history from Herodotus, and medicine from Galen. The modern world owes Byzantine scholars a huge debt for preserving many of the great works of Greece and Rome.

Constantinople's Hectic Pace The main street running through Constantinople was the Mese (MEHS•ee), or "Middle Way." Merchant stalls lined the main street and filled the side streets. Products from the most distant corners of Asia, Africa, and Europe passed through these stalls. Everywhere, food stands filled the air with the smell of their delicacies, while acrobats and street musicians performed.

Meanwhile, citizens could enjoy free entertainment at the Hippodrome, which offered wild chariot races and performance acts. The Hippodrome (from Greek words meaning "horse" and "racecourse") held 60,000 spectators. Fans of the different teams formed rowdy gangs named for the colors worn by their heroes.

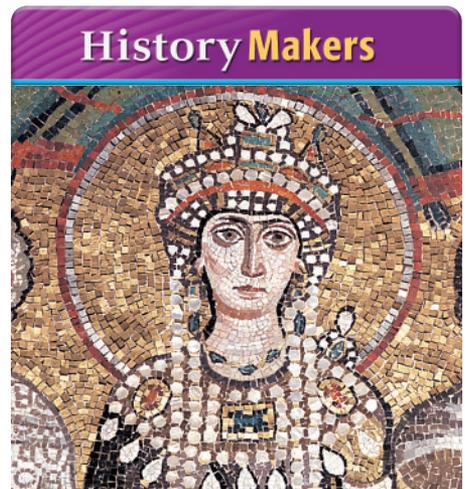
In 532, two such fan groups sparked citywide riots called the Nika Rebellion (because the mob cried "Nika!" or "Victory!"). Both sides were angry with the government. They felt that city officials had been too severe in putting down a previous riot of Hippodrome fans. They packed the Hippodrome and demanded the overthrow of Justinian. Belisarius, however, broke in with his troops and slaughtered about 30,000 rebels.

Justinian had considered fleeing during the Nika Rebellion, but his wife, Theodora, urged him to stay. As her husband's steely adviser, Theodora had immense power. She rallied Justinian to remain in the capital with a fiery speech:

PRIMARY SOURCE

My opinion is that now is a poor time for flight, even though it bring safety. For any man who has seen the light of day will also die, but one who has been an emperor cannot endure to be a fugitive. If now you wish to go, Emperor, nothing prevents you. There is the sea, there are the steps to the boats. But take care that after you are safe, you do not find that you would gladly exchange that safety for death.

THEODORA, quoted by Procopius in *History of the Wars*



Empress Theodora 500–548

The most powerful woman in Byzantine history rose from deep poverty. Early in life, Theodora was an actress. Eventually, she met Justinian, and in 525, they married.

As empress, Theodora met with foreign envoys, wrote to foreign leaders, passed laws, and built churches. During one political crisis, Theodora even confiscated the property of the general Belisarius. After she died in 548, Justinian was so depressed that he passed no major laws for the rest of his reign.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH LINKS For more on Empress Theodora, go to classzone.com

The Empire Falls

After Justinian's death in 565, the empire suffered countless setbacks. There were street riots, religious quarrels, palace intrigues, and foreign dangers. Each time the empire moved to the edge of collapse, it found some way to revive—only to face another crisis.

The Plague of Justinian The first crisis actually began before Justinian's death. It was a disease that resembled what we now know as the bubonic plague. This horrifying illness hit Constantinople in the later years of Justinian's reign. The plague probably arrived from India on ships infested with rats. Historians estimate that in 542, the worst year of the plague, 10,000 people were dying every day. The illness broke out repeatedly until around 700, when it finally faded. By that time, it had destroyed a huge percentage of the Byzantine population. **B**

Attacks from East and West From the very start of its rise to power, Byzantium faced constant challenges from foreign enemies. Lombards overran Justinian's conquests in the west. Avars, Slavs, and Bulgars made frequent raids on the northern borders. The powerful Sassanid Persians attacked relentlessly in the east. The Persians and Avars struck against Constantinople itself in 626. With the rise of Islam, Arab armies attacked the city in 674 and once again in 717. Russians attempted invasions of the city three times between 860 and 1043. In the 11th century, the Turks took over the Muslim world and fought their way slowly into Byzantine territory.

