

The Byzantine Empire and the Rise of Islam (450-1453)

The Eastern Roman Empire

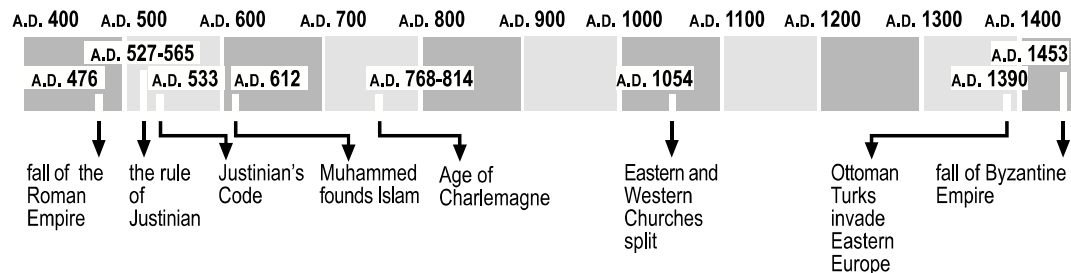
As discussed in the last unit, the Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium in Asia Minor.

After the fall of the Roman Empire around A.D. 476, the ancient world came to an end. In its place arose three civilizations: the Byzantine Empire (also known as the Eastern Roman Empire), the Muslim Empire, and Western Europe. The Byzantine Empire, the focus of this section, lasted about 1,000 years.

Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, is located on the Bosphorous Strait—the waterway connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea (see map on page 194). Its geographic location was excellent because it allowed **access** to the seas. In this way, Constantinople was able to control important trade routes between east and west, and north and south.

Economically, the city of Constantinople was quite rich. Its geographic location made it a crossroad between east and west. The Byzantine Empire controlled rich mines of copper, silver, gold, and fertile farmland. Constantinople also enjoyed prosperity due to its trade relationship with Asia, India, and parts of Europe. Among the products traded were furs, jewels, and other precious metals.

Timeline of the Byzantine Empire



The Rule of Justinian (527–565)

The Byzantine Empire was ruled by **autocrats** who held complete power. Probably the greatest leader of the Byzantine Empire was Justinian. He ruled for about 40 years, from A.D. 527–565. Justinian was very talented in the areas of law, music, and architecture.

Under Justinian's rule, the Byzantine Empire gained back some of the Western Roman Empire lost to the barbarians. Under Justinian, the Byzantine Empire expanded westward and reached its greatest extent. Anxious to restore the former Roman Empire, Justinian conquered northern Africa, southern Spain, and Italy. The army under Justinian was able to defeat the Persians in the east. This prevented the Persians from taking the capital city of Constantinople. Probably the greatest contribution Justinian made was to **codify** the laws of the Roman Empire. This meant that all of the laws under which the people were governed were written down in one complete book. This enabled the laws to be kept for many generations. These laws are known as the *Justinian's Code*. In addition, under the command of Justinian, work began on the Hagia Sophia or "Holy Wisdom," one of the world's most beautiful churches. This church differs from those found in Western Europe. Its domed roof is shaped like an onion. The church itself is surrounded by four towers with pointed tops. Because Justinian was such a powerful ruler, the Byzantine Empire nearly collapsed when he died.

Justinian ruled the Byzantine Empire with his wife, Theodora. While they were in power, Theodora helped to improve the status of women in the Byzantine Empire. Women were permitted to own property, for example.



Byzantine emperor

The army of the Byzantine Empire was a professional and well-disciplined force. This was necessary in order to protect the Byzantine Empire from attack, first from barbarians like the Huns, the Slavs, and the Turks, and then the Arabs, and later from the Crusaders of Western Europe. The navy of Byzantium was very powerful, enabling the leaders to control the seas and prevent attack.

Nevertheless, in spite of the excellent army and navy, the government was unable to slow the rise of **discontent** among the people of the Byzantine Empire. For example, in order to



Byzantine meal of the wealthy

maintain the Byzantine Empire, it became necessary to tax the people more and more. This tax burden angered the people. In A.D. 532, a revolt of taxpayers in Constantinople threatened the government. Justinian's army crushed the rebels, killing up to

30,000 people. From this time until his death, Justinian's rule was unchallenged.

