

While the western half of the Roman empire crumbled and fell, the eastern half, which became known as Byzantium, managed to survive and, mostly, to thrive for a millennium. During its long history, the Byzantine empire suffered many serious setbacks because of both internal strife and external pressures. Nevertheless, this culture, which blended Roman and Greek traditions, managed to flourish politically, economically, and socially up until the time it began its centuries-long decline culminating in its conquest by the Islamic Ottoman Turks in 1453. Several unique features of the Byzantine civilization contributed to its prosperity:

- A strategically located capital city called Constantinople that was one of the largest, most influential, and cosmopolitan urban centers in the world.
- A highly centralized and autocratic governmental structure consisting of an exalted emperor with an aura of divinity and a large and intricate bureaucracy.
- A rich Christian tradition elaborated by the emperor and the patriarchs that eventually evolved into an independent and separate faith referred to as Eastern Orthodox.
- An unusual and effective administration system whereby generals governed over free peasants who received small tracts of land to work in exchange for military service.
- The extension of Byzantine cultural traditions to eastern Europe and Russia through political, cultural, and economic relations.

1. The Early Byzantine Empire

A. The Later Roman Empire and Byzantium

- 1) 5th century, E. half of empire remained intact while W. crumbled
- 2) Challenges: Sasanids and Germans
- 3) Highly centralized state
 - a. Emperor with aura of divinity--Caesaropapism
 - b. Large and complex bureaucracy

What elements did Byzantium inherit from the Roman empire that helped it to survive?

B. Justinian (527-565 C.E.) and his legacy; Theodora (empress)

- 1) Rebuilt Constantinople, including Hagia Sophia
- 2) Codified Roman law *Corpus iuris civilis* (*The Body of the Civil Law*) aka "Justinian's Code"
- 3) Sent Belisarius to reconquer the W. Roman empire (didn't last)

What was the significance of Justinian's *Body of Civil Law*?

C. Islamic Conquests And Byzantine Revival

- 1) The emergence of the Islamic state, 7th century
 - a. Arab peoples conquered the Sasanid empire and part of Byzantium
 - b. Prolonged sieges of Constantinople by Islamic armies
 - c. Byzantium survived partly because of Greek fire
- 2) Byzantine society reorganized
 - a. Provinces (*themes*) under generals
 - b. Armies of free peasants helped agricultural economy

Describe the Byzantine form of government.

What were the consequences of the rise of the Islamic empire for Byzantium?

D. Byzantium and Western Europe:

- 1) Religious tensions
 - a. Roman services in Latin, Byzantine in Greek
 - b. mistrust between W. and E. Church leaders.
- 2) Political tensions
 - a. Byzantine rulers resented Germanic tribes domination of “Byzantine” lands
 - (1) Charlemagne
 - (2) Otto of Saxony

2. Byzantine Economy and Society

A. Rural Economy And Society

- 1) Large agricultural base to support cities
- 2) Economy strongest when large class of free peasants (*themes*) existed
- 3) Economy weakened when large landholders consolidated and made peasants dependent

What was the *theme* system? How did it work? Why was it so successful? What led to its demise?

B. Industry And Trade

- 1) Constantinople was major site of crafts and industry
 - a. Glass, linen, textiles, gems, jewelry, gold, and silver
 - b. Silk developed into major industry in 6th century; secrets came from China
- 2) Constantinople was clearinghouse for trade
 - a. Bezant was the standard currency of Mediterranean basin
 - b. Western anchor of trade route revived silk roads
- 3) Banks and partnerships supported commercial economy

What economic advantages did the Byzantine empire possess?

C. Urban Life

- 1) Housing in Constantinople varied widely by class
- 2) Attractions of Constantinople: baths, taverns, theaters
 - a. Hippodrome used for mass entertainment
 - b. Chariot races most popular; Greens and Blues rivalry

3. Classical Heritage and Orthodox Christianity

A. The Legacy of Classical Greece

- 1) Official language went from Latin to Greek
- 2) State-organized school system trained workforce
 - a. Primary education: reading, writing, grammar
 - b. Later education: classical Greek, literature, philosophy, science
 - c. Higher education in Constantinople: law, medicine, philosophy
- 3) Byzantine scholarship emphasized Greek tradition
 - a. Wrote commentaries on Greek literature
 - b. Preserved and transmitted Greek thought to later cultures

B. The Byzantine Church

- 1) Most distinctive feature was involvement of the emperor
 - a. Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) in which Arianism was declared heresy
 - b. Iconoclasm controversy (726-843) was started by Leo III
- 2) Greek philosophy applied to Byzantine theology

C. Monasticism and Popular Piety

- 1) Monasticism origins in early Christian ascetics (hermits)
 - a. "Pillar saints" like St. Simeon Stylite
 - b. St. Basil of Caesarea (329-379 C.E.) organized monastic movement
- 2) Mt. Athos, monastery in northern Greece from 9th century to present
- 3) Monks/nuns very popular with laity
 - a. Provided social services to the community
 - b. Opposed iconoclasm

D. Tensions Between Eastern and Western Christianity

- 1) Constantinople and Rome: strains mirrored political tensions
- 2) Ritual and doctrinal differences, such as iconoclasm
- 3) Great Schism in 1054--Eastern Orthodox versus Roman Catholic

Trace the development of the Byzantine church to the schism. What caused the schism?

4. The Influence of Byzantium in Eastern Europe

A. Domestic Problems and Foreign Pressures

- 1) Generals and local aristocrats allied; new elite class challenged imperial power
- 2) Western Europe took parts of Byzantium
 - a. Normans in southern Italy and Sicily
 - b. Crusaders carved out states and sacked Constantinople (1204)
- 3) Muslim Saljuq Turks invaded Anatolia, defeated Byzantines at Manzikert, 1071
- 4) Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, the end of the empire

What kinds of problems eventually led to the constriction and fall of the Byzantine empire?

B. Early Relations Between Byzantium and Slavic Peoples

- 1) Byzantines began to influence Bulgarian politics and culture after the 8th century
- 2) Missions to the Slavs
 - a. Saints Cyril and Methodius, mid-9th century
 - b. Cyrillic writing stimulated conversion to Orthodox Christianity
 - c. Education and religion tied together, led to more conversions

What was the relationship between the Byzantines and the Slavic people, including the Russians?

C. Byzantium And Russia

- 1) Mid-9th century, Russians started to organize a large state: Kiev
- 2) The conversion of Prince Vladimir, 989 C.E.
 - a. Kiev served as a conduit for spread of Byzantine culture and religion
 - b. Cyrillic writing and literature and Orthodox missions spread Byzantine culture
 - c. Byzantine art and architecture dominated Kiev: icons and “onion” domes
- 3) Princes established caesaropapist control of Russian Orthodox church
- 4) Russian culture flourishes from 11th century
 - a. Moscow claimed to be world’s “3rd Rome”
 - b. Sent out many missionaries from 16th century on