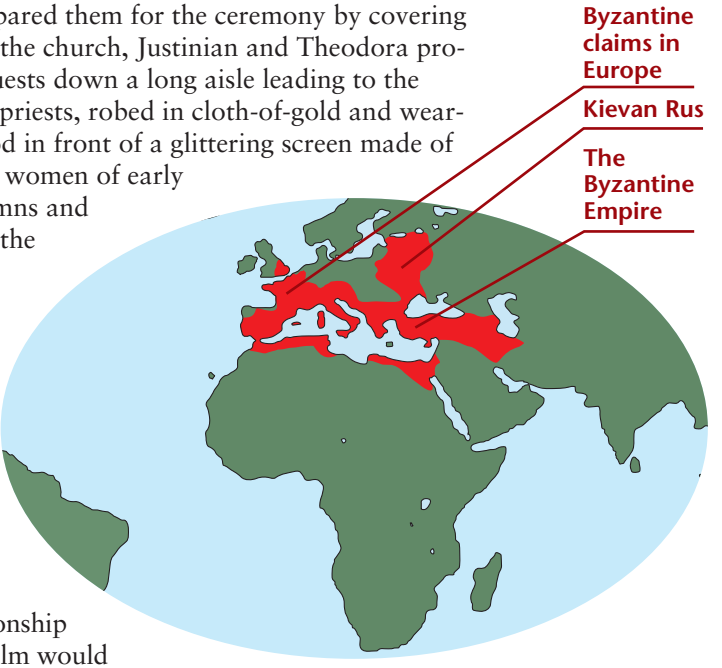
CHAPTER 10

The Byzantine World, 284–1240

The Basilica Of Saint Sophia, Constantinople

Interior of the former Basilica of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, a Byzantine church converted to a mosque in 1453. Notice the domed Romanesque architecture (page 244), and imagine the impression such a magnificent building would have made on citizens of Constantinople during the Byzantine Empire.

Justinian, the ailing Roman emperor's nephew and recently appointed co-ruler, prepared to enter a magnificent church on April 4, 527. It was the day of his formal coronation. At his side was his wife Theodora, who would be crowned as empress. The imperial couple was greeted by black-robed priests who prepared them for the ceremony by covering them in clouds of fragrant incense. Once inside the church, Justinian and Theodora proceeded slowly through an immense throng of guests down a long aisle leading to the main altar. Waiting there was another group of priests, robed in cloth-of-gold and wearing jeweled crosses and rings. These priests stood in front of a glittering screen made of gold and silver; on it paintings of holy men and women of early Christianity were displayed. Choirs chanted hymns and prayers as Justinian and Theodora knelt before the priests, beginning the six-hour ceremony.



Justinian was crowned Roman emperor, but his coronation took place hundreds of miles east of the city of Rome. The religious ceremony took place in Constantinople, the "New Rome" founded in the fourth century by Emperor Constantine I. Rome itself was conquered by Germanic invaders in 476, and only the eastern portion of the empire survived. There a new society evolved, preserving Rome's heritage but grounded in its own variant of Christianity and its own conception of the relationship between political and spiritual authority. The realm would be known as the Eastern Roman Empire and later as the Byzantine Empire, after the old city of Byzantium on which the new Constantinople had been built. Situated where Europe and Asia meet, the Byzantine world, often called simply Byzantium, blended elements of East and West but was truly part of neither.

Still, the empire's eastern rulers, however distinct their civilization was becoming, had no intention of writing off the western half. For centuries they would claim it and occasionally succeed in retaking portions of it, though only temporarily. The Byzantine Empire endured without the west for a thousand years. And even after it declined, through centuries of internal and external conflict, its legacy lived on in Russia, which in the tenth century adopted eastern Christianity and joined the Byzantine world.

The Foundations of Byzantine Governance

When Constantine legalized Christianity (Chapter 9), he did not know that he would soon be compelled to resolve its internal disputes and thereby assume leadership in the Christian Church. And when moving his capital east to Constantinople, he scarcely envisioned that the empire's western section would eventually fragment into separate Germanic kingdoms, leaving only the eastern portion intact. But these events set in motion trends that allowed the Eastern Roman Empire to develop separately, with governing structures substantively different from those in the west.

FOUNDATION MAP 10.1 The Early Byzantine Empire, 481 C.E.

After Constantine reoriented the Roman Empire eastward, Germanic tribes gradually overran the western portion of the realm. Following the abdication of the last Western Roman Emperor in 476, only the Eastern Roman Empire, known as the Byzantine Empire, remained. Notice that the Eastern Roman Empire controlled the prosperous commercial region of the eastern Mediterranean. How might this location have assisted the Byzantines in defending the legacy of Rome?

Constantine and the Christian Church

No sooner had Constantine become sole emperor in 324 than he became involved in a serious dispute among Christians. For a decade or so, an Egyptian Christian priest named Arius (*AIR-ē-us*) had been preaching that since God had created Christ, God the Father was older than and superior to God the Son. This perspective differed from the prevailing Christian belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were three co-equal persons of the Blessed Trinity. Arius's teaching, which his opponents branded a **heresy**—a religious opinion contrary to accepted Church doctrine—left

the Christian Church sharply divided. In fact, the Arian Heresy, as it was called, threatened to produce a **schism**, or division of the church into separate, competing churches.

Constantine intervenes in Christian affairs

Constantine was perplexed: why should anyone want to quarrel about something that was irrelevant to everyday life and could never be proven or disproven? He instructed the opposing parties to settle the issue amicably. But this advice enraged both sides, provoking Constantine into calling an ecumenical (*eck-ū-MEN-ih-kull*), or worldwide, council of Christian bishops and theologians. It convened in 325 in the Byzantine town of Nicaea (*nī-sø$\bar{E}$-uh*), near Constantinople (Map 10.1), with the emperor himself presiding.

Assuming the role of practical counselor in matters of religion, Constantine intended to enforce uniformity within the Church to which he did not formally belong but with which he sympathized. His presence at Nicaea demonstrated that he was in charge, and he shaped the council's findings in a manner that satisfied the great majority of bishops. The Nicene Creed, a statement of belief drafted by the council that is still recited today in many Christian churches, declared that Christ was "of the same being" as God the Father. A few delegates, including Arius, refused to sign this creed; they were expelled from the council and exiled by the emperor.