From Justinian's reign until the 15th century, the Byzantine Empire had to constantly fight invaders. The Byzantine Empire gradually began to lose its territories and became weakened by years of fighting. By the late 1300s, the Byzantine Empire consisted of only the city of Constantinople and a small part of Greece. In 1453, the Ottoman Turks, who practiced Islam, one of the world's major religions, captured Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul. This Christian city became the capital of the Ottoman Empire. This ended the Byzantine Empire.

Religion in the Byzantine Empire

Christianity was not the same in the Byzantine Empire as it was in the Western Empire. There was much disagreement about customs of the Church.

One very important event in the history of the Byzantine Empire was the split in the Catholic church between the east and west. Until the middle of the 11th century, the people of the Byzantine Empire continued to follow the religion of the Roman Catholic Church. Then, in 1054 after years of arguing between the Roman Catholic Popes and the patriarchs of Constantinople, the Byzantine Empire formed its own church. Today, millions of Eastern Europeans and Russians follow what is now called the *Greek Orthodox* or *Eastern Orthodox Church*.

Byzantine Contributions to Civilization

The contributions of Byzantium were most significant in Eastern Europe. The Byzantine Empire blended Roman, Christian, Greek, and Middle Eastern elements to create a unique culture. Even today in Istanbul, the modern name for Constantinople, a visitor can see this blend. With the

Justinian's Code, the Byzantine Empire preserved Roman law. Greek culture and language were absorbed into Byzantine culture. The Ottoman conquerors adapted features of Byzantine government, social life, and architecture. Even today, the Russian alphabet contains some Greek letters.

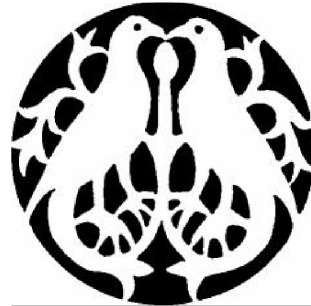
Art

Byzantine artists made unique contributions, especially in religious art and architecture, that have influenced western styles since the Middle Ages to the present. Designed to evoke the presence of God, icons, religious images painted



Byzantine tree design

on small wooden panels staring directly outward, gave viewers a sense of personal contact with the sacred. The figures themselves seemed to glow because the artist painted upon a background of reflecting gold paint. Mosaics, pictures or designs made of colored bits of stained glass or tile cemented in place, brought scenes from the Bible to life. In architecture, Byzantine palaces and churches blended Greek, Roman, Persian, and other Middle Eastern styles.



Byzantine bird design

Literature

Byzantine scholars produced their own books and also preserved the classic works of ancient Greece. Byzantine historians were mostly concerned with writing about their own times, just like Greek historians. Considered by many scholars to be the western world's first important female historian, Anna Comnena analyzed the reign of her father, Emperor Alexius I, and portrayed Latin crusaders as greedy barbarians.

As the Byzantine Empire threatened to collapse, Greek scholars left Constantinople in the 1400s to teach at Italian universities. Along with their knowledge of Greek and Byzantine culture, they took valuable Greek manuscripts to the West. The work of these scholars contributed to the European culture first developing known as the *Renaissance*.

The Rise of Islam

The religion of Islam got its start in the Arabian Peninsula. At one time, the Islamic world covered North Africa, Arabia, Persia, Asia Minor, Spain, and part of France. Islamic culture is a blend of east and west. Today, over one billion people believe in the Islamic faith.

The millions who practice the religion of Islam are called *Muslims* and believe in Allah, or God. The Quran or Koran is the Islamic holy book, and teaches the basic ideas of the Islamic faith. The followers of Islam believe that Muhammed is the **prophet** or messenger of Allah. The holy city of Islam is Mecca, where millions still visit for prayer each year. Mecca is located in present-day Saudi Arabia.

Muhammed, an Arab merchant, is believed to have begun his preaching in Mecca. He made many enemies and was forced to leave Mecca. He did not agree with such religious practices as worshipping idols. He also believed all Muslim men were equal.

Muslims have five religious responsibilities known as the *Five Pillars of Islam*. The people of Islam pray five times a day. Each time, they go down on their hands and knees, face the holy city of Mecca, and recite a prayer. Once each year for one month called *Ramadan*, the people of the Islamic faith **fast**, or go without food, from sunrise to sunset. This is to remind them to care for those who are in need. They must also give to the poor. They must offer a statement of their faith that "There is no God but Allah," and they are expected to go to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Muslims believe in the same God as Jews and Christians and recognize many of the same prophets. They recognize no official priests who mediate between the people and God.

