

- The Byzantine gold coin, which Westerners called the *bezant*, was the standard coinage in much of the world far beyond Constantinople. Coins have been found in the Far East.
- Persians captured the silk trade, but silkworms were smuggled into Constantinople, where silk became a government monopoly.

## History Through the Arts

### WEAVING

#### Egyptian Christian Cloth

The power of the Byzantine Empire helped spread Christianity throughout the lands around the Mediterranean Sea, including Egypt. The Copts, as Egyptian Christians were called, combined aspects of Christian art that had developed in Italy and Byzantium with traditional Egyptian styles to form Coptic art.

In this ancient woven fabric, we see an excellent example of Coptic art. An elegant Byzantine woman, surrounded by a spiral of waves, gazes out from the cloth. This spiral design is one of the oldest in Mediterranean culture. It was being used as a decorative form long before the time of Jesus. The ducks that fill the circles on four sides typify the deco-



ration used by early Egyptian artists, who portrayed all kinds of animal and plant life.

The face of the woman, stylized and two-dimensional, resembles the early portraits on Egyptian coffins

and mummy cases. However, the woman's headdress, jewels, and robe look very much like the mosaic picture of a Byzantine empress in an early Christian church in Ravenna, Italy.

that even today no one knows its exact formula. The best guess is that Greek fire contained a combination of naphtha, sulphur, and saltpeter (potassium nitrate).

**Economic strength.** Because of its abundant agriculture, manufacturing, and trade, the East had always been the richest part of the Roman Empire. At the heart of the empire lay Constantinople, a city of grandeur with a population of 1 million inhabitants. Its advantage lay in its location. Situated on the border of Asia and Europe, the city overlooked the strategic Bosphorus, the narrow straits that linked the Black and Mediterranean seas (see map, page 191). Such a location allowed the Byzantines to control the vital trade routes

- linking Europe and Asia.

- Merchandise from as far away as Scandinavia, China, and India poured into the markets of Constantinople. There and throughout the empire, the government regulated trade and manufacturing to produce large tax revenues. The emperor used the taxes to pay government officials and soldiers and to build great public buildings.

#### The Christian Church

Important figures in the early Christian Church included the patriarchs of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. In time the pope and the church in Rome gained supreme authority in the West. However, the Byzantines did not recognize this authority. In the East the patriarch of Constantinople came to be the most powerful church leader.

The Byzantine faith provided a source of both weakness and strength for the Byzantine Empire. Because Christianity formed such a vital part of Byzantine life, the Byzantines argued bitterly and endlessly about minute details of ritual and doctrines concerning beliefs. Often, Byzantine leaders considered these arguments more important than broad matters of imperial policy, such as taxes or defense.

The most significant religious argument concerned holy pictures of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the saints, called *icons*, from *eikon*, the Greek word for "portrait." Many Byzantines revered icons,

- Two major losses occurred in 1071: the Normans (descendants of Vikings) drove the Byzantines from southern Italy, and the Seljuk Turks defeated them at the Battle of Manzikert in Armenia. The Turks thereafter were a constant threat in Asia Minor.

## SECTION 1

### Closure

Ask students to list the accomplishments of the Byzantine Empire. Ask: How was it able to survive 1,000 years longer than its counterpart, the Western Roman Empire? (*political, military, and economic strengths*)

### Review Answers

1. **dowry:** money or goods a wife brings to a marriage; **icon:** picture of religious figures; **iconoclast:** believed that presence of icons was heretical idol worship; **iconoclastic controversy:** argument between supporters and opponents of icons; **heresy:** opinion conflicting with church doctrine;

**excommunication:** expelling a person from the church; **mosaic:** picture or design formed by inlaid pieces of glass, stone, or enamel

2. **Justinian:** Byzantine emperor during 500s who revived culture and reconquered much of the old Roman Empire; **Greek fire:** flammable liquid used by Byzantines to set enemy ships on fire; **Slavs:** Asiatic people who migrated north of the Black Sea; **Hagia Sophia:** beautiful Byzantine cathedral built by Justinian in Constantinople

3. **Constantinople:** capital of Byzantine Empire, located between Black and Aegean seas

4. (a) Justinian conquered most of the western rim of

When Hagia Sophia was completed in 537, one Byzantine writer called it a church “the like of which had never been since Adam, nor ever will be.” And the great Byzantine historian Procopius (pruh • KOH • pee • uhs) described his feelings after first entering the church.

“The church . . . is distinguished by indescribable beauty, for it excels both in its size and in the harmony of its proportion. . . . It is singularly full of light and sunshine; you would declare that the place is not lighted by the sun from without, but that the rays are produced within itself, such an abundance of light is poured into this church. . . .