The Union of Church and State

Constantine's forceful intervention in the Council of Nicaea illuminates how governance would develop in the Eastern Roman Empire. While western institutions evolved under the influence of Germanic concepts of kingship, the Byzantines held to and amplified the authoritarian legacy of the caesars. Their political institutions were also derived in large measure from the monarchist principles of Alexander the Great and his successors, in which the ruler was exalted above all. For example, the eastern Roman emperor was referred to as "lord of the world." After the Emperor Theodosius the Great proclaimed Christianity the official religion of the empire in 380, he and future rulers were also called "equal of the Apostles." The interchangeable use of these two titles reflected the combination of secular and spiritual authority in one man.

Caesaropapism unifies spiritual and political authority

In Constantinople, the rulers embraced Christianity fervently. The emperor was viewed as God's vice-regent on earth, a sacred person who headed the Church as well as the state and who acted with the fullness of divine as well as human authority. This was the Byzantine concept of **caesaropapism** (*sē-zar-ō-PĀ-pizm*), the vesting of all spiritual and political authority in a single person—a man who served as both caesar and pope. It contrasted profoundly with the position taken by the bishop of Rome, who claimed no political supremacy, but called himself head of the Christian Church (or pope) and used his spiritual authority to curb the ambitions of kings and princes after the Western Roman Empire collapsed in 476.

In the east, however, a patriarch exercised spiritual leadership over a Christian community equivalent to that exercised by a bishop in the west. Each of the four eastern patriarchs—of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria—considered himself equal to the bishop of Rome and subject solely to the emperor in Constantinople. They did not recognize the bishop of Rome's claim to lead the entire Christian Church, maintaining instead that overall leadership was vested solely in the emperor.

In the emerging Byzantine world, then, Church and state were united in the person of the ruler. In relocating the capital of the empire, Constantine infused it with the spirit

of a new, dynamic faith that half a century later would be proclaimed the empire's official religion. These actions revolutionized both government and society in the Eastern Roman Empire, accelerating the decline of paganism and embedding Christianity in the popular culture. This all-embracing, vigorous Christianity made caesaropapism work and laid the foundations of Byzantine governance.

Early Byzantium: Challenges and Survival

In the two centuries following Constantine's death in 337, the Roman Empire's western section gradually gave way to Germanic pressure, its own internal weaknesses, and the neglect it suffered after the transfer of the capital to Constantinople. But the stability of the eastern part was by no means ensured. First, religious problems continued to distract the empire. In 361 Emperor Julian (361–363) tried to revive paganism and reverse the trend toward Christianization. For his actions he was called "the Apostate"—a person who abandons a religion and returns to a previous belief system. Julian's return to paganism might have led to civil war had he not been killed fighting the Persians in 363. Sasanian Persia constituted a second threat to the empire's stability. Fortunately for the Byzantines, the Sasanian Empire was large and cumbersome, and if it sent too many soldiers against Constantinople, it risked uprisings among the non-Persian peoples along its own eastern frontiers.

Sasanian Persia challenges the Byzantine Empire

For the next century, as Germans overran the western empire, Constantinople survived, for it was too strategically situated and too well defended to be attacked directly. When the Western Roman Empire collapsed in 476, the eastern empire was holding off the Ostrogoths in southeastern Europe. Constantinople could not have dispatched a powerful army to save Rome without endangering itself. Now only the eastern empire remained. Although future emperors would long refuse to acknowledge the loss of the west, their efforts to regain it proved futile.

Justinian and Theodora

Gradually the eastern character of the empire intensified. The Emperor Justinian, who ruled from 527 to 565, exercised power even more forcefully than Constantine had. He was determined to make the most of the awesome powers of caesaropapism.

Justinian resolves to reunify both Church and Empire

Born in Macedonia in 482, Justinian became in his mid-thirties the power behind the throne of his uncle, the Emperor Justin. Through Justin he negotiated a reunification of the Christian Church, which had been divided since the Roman pope and patriarch of Constantinople had excommunicated one another in 484. Justinian stood firm in his belief in unity, both religious and imperial: just as there was one God, so must there be one Church and one Roman Empire. When he came to the throne in 527, he was determined to restore and maintain those unities under God, of whose will he considered himself, as a caesaropapist, the chief executive on earth.

Justinian was a disciplined autocrat—a ruler whose authority was unlimited. He was also a shrewd judge of men and a gifted administrator. In addition, he married a woman whose skills complemented and enhanced his own. Theodora, a comic actress and strip-tease dancer whose parents were circus people, had enthralled Justinian when she performed at his court. He promptly overcame the horrified protests of his counselors and made her his wife. When he was crowned Emperor in 527, he insisted that she be crowned

Empress—a formal designation as co-ruler. With an iron will and outstanding political judgment, Theodora worked tirelessly in the service of her husband and the empire.

Theodora overcomes Justinian's caution

In 532, when a violent uprising against his rule threatened his life, Justinian consulted his advisors and decided to flee Constantinople. But Theodora disagreed, arguing that in an hour of peril a ruler must not abandon his responsibilities. Neither emperor nor advisors would ordinarily have taken that sort of rebuke from a woman, but Theodora was Empress, a regular participant in imperial deliberations and a superb politician. Shamed by her courage and logic, Justinian and his advisors remained in Constantinople and put down the rebellion.

Byzantium codifies Roman law

Codification of Roman Law. Justinian and Theodora were autocrats, but they ruled by Roman law and not by whim. With Roman order overturned by Germanic control of the West, Justinian decided to codify and streamline the law. He appointed prominent jurists to compile all the laws of Rome that were still in force; they were published in 529 as the Code of Justinian. This pathbreaking collection of statutes made Roman law the most influential legal system in history. The Byzantine Empire preserved it for centuries, eventually returning it to Western Europe.

Empress Theodora and attendants.