The Five Pillars of Islam

1. required to worship only one God, Allah, and to accept Muhammed as Allah's prophet, or messenger
2. required to pray five times a day, facing toward Mecca
3. required to fast, or not eat, from sunrise to sunset during the one holy month of the year
4. commanded to give a portion of their wealth to the needy
5. required to visit Mecca at least one time in their lives

Islam teaches that people are responsible for their own actions. Each individual will stand before God on the final judgement day and face either eternal punishment in hell or eternal bliss in paradise, depending upon his or her actions. True followers of Islam believe that they will be rewarded with eternal life in paradise upon their death.

The governments of Islamic nations take their laws directly from the Quran. The Caliphs, Muslim political and religious leaders, rule in the community. Punishment is very harsh for those who disobey the laws of the religion. Muslims who die fighting for the faith are promised entrance to paradise. Religious wars are called *Jihads*.

Women in Early Muslim Society

The Quran, the Islamic holy book, states that men are managers of the affairs of women and that righteous women are therefore obedient.

The Quran also states that men and women are spiritually equals in the eyes of God. Islamic law guarantees women some legal rights concerning marriage, family, and property. Muslim women are excluded from public life. In private life they are in charge of the household and the raising of the children.



Many Muslim women today still wear the traditional clothing, such as the chador.

Islamic Contributions to Civilization

Philosophy

Islamic tradition held that truth could be known through faith in Allah. Islamic philosophers tried to combine that tradition with the Greek tradition that humans could gain truth through reason. Christian thinkers in medieval Europe would try to do the same much later.

Literature

The Quran, the Islamic holy book, was a major contribution to literature. It established Arabic as an expressive literary language. Even before the Quran was written, Arabs had a strong tradition of storytelling and were

particularly fond of poetry. Fictional adventure stories also played an important part in Islamic literature. The best-known collection is *The Arabian Nights* or *The Thousand and One Nights*. The tales of Aladdin, Ali Baba, and Sinbad are known today all over the world.

Art and Architecture

Since the Quran forbids the worship of idols, Muslim religious leaders forbade artists to portray God or human figures in religious art. As a result, Muslim artists developed a decorative style called *arabesque*. Arabesque used detailed abstract geometric patterns of curved lines. Walls and ceilings of mosques, textiles, rugs, and glassware were decorated with the intricate designs. In nonreligious art, some Muslim artists painted human and animal figures and excelled at painting miniatures to illustrate books.

Muslims also perfected skills in calligraphy or artistic lettering. They worked the flowing Arabic scripts into decorations on pages of verse from the Quran and on buildings and objects of art.

Mosques were the most important buildings in the Islamic world. The architecture of mosques became a major art form. The architecture of mosques featured domes, towers called *minarets*, clusters of marble columns, vaulted ceilings, and pointed arches. One of the greatest mosques is in Jerusalem and is called the *Dome of the Rock*.

Science, Mathematics, and Astronomy

Muslims excelled in science. Many inventions and important ideas were developed by Islamic scientists. With centuries of trade and travel to India, China, Russia, Africa, and Europe, geographers developed a map of the Earth.

The greatest Muslim mathematician was al-Khwarizmi. His work prepared the way for the study of algebra. Evidence of Islamic contributions to modern mathematics exists in the English language with terms from Arabic including algebra and zero.