The entire ceiling is covered with pure gold, which adds glory to its beauty, though the rays of light reflected upon the gold from the marble surpass it in beauty. . . . Who could tell of the beauty of the columns and marbles with which the church is adorned? One would think that one had come upon a meadow full of flowers in bloom: who would not admire the purple tints of some and the green of others, the glowing red and glittering white . . . ? Whoever enters there to worship perceives at once that it is not by any human strength or skill, but by the favour of God that this work has been perfected; his mind rises sublime to commune with God, feeling that He cannot be far off, but must especially love to dwell in the place which He has chosen.”

Justinian himself solemnly consecrated the church. As he first entered Hagia Sophia, he exclaimed, “O Solomon, I have outdone thee!” He was referring to King Solomon of Israel, who built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. The splendor of Solomon’s temple is described in the Bible.

### The Preservation of Roman Law

Probably the greatest Byzantine contribution to civilization was the preservation of Roman law. Early in his reign, Justinian ordered his scholars to collect and organize all Roman law. The entire collection is known as the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (Latin for “Body of Civil Law”). It is also called Justinian’s Code and includes four parts—the *Code*, the *Digest*, the *Institutes*, and the *Novels*.

The *Code* was a collection of Roman laws, omitting repetitions, inconsistencies, and statutes dealing with Roman religion. The *Digest* consisted of a summary of the writings of the great Roman legal experts, organized alphabetically by ideas. The *Institutes* was a textbook on the basic principles of Roman law. Justinian’s own laws were included in both the *Institutes* and the *Novels*. In western Europe Roman law was studied chiefly from the *Digest* and *Institutes*. Justinian’s Code forms the basis of many modern European legal systems.

### Decline of the Empire

In the 1000s the Seljuk Turks, originally a nomadic people from central Asia, captured most of Asia Minor. This vital area included the Byzantine Empire’s “breadbasket” and the source of soldiers for its army. When the Turks prepared to attack Constantinople, the Byzantine emperor appealed to the West for help. Western Europeans responded in 1096 and 1097 with the First Crusade, recapturing western Asia Minor for the Byzantines (see Chapter 11). During the Fourth Crusade in 1204, however, the crusaders attacked the Byzantine Empire and captured Constantinople.

After 50 years of Western rule, the Byzantines recaptured the city and reorganized the empire. Although the empire continued to exist for almost 200 years, it never regained its former strength. In the 1400s a new Asiatic people, the Ottoman Turks, rose to power in the region. When they captured Constantinople in 1453, the Byzantine Empire finally came to an end.

## SECTION 1 REVIEW

1. **Define** dowry, icon, iconoclast, iconoclastic controversy, heresy, excommunication, mosaic
2. **Identify** Justinian, Greek fire, Slavs, Hagia Sophia
3. **Locate** Constantinople
4. **Analyzing Maps** (a) Using the map on page 189, describe the area of the Roman Empire in the west that Justinian had conquered by 565. (b) What peoples were affected by these conquests?
5. **Analyzing Ideas** Why was the Byzantine Empire able to survive and prosper, while the Roman Empire collapsed?
6. **Evaluating Ideas** What impact do you think Byzantine culture had on Western civilization?

The end of the Byzantine Empire finally came in 1453 when barely 8,000 defenders were left to face the besieging Turkish army of 160,000 troops. After eight heroic weeks, the city fell. As the Turks stormed the walls, the emperor rushed to meet them, crying out as he was cut down, "God forbid that I should live an Emperor without an Empire! As my city falls, I fall with it."

### Section I Review

#### Identify Byzantine Empire, Justinian, Orthodox Church

#### Main Ideas

1. Describe three of Justinian's accomplishments.
2. How did Byzantine civilization mix Greek, Persian, and Roman elements?
3. Why were Leo III and Basil II considered powerful emperors?
4. What major invasions weakened the empire and led to its final collapse in 1453?

#### Critical Thinking

**Predicting Effects:** Do you think the same kind of civilization would have flourished if Constantine had chosen Ravenna, Italy, instead of Byzantium as the site for his New Rome? Explain your answer.

### The Byzantines created a magnificent civilization.

Byzantine civilization was more advanced than any in western Europe. Not until the 1300s were Byzantine standards of art and scholarship equaled by the West. Two factors accounted for this amazing strength and endurance.

First, the Byzantines had a centralized government with a well-trained bureaucracy. A bureaucracy is a system of governing by means of government offices staffed with people trained in specific kinds of business, such as tax collection. Byzantine bureaucracy was adapted from the Persians and worked well through most of its history.

Second, the empire's social institutions were healthy. It had an efficient army and navy, a stable and effective religious leadership in the Orthodox Church, and a strong economy to support a high standard of living.