The Code not only preserved Roman law, however, but also inadvertently froze it. Exalted by the Byzantines as a perfect system, Roman law was closed to the possibility of further change. It remains the foundation of the modern legal systems of many Western nations but never displayed the flexibility to adapt and change that would later characterize Anglo-American law (see "Excerpt from the Code of Justinian").

Attempts to Reunite the Empire. Justinian's Code was the foundation of his honest and efficient administration. But his government was in constant financial distress, largely because of its extensive and expensive military commitments. Throughout his reign, Justinian waged war to reunify the Roman Empire.

Reunification was unlikely, however, given the circumstances of the day. By the time of Justinian, two distinct cultures had evolved, the one Byzantine, the other a blend of Roman and Germanic. Their political and religious institutions were so different that permanent reunification could have been achieved only by occupation, and a standing occupation force large enough to secure Rome was too large for the Byzantines to afford. The Germanic tribes that had conquered the western empire were powerful forces in their own right, and in any case Byzantine troops were needed to defend the eastern empire against the Persians on its eastern border.

Nevertheless, Justinian's political and economic realism was overridden by his religious faith. Not only did a Roman Empire without Rome seem absurd, but he was also disturbed by the heretical Germanic kingdom that ruled Rome. Those Germans were Arian Christians, believing that Christ was a divine creature made by God. The Arian Heresy had been condemned at the Council of Nicaea more than a century earlier, and Justinian would not tolerate its presence in Rome.

Justinian's religious convictions drive him to attack Rome

So for the next three decades the Byzantine Empire waged war, despite lacking forces to fight on its eastern and western frontiers simultaneously. Whenever Byzantium advanced in Italy and reoccupied Rome, the Persians attacked in the east. When Byzantine troops were shifted to the east, the Germans took back the territory they had lost in Italy. The arrival of the bubonic plague in 541—its first recorded appearance in the eastern Mediterranean region—further weakened the Byzantine forces.

Document 10.1 Excerpt from the Code of Justinian

"The compilation of Roman law which was enacted under the Byzantine emperor, Justinian I . . . has been without doubt the most important and influential collection of secular legal materials that the world has ever known. The compilation preserved Roman law for succeeding generations and nations. All later Western systems borrowed extensively from it." (Allen Watson, page xxiii)

BOOK ONE, PART I

10. Justice is a steady and enduring will to render unto everyone his right. The basic principles of right are: to live honorably, not to harm any other person, to render to each his own. Practical wisdom in matters of right is an awareness of God's and men's affairs, knowledge of justice and injustice.

11. The term "law" is used in several senses: in one sense, when law is used as meaning what is always fair and good, it is natural law; in the other, as meaning what is in the interest of everyone . . . it is civil law.

BOOK ONE, PART III

31. The emperor is not bound by statutes.

BOOK ONE, PART IV

1. A decision given by the emperor has the force of a statute. This is because the populace commits to him and into him its own entire authority and power . . .

BOOK ONE, PART V

1. All our law concerns [either] persons or things or actions.

3. Certainly, the great divide in the law of persons is this: all men are either free men or slaves.

4. Freedom is one's natural power of doing what one pleases, save insofar as it is ruled out either by coercion or by law. Slavery is an institution . . . whereby someone is against nature made subject to the ownership of another. Slaves are so-called, because generals have a custom of selling their prisoners and thereby preserving rather than killing them.

9. There are many points in our law in which the condition of females is inferior to that of males.

BOOK TWENTY-FOUR, PART II

3. A true divorce does not take place unless an intention to remain apart permanently is present. So things said or done in anger are not effective unless the parties show by their persistence that they are an indication of their considered opinion. So where repudiation takes place in anger and the wife returns shortly afterward, she is not held to have divorced her husband.

BOOK TWENTY-FOUR, PART III

1. An action for the dowry takes precedence at all times and in all circumstances; for it is in the public interest for women to keep their dowries, since it is absolutely essential for women to have dowries so that they can produce offspring and replenish the state with their children.

SOURCE: Allen Watson, trans. and ed. *The Digest of Justinian,* Volume I (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985).

The Byzantine Empire becomes culturally Greek rather than Latin

As the Byzantine Empire became increasingly eastern and less Roman, it became increasingly Greek. Constantine's creation of a new capital had at first expanded knowledge of Latin in the east, since much of the empire's administration was transferred to Constantinople. But Greek remained the spoken language of the Eastern Roman Empire, and gradually it replaced Latin in official transactions. Greek was also more prestigious than Latin: public speeches in Constantinople were normally given in Greek, and it was

Map 10.2 The Byzantine Empire During Justinian's Reign, 527–565

Justinian, the last of the Latin-speaking emperors, never accepted the loss of the Western Roman Empire. In comparing this map with Map 10.1, note that Justinian's armies reconquered sizable segments of the West. Pressure from other areas, however, made it impossible for Justinian to hold his gains and prevented his successors from undertaking further westward initiatives. Where might this pressure have come from?

the language of instruction in all Byzantine schools except those teaching law. Justinian was the last native Latin-speaking Byzantine emperor.

Justinian's death in 565 was a significant event in the ongoing turning of the empire away from Rome. His successors, lacking his commitment to reunification, did little to realize it. As Rome receded in significance, Byzantine efforts were concentrated against pressures from the Persians in the east (Map 10.2). Then, from the seventh century onward, the Arabs in the south and southeast proved an even more dangerous foe. Eventually, Constantinople had little choice but to let go of the west.

Byzantine Society

During the two centuries from Constantine to Justinian, Byzantine society was prosperous and even wealthy. The Roman emperors brought from the west a privileged imperial court; a large, generally efficient and well-compensated bureaucracy; legions of ambitious entrepreneurs; clever con men on the lookout for every angle; and assorted hangers-on hopeful that some of the glory of the New Rome would rub off on their cloaks.

This transplanted society's showplace was Constantinople, whose population approached 400,000 in the early sixth century C.E. Ships docked in the Golden Horn, the city's inner harbor, bringing treasured goods from Asia and Africa. The city's artisans created splendid wares and textiles. The imperial court glistened with jewels, while visitors admitted to the emperor's presence passed by artificial trees filled with mechanical songbirds crafted in gold.