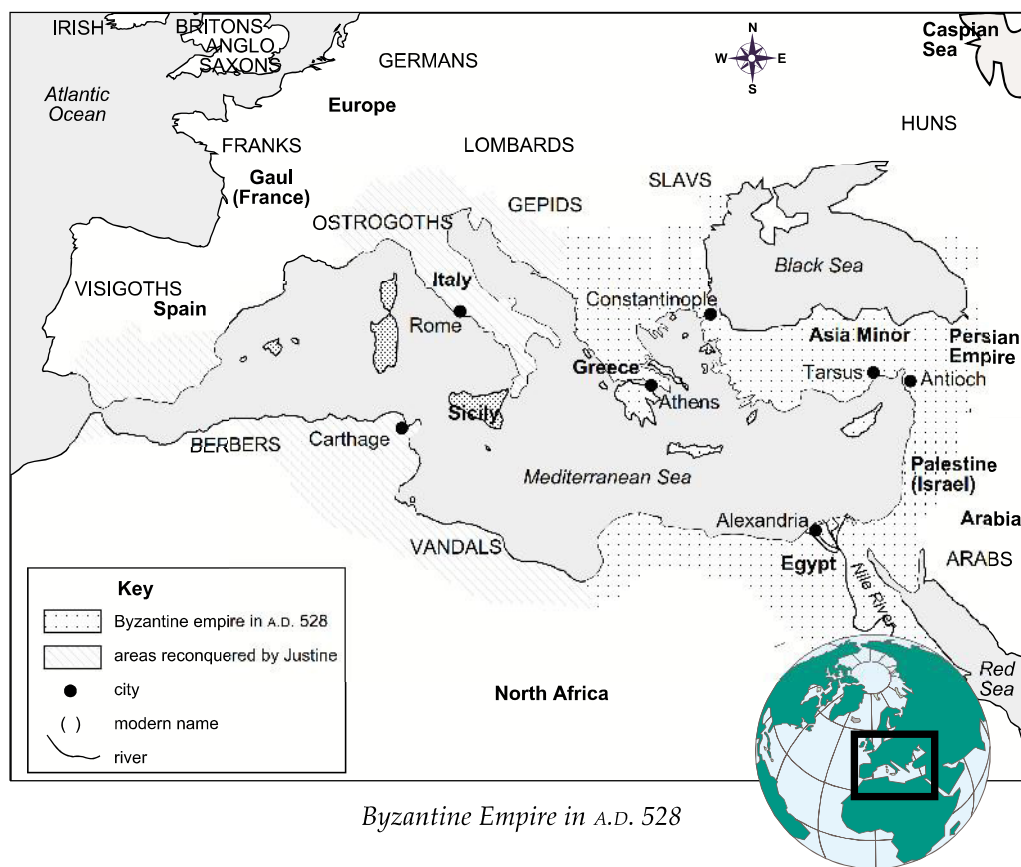
Muslim astronomers accurately calculated the circumference of the Earth within a few thousand feet. Muslim astronomers and navigators perfected instruments to observe the stars. They accurately determined latitude and longitude, helping to pave the way for later explorers.

Medicine

Muslims made advances in medicine. They wrote various books and an encyclopedia on topics such as measles and smallpox and included a list of over 4,000 prescriptions. Arab pharmacists were the first to mix bitter medicines and sweet-tasting syrups.

One of the most original medical thinkers was al-Razi. He advised doctors to treat the mind as well as the body. He taught doctors to make hopeful comments so that patients would recover faster.

In surgery, Muslims introduced the use of animal gut to stitch cuts and wounds. Muslim eye surgeons developed a way to treat cataracts by drawing fluid from the eye's lens with a hollow needle.



Review

The Byzantine Empire, founded when the Roman emperor Constantine moved his capital to Byzantium, outlasted the fall of the Roman Empire in the West by 1,000 years. Byzantium was an excellent place for a capital because it was located on the waterway connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea. Here, Byzantium was able to control trade routes between east and west, and north and south.

Justinian was probably the greatest ruler of the Byzantine Empire. He ruled from A.D. 527-565. Justinian recaptured lands to the west that the barbarians had taken from the Roman Empire, and he defeated the Persians in the east. Justinian's greatest contribution was the codification of the laws of the Roman Empire. These laws are known as Justinian's Code.

Until the 11th century the people of the Byzantine Empire followed the religion of the Roman Catholic Church. For a long time Byzantine emperors had argued with the popes, and finally the Byzantine Empire formed its own separate church. Today this church is called the Greek Orthodox Church or the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The Byzantine Empire eventually weakened because of the discontent of the people, who felt they were taxed too heavily, and the constant warfare against the barbarian tribes. The Byzantine Empire fell in 1453 when the Ottoman Turks took Constantinople.

The Ottoman Turks were Muslims. Muslim is the name given to people who follow the Islamic religion. This religion was founded in the Arabian peninsula by a man named Muhammed. Muslims worship Allah, or God, and believe that Muhammed was the prophet of Allah. Muslims follow the lesson of their faith as taught in their holy book, the Quran (Koran). Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, is the holy city of Islam. Muslims pray five times a day, bowing in the direction of Mecca each time.

In Islamic nations today, the governments take their laws directly from the Quran. The religious leaders are also political leaders. Islamic contributions included advancements in science, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. Their contributions are evident today in terms used in mathematics and science.