### The destruction of the Byzantine Empire followed centuries of invasions.

Byzantine fortunes fell again after Basil's death. The city-state of Venice and other emerging merchant powers offered serious competition to Byzantine trade in the eastern Mediterranean. Further, the Seljuk Turks—a foe more powerful than any the Byzantines had yet faced—appeared from Central Asia to threaten Constantinople. In 1071 the empire lost the whole of Asia Minor to the Turks after a humiliating defeat.

The loss of Asia Minor was a serious blow. Not only had it served as a buffer against surprise attack by eastern invaders, it also supplied the empire with food and recruits for the army. If the loss of Asia Minor was unfortunate, however, the sack of Constantinople was catastrophic.

In 1204 the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade descended on Constantinople, supposedly to await transport to Jerusalem. Instead, at the instigation of an envious Venice, the army swarmed through Constantinople, burning, killing, and looting the treasure house of the empire. Some of the treasure was irrevocably lost; some of it was shipped west. Today, four bronze horses from Constantine's Hippodrome (race-track) can be found in Saint Mark's Cathedral in Venice, where Venetian lords sent them in 1204. These are shown in the photograph on page 233.

After three days of rioting, a Roman Catholic king sat on the throne of Byzantium. The pope was appalled when he heard the reports, but took advantage of events to appoint Roman Catholic bishops to the Orthodox churches. Fifty-seven years later, in 1261, the Byzantines threw the crusaders out.


The Byzantine Empire never recovered from the sack of Constantinople. Even after the crusaders were ejected, the empire knew little peace. Civil war broke out as various princes fought for the throne, and religious quarrels divided people. In 1354 the Ottoman Turks, former subjects of the Seljuk Turks, bypassed Constantinople, crossing the Bosphorus further south. They quickly spread out into the countryside, beginning a state that would become the Ottoman Empire. By 1445 all that remained of the once-mighty Byzantine Empire was the city of Constantinople.

Byzantium inherited the intellectual treasures of both Greece and Rome, with the works of Plato

**Monasteries and scholars preserved classical learning.**

farmers. Since the Byzantine economy was relatively stable, government supervision of the large estates improved the daily life of the farmers.

**From the Archives**  
**A Mother Who Ruled Byzantium**



Alexius Comnenus reigned as the Byzantine emperor between 1081 and 1118. Comnenus not only held his mother, Anna Dalassena, in high regard, he also entrusted to her much of the responsibility for ruling the empire. This account is from the writings of Anna Comnena, daughter of Comnenus and granddaughter of Anna Dalassena.

[My] father accorded his mother such high honor in these matters and deferred to her in all respects, as if he were turning over the reins of the empire to her and running alongside her while she drove the imperial chariot, contenting himself simply with the title of emperor. . . . He took upon himself the wars against the barbarians. . . . while he entrusted to his mother the complete management of [civil] affairs, the selection of civil magistrates, the collection of incoming revenues and the expenses of the government. . . . [My] grandmother was . . . so highly skilled in controlling and running the government, that she was not only able to manage the Roman empire but could have handled every empire under the sun. She had a vast amount of experience and understood the internal workings of many things: she knew how each affair began and to what result it might lead, which actions were destructive and which rather were beneficial.

but strong emperors took pains to help the small the court and the rest of the people in Byzantium,

There was the usual gap between the wealth of richly ornamented clothing the Byzantines loved. The silk industry became a profitable state monopoly, and splendid silk fabrics were available for the emperor rewarded them for their precious secret. There the out of China, headed for Constantinople. There the worm eggs into hollow canes and, smuggling them edge. Around 550 two Greek monks packed silk- tion anyone caught selling or stealing this knowl- the silk-making process, threatening with execu- known source. The Chinese forbade the export of ported at great expense from China, the only-

Until A.D. 550 silk cloth was a luxury item im- came its chief industry.

pride of Constantinople. Clothmaking soon be- carved ivory, and exquisite leather work—were the tisans—jeweled ornaments, magnificent tapestries, was strictly regulated. Articles made by skilled ar- tored manufacturing, and the quality of exports conditions were fixed. Imperial inspectors moni- rigidly controlled; and wages, prices, and working stern watchdog over the economy. Industry was a the health of the empire, the government was so important to

Because economic activity was so important to social status. hand, the loss of a fortune reduced a family's so- larly bought by wealthy commoners. On the other- the highest bidder and titles of nobility were regu- in life. Important court offices were legally sold to zantines approved of ambitious merchants rising ated but considered a demeaning activity, the By- Unlike western Europe where trade was tol- or worthless.

the medieval world where other coins were scarce coins served as international currency throughout strong economic position. In fact, Byzantine gold based on gold successfully supported the empire's trade for nearly 1,000 years. A stable currency of Constantinople was the world's greatest center of Built astride the crossroads of Europe and Asia,

**Byzantium's economy supported a prosperous society.**

which explains why much early Russian literature, especially the lives of the saints, is Byzantine in origin.