Constantinople becomes a major trading center

Constantinople's superb location gave it control of the trade routes of the eastern Mediterranean, and its vibrant economy amply justified Constantine's decision to build his new capital there. Grain and cotton from Egypt, spices from India, and silks from China were traded on the docks not only of Constantinople but also of other cities throughout the realm. Transporting goods by sea instead of land made trade in bulk profitable and lowered prices on imported goods enough so that they could be purchased not only by the aristocracy but also by a developing middle class.

Constantinople.

As the Byzantine Empire's urban economy expanded, it was run by an increasingly wealthy and confident commercial class. City women enjoyed substantial mobility and freedom of action. Many owned shops, kept the books for merchant houses, and bartered with traders from three continents. But this prosperity rested not only on trade but also on the labors of masses of peasants who worked the land and supplied food and soldiers for the empire. Rural people remained largely impoverished, tied to the land, the production of food, and the reproduction of enough children to keep the ranks of farmers and soldiers filled. Social mobility between farm and city was virtually unknown, and rural and urban people seemed to inhabit two different worlds.

Byzantines hold celebrations and sporting events in hippodromes

Social life for peasants centered on weekly religious services, religious holidays, and celebrations of family events such as baptisms and weddings. Activities in cities were more varied; many were centered around the Church, but secular attractions were also available. Crowds gathered in large outdoor arenas, known as hippodromes, to watch chariot races, combats between men and wild animals, and athletic competitions. Young male spectators cheered for their favorite teams—the "Blues" or the "Greens"—wearing the team colors, cutting their hair in outlandish styles, and often fighting in the stands against supporters of the opposing side.

By the seventh century C.E., however, Byzantine prosperity had begun to fade. The hippodromes were half empty and the religious pageants lost much of their luster. The decline was due primarily to two invasions—Muslim soldiers from Arabia and microbes carrying bubonic plague. The bacterial threat proved even more deadly than the military one.

Crises of the Seventh Century

The bubonic plague, which repeatedly ravaged the empire, took a dreadful toll. Plague germs are ingested by fleas that suck the blood of infected black rats. The fleas then move from rats to humans and pass on the microbes by biting their new hosts. Before the development of broad-spectrum antibiotics in the twentieth century, mortality rates from the three varieties of plague were very high. Pneumonic plague, spread by a victim coughing directly into the face of an uninfected person, killed 50 percent of its victims; septicemic plague, occurring when a flea transmits the germs directly into a blood vessel, killed 100 percent. But the most common form of the disease was bubonic plague,

occurring when a flea bites soft tissue anywhere on the human body. Mortality was about 35 percent fifteen centuries ago and is approximately 20 percent today.

Bubonic plague devastates Byzantium

Bubonic plague, which Europeans later called "the Black Death," appeared in the Byzantine Empire in 541 when ships from North Africa inadvertently carrying infected rats docked in Byzantine ports. Victims died horribly, their bodies covered with "buboes," or large nodules filled with blood that turned black. The high fevers, delirium, and intense pain that accompanied the plague terrified the uninfected population; frightened citizens left the sick untended and bodies unburied in the streets. Epidemics hit the urban centers particularly hard, disrupting commerce and culture and causing millions to perish. The empire's population declined drastically, from 17 million in 610 to 7 million in 780, owing not only to the plague but also to incessant wars.

These wars constituted the second of the Byzantine Empire's crises. Between 613 and 628 the emperor Heraclius (610–641), a devout Christian and tenacious warrior, fought a series of devastating conflicts against the Persians, the age-old eastern enemies of the Byzantine realm. Led in combat by their courageous emperor, who personally slew a number of enemy generals, the Byzantines emerged victorious. Worn down, however, by the recurrent plague and the draining wars against Persia, they soon found themselves hard pressed to resist an even more dangerous foe.

Out of Arabia in the 630s swept formidable desert warriors who spread the world's third major monotheistic religion—Islam—by conquest. The military forces of this vigorous new faith, whose rise is described in the next chapter, quickly overran Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Egypt, and much of North Africa, depriving the Byzantine Empire of many of its richest lands. The Muslims, as practitioners of Islam are known, also subjugated Persia, which had been weakened by its wars against the Byzantines. Constantinople did not fall to Islamic forces until the fifteenth century, but in the seventh century the loss of so many of its most cherished lands impoverished the Byzantine Empire not only materially but also psychologically.

Islamic expansion weakens Byzantium

The material losses were especially significant. Commerce withered as Byzantine trade routes with Mesopotamia and Syria passed into Islamic hands. This trade reduction weakened the wealthy, self-confident Byzantine commercial class and coincided with an alteration in the status of women. Theodora had been the first in a series of important Byzantine empresses: seven governed as regents for their young sons, two ruled the empire themselves, and others were quietly yet effectively influential. But in spite of the prominence of such powerful women, the situation for women in general deteriorated after the onset of the plague. As in Persia and Arabia, women were now required to veil themselves in public and to remain at home for most of their lives, their social contacts with men restricted to members of their own families. As Byzantine society became more agrarian and less commercial, women's lives became increasingly confined and their roles increasingly subordinate to those of men.

The crises of the seventh century did not prove fatal to the Byzantine Empire, however. Recovering from their extensive initial losses, the Byzantines eventually managed to hold back the armies of Islam, establishing the empire as a bulwark against Islamic expansion into southeastern Europe. But Byzantium by this time was considerably weaker, both from the effects of disease and the ravages of foreign wars, than it had been a century earlier. These circumstances amplified the divisions and weaknesses within the Christian Church, making them dangerous to the continued stability of the empire.

Eastern Christianity's Culture and Conflicts

Christianity and Byzantine daily life reinforce one another

The Christian Church dominated the empire's spiritual and cultural life. Spiritually that domination was penetrating and vibrant. As one historian has observed, for the Byzantines, "Christ, his Mother, and the Saints were as real as members of their own families." To be Byzantine was to be deeply Christian and to express that faith in elaborate rituals and observances. Byzantine church services were usually between four and six hours long. The emperor took part in all major worship services held in Constantinople, often marching to church at the end of a procession that could include as many as 50,000 gloriously robed officials. During services, the churches resounded with chants and hymns; clouds of incense perfumed the air. Christianity was the connective tissue of Byzantine life and the worldview that gave life meaning.