The Byzantines used bribes, diplomacy, political marriages, and military power to keep their enemies at bay. In the seventh century, Emperor Heraclius reorganized the empire along military lines. Provinces became themes, or military districts. Each theme was run by a general who reported directly to the emperor. These strategies, however, could not work forever. Slowly, the Byzantine Empire shrank under the impact of foreign attacks. By 1350, it was reduced to the tip of Anatolia and a strip of the Balkans. Yet thanks to its walls, its fleet, and its strategic location, Constantinople held out for another 100 years. Finally, the city fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

The Church Divides

During the Byzantine Empire, Christianity underwent a dramatic development. Christianity had begun to develop differently in the Western and Eastern Roman Empires, due largely to the distance and lack of contact between the two regions. As the Eastern Empire became Byzantium and flourished, those differences grew and ultimately split apart the Church.

A Religious Split Eastern Christianity built its heritage on the works of early Church fathers. One was Saint Basil, who, around 357, wrote rules for the life of monks. Here, Saint Basil describes how monks and Christians should behave:

▼ Saint Basil



PRIMARY SOURCE **C**

The Christian should not be ostentatious [showy] in clothing or sandals, for all this is idle boasting. He should wear cheap clothes according to the need of the body. He should consume nothing beyond what is necessary or which tends to extravagance, for all this is abuse. He should not strive for honour nor always seek the first place. Each one should hold all men above himself. He should not be disobedient. . . . He should not be desirous of money, nor treasure up unnecessary things to no avail. He who approaches God ought to embrace poverty in all things, and be pierced with the fear of God.

SAINT BASIL, quoted in *The Letters*

MAIN IDEA

Making Inferences

B How might the plague have helped make Byzantium more vulnerable to foreign attack?

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Primary Sources

C How might Saint Basil view a lavish and extravagant lifestyle?

> Analyzing Key Concepts

Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy

Originally, Christianity had one church. Because of political conflicts and differences in belief, the western and eastern parts of the Christian Church split apart in 1054. The western church became the Roman Catholic Church, and the eastern church became the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Both churches believe in the gospel of Jesus and in the Bible as interpreted by their church. They also believe that God uses sacraments to convey his love to humans. Sacraments are visible signs of something sacred; for instance, the water used in baptism is a sign of God's power to cleanse people of sin. The Venn diagram below shows other similarities and differences.

The 11th Century: Comparing Two Churches

Roman Catholic

Services are conducted in Latin.
The pope has authority over all other bishops.
The pope claims authority over all kings and emperors.
Priests may not marry.
Divorce is not permitted.

Similarities

They base their faith on the gospel of Jesus and the Bible.
They use sacraments such as baptism.
Their religious leaders are priests and bishops.
They seek to convert people.

Eastern Orthodox

Services are conducted in Greek or local languages.
The patriarch and other bishops head the Church as a group.
The emperor claims authority over the patriarch and other bishops of the empire.
Priests may be married.
Divorce is allowed under certain conditions.

Leaders of the Two Churches



Pope John Paul II (right) is the supreme head of the Roman Catholic Church. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (left) holds a slightly different position in the Orthodox Church. Eastern Orthodox churches pay him their highest honors because he heads the ancient Church of Constantinople, but they do not consider him their supreme authority.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH LINKS For more on Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, go to classzone.com

> DATA FILE

ROMAN CATHOLIC AND EASTERN ORTHODOX DATA

- U.S. state with highest percentage of Roman Catholics: Rhode Island, 51 percent.
2001 American Religious Identification Survey by Graduate Center of City University of New York
- U.S. states with highest percentage of Eastern Orthodox: New Hampshire and New Jersey, 0.90 percent each.
1990 National Survey of Religious Identification
- Vatican City is an independent state located in Rome, Italy. The Roman Catholic Church claims more than a billion members worldwide.
Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, third edition; www.adherents.com
- The largest of the Eastern Orthodox churches is the Russian Orthodox Church. It claims 90 million members worldwide.
www.adherents.com
- In 2001, the world region with the largest population of Roman Catholics: Latin America, 466,226,000
Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year 2002
- In 2001, the world region with the largest population of Eastern Orthodox members: Europe, 158,375,000
Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year 2002

Connect to Today

- 1. Forming and Supporting Opinions**
What do you think was the most important issue dividing the two churches? Explain your answer.
 See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R20.
- 2. Making Predictions** Do you think the schism between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church will ever be healed and the two churches reunited? Why or why not?

Another significant figure was Saint John Chrysostom (KRIHS•uhs•tuhm). As bishop of Constantinople from 398 to 404, Chrysostom was the **patriarch** (PAY•tree•AHRK), or leading bishop of the East. But even the patriarch bowed to the emperor.

A controversy that tested the emperor's authority over religious matters broke out in the eighth century. In 730, Emperor Leo III banned the use of **icons**, religious images used by Eastern Christians to aid their devotions. The emperor viewed the use of icons as idol worship. People responded with riots, and the clergy rebelled.

In the West, the pope became involved in this eastern dispute and supported the use of icons. One pope even ordered the **excommunication** of a Byzantine emperor—that is, he declared the emperor to be an outcast from the Church. In 843, more than 100 years after the controversy began, Empress Theodora restored icons to Eastern churches.

Differences between the Eastern and Western churches, continued to grow. In 1054, matters came to a head when the pope and the patriarch excommunicated each other in a dispute over religious doctrine. Shortly afterward, Christianity officially split between the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East.

Byzantine Missionaries Convert the Slavs As West and East grew apart, the two traditions of Christianity competed for converts. Missionaries from the Orthodox Church, for example, took their form of Christianity to the Slavs, groups that inhabited the forests north of the Black Sea. Two of the most successful Eastern missionaries, Saint Methodius and Saint Cyril (SEER•uhl), worked among the Slavs in the ninth century. Cyril and Methodius invented an alphabet for the Slavic languages. With an alphabet, Slavs would be able to read the Bible in their own tongues. Many Slavic languages, including Russian, are now written in what is called the **Cyrillic** (suh•RIHL•ihk) **alphabet**.

As these missionaries carried out their work, the Slavs themselves were creating a culture that would form one of history's most influential countries: Russia.



▲ (top) An 11th-century silver chalice displays the Cyrillic alphabet. (bottom) A closeup of the alphabet reveals its likeness to English.

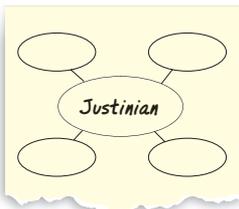
SECTION **1** ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Justinian
- Justinian Code
- Hagia Sophia
- patriarch
- icon
- excommunication
- Cyrillic alphabet

USING YOUR NOTES

2. In your opinion, was Justinian a great leader? Why or why not?



MAIN IDEAS

3. How did the Byzantines help to preserve Greco-Roman culture?
4. What various methods did the Byzantines use to hold off their enemies?
5. Why did Eastern Christians rebel against Emperor Leo III in 730?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **FORMING AND SUPPORTING OPINIONS** Do you agree or disagree with the characterization of Justinian as a new Caesar? Why?
7. **ANALYZING MOTIVES** Why do you think Justinian decided the time had come to reform Roman law?
8. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** Why do you think the Justinian Code lasted so long?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS**
Imagine you are a Byzantine missionary attempting to convert a group of Slavs. Write a **speech** that you would give to the group in order to sway them.

CONNECT TO TODAY CREATING A LIST

Locate the Cyrillic alphabet and make a **list** of what, if any, letters resemble their English counterparts. Discuss with the class why this might be.