The former Basilica of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, with its massive dome surrounded by four graceful Islamic minarets following its conversion into a mosque.

Culturally, Christianity inspired architectural works of exquisite beauty. Beginning around 450, the Church built basilicas, shrines, and monasteries from one end of the empire to the other. Byzantine architecture was noted for its elegant domes, and the emperors ordered the construction of massive ones. For example, the Basilica of Saint Sophia in Constantinople commissioned by Justinian featured an immense dome held up by several smaller ones (see page 234). The ceilings were adorned with elaborate ornamental mosaics depicting scenes from the life of Christ, the lives of the saints, and the principal events of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Angels and holy men and women were portrayed in the colorful, stylized paintings, called icons, that hung on the walls. As the exteriors of these domed structures were frequently rather plain, those entering them were often awed by the grandeur inside.

Doctrinal quarrels divide eastern Christendom

Yet despite the devotion of its faithful and the grandeur of its culture, eastern Christendom suffered from serious shortcomings. First, the Church engaged in recurring doctrinal quarrels over the precise nature of Jesus Christ. The Monophysites (*mahn-AH-fizz-ītz*) contended that Christ was purely divine, while the Nestorians asserted that he was actually two persons, one human and the other divine. In 681, at an ecumenical council in Constantinople, representatives of all Christian churches agreed on an official definition: Jesus was one person with two distinct natures, one divine and one human, each the equal of the other. This statement should have settled the issue, and over time it did. But in the short term Monophysitism (*mah-NAH-fizz-ih-tizm*) remained strong in the empire's eastern provinces, such as Armenia and Anatolia, which were crucial to Byzantium as the source of much of its food and most of its soldiers. Not until the eleventh century did the issue of Monophysitism vanish, and then not by agreement among Christians, but rather because these provinces were conquered by Islamic forces.

Iconoclasm creates a passionate controversy

While struggling with the insoluble issue of Jesus's true nature, the empire was also divided by a controversy over icons, the religious paintings of Jesus, Mary, and the saints that were distinctive to Byzantine art. Popular belief held that divine graces flowed through these images to anyone who looked at them with reverence. One of the consequences of this belief was the worship of icons, a form of idolatry and arguably a violation of the Second of the Ten Commandments, which decreed that "Thou shalt not make any graven images." In 726 Byzantine Emperor Leo III banned icons, calling their worship perverse and superstitious. His prohibition provoked a wave of **iconoclasm** (*ī-KAHN-ah-klah-zum,* or image breaking) throughout the empire, resulting in the destruction of many priceless works of art and triggering a bitter dispute that tore the empire apart. A revolt against iconoclasm then broke out in Greece, and in Rome the pope, supporting the use of icons, denounced

Leo. The destruction of icons was prohibited at a Church council in 787, restored by another in 815, and banned again in 843. For two more centuries iconoclasm remained a divisive force in Byzantine life, although it was gradually overshadowed by the growing division between the eastern and western Church.

As explained in the preceding chapter, the Christian Church's most divisive problem was the prospect of a rupture between eastern and western Christendom. Ever since the empire's capital had moved to Constantinople, the two branches of the Christian Church had developed radically different organizational structures. At various times between 476 and 1054, the western papacy attempted to assert its authority over Constantinople; at other times, Byzantine patriarchs and sometimes emperors adopted initiatives designed to enhance their privileges.

Icon of St. Michael the Archangel.

From a Byzantine perspective, the struggle was doctrinal as well as political. The Byzantines, in designating the emperor as an equal of the apostles, could not then subordinate him to the pope in theological matters. Church tradition held that questions of doctrine could only be solved by an ecumenical council, at which the Holy Spirit would make its wishes known. Although the pope asserted authority over both the emperor and an ecumenical council, Byzantines could not accept what to them would have amounted to a redefinition of Christianity and of the emperor's role within it. At the same time, from a western perspective, the eastern Church's tendency to debate obscure theological issues was dangerous to Christian unity.

The Great Schism divides Christendom

So many issues separated the two branches of Christianity that, when the formal schism finally came in 1054 (Chapter 9), it merely ratified a reality that had existed for centuries. Henceforth, despite occasional short-lived efforts at reconciliation, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, functioning under their own patriarchs and caesaropapist rulers, remained independent of the pope in Rome and the Roman Catholic West.

Foreign Conflicts and Byzantium's Decline

Muslims fail to conquer the Byzantine Empire

Religious issues disturbed the middle years of the Byzantine Empire, but conflicts with foreign powers determined its ultimate fate. These, too, possessed a religious dimension, as Islam's compelling spiritual vision, combined with its relentless armies, posed a persistent challenge to the Christian world.

The Arab Conflict

After subjugating Persia by 642, the Arab armies, eager to spread Islam westward, continued their assault on Byzantium. In 655 they destroyed the Byzantine navy, enabling them to besiege Constantinople from 673 to 678. But the Byzantines were able to break the siege with the help of a secret weapon called Greek Fire. A flaming liquid whose precise composition remains unknown, Greek Fire was sprayed on the hulls and sails of enemy ships. Since it was oil-based, any of the substance that missed its target floated on the water, where it spread to other ships and incinerated anyone who fell or jumped overboard. In 678 the perplexed Muslims raised the siege and withdrew, turning their energies in the next decades to completing the conquest of North Africa. Then, moving across the Straits of Gibraltar and through Spain into Europe, they were finally stopped in 732 near Tours, by Franks led by Charles Martel (Chapter 9).

Ruins of the fifth-century walls of Constantinople in present-day Istanbul.

Byzantines fighting the Bulgars.

Although the Byzantine Empire survived the initial Arab onslaught, its territorial holdings were greatly diminished (Map 10.3). Beginning in the mid-800s, however, Byzantine power gradually revived. The Arab threat waned, and in the tenth century, rejuvenated Byzantine armies invaded Syria, destroying the bases from which the Arabs had launched their raids. Later the Byzantines conquered much of Bulgaria and established a strong imperial position in the Balkans. From 843 until 1025 the Byzantine Empire prospered under a series of forceful, farsighted leaders. Its position was stronger than at any time since the age of Justinian.

The Turkish Conquests

Then, between 1025 and 1070, a series of incompetent leaders undermined the strength that the Byzantine Empire had won with such difficulty in the preceding two centuries. This weakness opened the way to a challenge from a nomadic central Asian tribe called the Seljuk (*SELL-yook*) Turks.

During the eleventh century, the Seljuks had gradually been conquering Persia and Mesopotamia. In the process they had become Muslims, and, as part of an overall plan to unify Islamic lands, they intended to strike next at Egypt and destroy the regime there. To do so they would have to move from Mesopotamia to the east and south of the Byzantine Empire, whose eastern Anatolian provinces they coveted but whose existence as the region's major power they had no intention of challenging.

The Seljuk Turks threaten the Byzantine Empire

Adjacent to the Turks' new Mesopotamian territories was Armenia, populated by Monophysite Christians who had been antagonized by Byzantine policies of religious discrimination and crushing taxation. The Turks decided to take advantage of Armenia's dissatisfaction with Byzantine rule, hoping to secure their borders before attacking Egypt. In 1064, led by Sultan Alp Arslan, Turkish forces destroyed the capital of Armenia and penetrated deep into Byzantine Anatolia, where they met only sporadic resistance. Six years later, hoping to prevent further Turkish advances, the Byzantine emperor Romanus IV Diogenes (*rō-MAH-nus dī-AH-juh-nēz*) concluded a truce with the Sultan.

The truce was almost immediately broken by Turkoman raiding parties composed of southwest Asians who spoke a language related to Turkish but who refused to accept Seljuk control. Romanus, erroneously concluding that Sultan Alp Arslan was behind these raids, moved eastward to punish him in 1071. At the same time the Sultan, considering the truce still in force, moved southward against Egypt. When he learned that the Byzantines had broken the truce, however, he turned north to intercept Romanus.

The two armies met on August 26, 1071, at Manzikert in Armenia, where the Byzantines were soundly defeated. The battle proved disastrous for the Byzantine Empire. Romanus was captured, and the new Byzantine emperor, Michael VII Ducas, soon broke the generous treaty that Alp Arslan had granted the Byzantines after Manzikert. Exasperated, the Sultan gave up his plan to attack Egypt and moved forcefully against the empire. By 1080 the Seljuk Turks controlled nearly all of eastern Anatolia.

Defeat at Manzikert severely weakens the Byzantine Empire

The Byzantine Empire still held the coasts of the Mediterranean and Black seas and western Anatolia (Map 10.3). But eastern Anatolia and Armenia had been the empire's source of food and soldiers, and, once lost, these valuable territories could neither be retaken nor replaced. The Turks, who had had designs on eastern Anatolia but had never thought of conquering Byzantium itself, now held the strategic initiative and possessed

Map 10.3 The Gradual Retraction of the Byzantine Empire, 628–1328

By 1200, the Byzantine Empire was considerably smaller than it had been in 481 (Map 10.1). Arabian invasions from the south in the seventh century surprised the Empire's leaders and forced them to divide their forces between Persian and Arab threats. Observe that the Empire was gradually pushed westward, and that it lost all its North African territories to the Arabs. At the start of the thirteenth century, Byzantium's collapse was not assured, but its long-term survival was clearly questionable. How might the loss of these regions have handicapped the Byzantine emperors?

Map A

Map B

Map C

the resources necessary for eventual victory. It came in 1453, when the Ottoman Turks, successors to the Seljuks, completed the Islamic conquest of West Asia and defeated the Byzantine Empire.

Pre-Christian Russia

The Byzantine Empire was largely shattered after Manzikert, but Byzantine influence lived on in the north. There, in 988, the Grand Prince of an area called Kiev had converted to eastern Christianity. His decision meant that even after Byzantium's collapse, its culture and religion would continue in his realm. This area of Byzantine influence eventually grew into an enormous country known as Russia.

Russia's Difficult Climate and Terrain

Russian territory stretches from eastern Europe across northern Asia. Endless forests blanket its northern expanses, while its south is covered with vast treeless plains known as steppes (Map 10.4). Although Russia today possesses thousands of miles of seacoast, throughout most of history it was in effect landlocked. Its long northern coastline borders the Arctic Ocean, ice-bound for much of the year, while access to its Baltic and Black Sea ports, acquired in recent centuries, is controlled by countries that have often been hostile. This landlocked condition inhibited trade routes and frustrated Russia's development for centuries.

Geography impedes Russian development

Russia is not only landlocked but cold, the most heavily populated frigid land in the world. Even its southernmost portions lie no farther south than North Dakota. The Gulf Stream, which moderates the climate of continental Europe, touches only a tiny portion of Russia. Siberia, in Asian Russia, is known for its brutally cold conditions, and in the northern part of European Russia the soil remains frozen for more than half the year. This cold severely restricts both the quantity of arable land and the length of the growing season. Central Asian Russia suffers from both severe cold and inadequate moisture, making agriculture impossible there without irrigation. Finally, as nearly all the region's principal rivers flow north or south, rather than east or west, travel across Russia has always been difficult, hindering commerce and the use of its natural resources.

Early Cultures and Conflicts

Sarmatians use the stirrup to conquer and rule southern Russia

Societies appear to have developed earliest in southern Russia, where the cold was less severe. The Cimmerians (*sih-MARE-ē-uns*), linguistically related to the Greeks, ruled the lands north and east of the Black Sea between 1000 and 700 B.C.E. They were conquered by the Scythians, a Central Asian nomadic people who also invaded Persia. Between 700 and 200 B.C.E. the Scythians dominated southern Russia, but their formidable military state collapsed under pressure from another group of nomads called Sarmatians (*sahr-MĀ-shuns*), who then ruled the region until about 200 C.E. Fighting from horseback with heavy armor and long swords, the Sarmatians made good use of stirrups, a Central Asian innovation that secured the feet of a mounted warrior, allowing him to charge and thrust without being knocked from his horse.

The Scythians and Sarmatians were related to the Persians. Their occupation of southern Russia brought them into contact with Greek colonies on the northern shore of the Black Sea. They were accomplished metalworkers and outstanding fighters whose kings

Map 10.4 The Topography of Russia

Russia's formidable topography impeded its settlement and development for centuries. Its great rivers flow north-south rather than east-west, dead-ending travelers from its southern regions in the frigid Arctic rather than linking its Baltic and Pacific coasts. Notice that between taiga and desert lie vast expanses of forest and grassy steppes, areas in which large-scale farming has always been difficult. Battling these geographic challenges, the Grand Princes of Kiev laid the foundations of the Russian Empire. How might Russia's location across extreme northern latitudes restrict its development?

ruled by divine right; the Greeks were skilled fishers and tireless traders who elected their leaders. Neither group made any systematic attempt to conquer the other. Both preferred to reap the benefits of commercial contact and frequent intermarriage, practices that resulted in a blending of their cultures. But both found themselves displaced by the nomadic invasions that were having such a disastrous impact on the Western Roman Empire.

Nomadic invasions cross Russia

First among the invading nomads were the Germanic Ostrogoths, discussed in Chapter 9, who established a powerful kingdom between the Baltic and Black seas from 200 to 370 C.E. Then the Huns, a fearsome collection of Turkic-speakers, arrived on their way to Central Europe and an eventual confrontation with Pope Leo the Great (Chapter 9). The Avars were next, extending their control over a wide band of southern and western Russia beginning in 558. They threatened both Europe and Byzantium before collapsing in the mid-seventh century. Clearly the southern Russian plain was well-traveled by nomadic peoples heading for the more moderate climes of southwest Asia and Europe.

Khazars convert to Judaism

When the Khazars (*KAH-zars*) moved into the lower Volga region of southwestern Russia in the seventh century, they appeared at first to be simply another invading culture that would dominate the region for a while and then be replaced. But their influence surpassed that of their short-lived predecessors. They abandoned their nomadic heritage and built large towns along the trade routes connecting Asia and Europe. Thus they served as a commercial and cultural crossroads. As one of the first peoples in the world to create a professional, paid army, they developed military skills that helped hold back Islamic armies. But they tolerated Islam, as well as paganism, Judaism, and Christianity, within their borders. In the eighth century they adopted Judaism, an unprecedented conversion based not on conquest but conviction. The legacy of the Khazars to the development of a Russian state was rich and surprising.

But the people who were destined to organize that state and dominate its successors lived well to the north and west of the Khazar realm. These people were the eastern Slavs, members of a linguistic group that today includes the speakers of Russian, Belarussian, and Ukrainian languages. The Slavs were skilled ironworkers and woodworkers, with well-established agricultural patterns that were exceptional in northern lands. One of their tribes, in fact, may have been the "Rus" (*ROOS*) who gave the land its name: Russia.

Kievan Rus Connects to the Byzantine World

The origin of the people who called themselves "Rus" is disputed. Some scholars argue that they were Norsemen from Scandinavia, also known as "Varangians," who allegedly arrived in northwestern Russia around 862 and imposed order on the Slavs who lived there. Other historians contend that the Rus lived in the south and were known to both Arab and Byzantine observers before 862. But one point is not in dispute: late in the ninth or early in the tenth century, the Rus, wherever they originated from, founded the state known as Kievan Rus. By 988 this state had become part of the Byzantine world.

The First Period: Early Rulers and Campaigns

Kievan Russia's history is customarily divided into three periods. The first, lasting from approximately 882 until 972, was the era in which the state was established and consolidated. Its first ruler was Oleg, a prince who gradually extended control over several neighboring East Slavic tribes. They were forced to pay tribute to him in Kiev, his capital, a town on the lower Dnieper (*nē-YEH-pur*) River in southern Russia (Map 10.5). In 907 Oleg went to war against the Byzantine Empire in what seems to have been an inconclusive series of skirmishes. Constantinople did, however, buy off the Rus with a highly generous commercial treaty.

Kievan Rus develops a centralized state

Oleg's successor, Prince Igor (913–945), conducted a series of campaigns designed to maintain Kiev's domination over its tributary peoples. He also fought a large-scale war against the Byzantines from 941 to 943, during which his forces plundered the suburbs of Constantinople. But Greek Fire kept him from conquering the city, and in 945 he was killed while collecting tribute (always a dangerous undertaking) from one of the East Slavic tribes. His widow Olga assumed his powers, ruling Kiev as regent for their young son Sviatoslav (*svē-AH-tuh-slav*) from 945 to 962.

Olga connects Kiev to Constantinople

Olga became the first prominent female leader in Kievan Russia, in part by relentlessly enforcing her control over the tributary groups, in part by coming to terms with

Map 10.5 Kievan Rus, ca. 900

While the Orthodox Christian Byzantine Empire contended for supremacy in southwest Asia with the Muslims (Chapter 11), a new Orthodox Christian monarchy was emerging farther north. Grand Prince Vladimir's conversion to Orthodoxy in 988 oriented Kievan Rus to the south and west, turning it away from Asia and toward Europe. Note that Kievan Russia's location, on the western edge of Asia and the eastern fringe of Europe, would have supported a turn in either direction. This made Vladimir's adoption of Orthodox Christianity decisive for future Russian development. Could Kievan Russia have offered any support to the Byzantine Empire in its ongoing struggle with the Muslims?

the Byzantine Empire. She converted to eastern Christianity and traveled to Constantinople, where she met the emperor himself. The two appear to have concluded a cautious alliance, providing Sviatoslav with a degree of security on his southern frontier when he became Grand Prince (or ruler) of Kiev in 962. Although her son did not convert to Christianity, ultimately Olga's efforts on behalf of her new faith were recognized by the Orthodox Church, which canonized her as a saint.

Sviatoslav's defeat of the Khazars leaves Kiev open to attack

Sviatoslav ruled for only ten years, but they were a pivotal decade for Kievan Rus. In 965 he boldly attacked the Khazars, sacking their capital and fatally weakening their state. But this action was shortsighted, since the Khazars had been useful as a buffer against nomadic Central Asian tribes, particularly the ferocious Pechenegs (*PEH-chenegs*). Three years later Sviatoslav, as the ally of Byzantium, conquered Bulgaria. The Pechenegs seized upon his absence to besiege Kiev, and in 969 Constantinople suddenly awoke

to the dangers of instability on its northern border. The Byzantine Emperor broke his alliance with Kiev, and in 971, after two years of bitter warfare, Sviatoslav withdrew from the Balkans. On his way home in 972 he was killed by the Pechenegs, who boiled the flesh off his skull, then made it into a cup from which they drank in the hope of imbibing his courage. The first period of Kievan Russia's history had come to a discouraging end.

The Second Period: Connections to Christendom

Eight years later, following civil war among Sviatoslav's three sons, Vladimir (*VLAD-i-mēr* or *vlad-Ē-mēr*), the youngest, emerged victorious. His accession as Grand Prince in 980 ushered in Kiev's second and most glorious era, which lasted until 1054. Vladimir did much to unite and consolidate his realm, secure its borders, and enhance both its culture and its commerce. But his most momentous step was conversion to the Christian faith and his insistence that it be adopted throughout his realm. Vladimir's historic conversion took place in 988–989, when Christianity was spreading swiftly into Scandinavia, Poland, and Hungary. As part of a complex set of arrangements with Constantinople, he not only was baptized a Christian but also married the Byzantine emperor's sister.

Vladimir Christianizes Kiev

Russian legend offers an explanation for the conversion. According to popular accounts, Vladimir had summoned to Kiev representatives of the three great monotheistic religions, requiring each delegation to present arguments in support of its beliefs. After the presentations, he and his advisors decided against Judaism because its principles had not prevented the conquest of Judea by the Romans or the more recent defeat of the Jewish Khazars by Kiev itself. Islam was attractive as a dynamic, expanding movement, but its expansion had slowed considerably since the eighth century. A more practical problem was that the Islamic faith forbade the use of alcohol, and Russians could not imagine getting through the harsh winter months without it. Impressed with the majesty and beauty of Byzantine ritual, Vladimir chose Christianity. In so doing, he connected his realm with the Christian world.

It is significant that Russia adopted eastern rather than western Christianity. By 988 those two branches had diverged dramatically from one another, and in 1054, as already noted, the Great Schism formally divided them into two distinctly regional religions. Vladimir's preference for the Byzantine branch, known after 1054 as the Orthodox Church, carried with it three monumental consequences for Russia.

Russia inherits caesaropapism through Orthodox Christianity

First, Russia attached itself to a Christian church that remained firmly anchored in the rituals, practices, and doctrines of early Christianity. Western Christendom, by contrast, had gradually revised many of these traditions, exalting one bishop (the pope) above all others, altering the liturgy of divine worship, forbidding the marriage of priests, and later fragmenting with the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century. The rigorous internal questioning and self-criticism characteristic of western Christendom remained alien to Russia, as did the notion of a spiritual authority that was separate from and superior to that of the secular state. The Russians instead inherited the eastern caesaropapist tradition, which closely connected the church and state and placed both under the authority of the ruler of the realm.

Second, the slow weakening and eventual collapse of the Byzantine Empire eventually made Russia, by default, the leader of the Orthodox world. Outside of Russia, the Orthodox Church was increasingly marginalized and reduced to the status of a weak minority faith. Russia thus became the flagship of eastern Christianity.

Byzantine culture enriches Kievan society

Finally, Vladimir's choice made his country the beneficiary of the Byzantine cultural heritage. Orthodox Christianity linked Kiev to a rich, dynamic collection of rituals and traditions that enriched its rather spartan Slavic culture. Byzantine art, with its extensive use of gold and vivid depictions of Christian saints and events, left an indelible stamp on Russian symbolism. Orthodox worship services, chanted and sung in a liturgical language developed for Slavic peoples (rather than in Hebrew, Arabic, or Latin, as would have been required had Russia converted to Judaism, Islam, or Western Christianity) played a key role in the development of the Russian language. So did the Cyrillic alphabet, adapted from the Greek with extra letters added to represent Slavic sounds. Over the centuries, these and other influences, flowing from the Byzantine connection, contributed to the formation of a distinctive, energetic, and inspirational Russian culture.

Vladimir was later canonized a saint in the Orthodox Church. His actions provided a platform for the accomplishments of his successor, Iaroslav (*YAHR-ah-slahv*) the Wise (1019–1054), who governed at the height of Kievan power. Iaroslav's military campaigns against Pechenegs and Poles consolidated a state ranging from the Black Sea to the Baltic. He authorized the preparation of Russia's first legal code, built churches and monasteries throughout the land, and transformed the city of Kiev into a vibrant center of commerce and culture. He also appointed a wise Russian churchman as metropolitan of Kiev, Russia's leading church official, thus giving Russia its first native-born church leader. But his decision to divide his lands upon his death among his five sons condemned Kievan Rus to political turmoil and civil war, starting in 1054. Taking advantage of this instability, a new wave of Turkic-speaking invaders from the steppes, the Polovtsy (*pah-LAHV-tsē* or *pah-lahv-TSĒ*), appeared in the southeast and harassed the Kievan state for decades.

The Third Period: Chaos and Conflict

The Polovtsy invade and weaken Kiev

With this civil war and the subsequent Polovtsy invasion, the third era of Kievan Rus began, a lengthy period of chaos and conflict (1054–1240) during which its very survival was often in doubt. Iaroslav's grandson Vladimir Monomakh (*MAH-nō-MAHK*), who served as Grand Prince from 1113 to 1125, fought constantly to defend the state, primarily against the Polovtsy but also against other invaders from the west and south. Monomakh managed to preserve his realm but was unable to guarantee its long-term survival. His successors quarreled among themselves, sacked Kiev itself, and eventually transferred the capital northeast to the city of Vladimir. Repeatedly raided by the persistent Polovtsy and increasingly detached culturally and commercially from the declining Byzantine Empire, the Kievan realm fragmented into feuding principalities. By the time Kiev fell to the Mongols in 1240, the center of Russia had shifted to the northern forests, affording its people a more defensible position against the seemingly unending stream of invaders moving across the southern steppes.

Economy and Society

Agriculture was the source of Kievan prosperity. Because of Russian geography, the growing season was relatively brief, but the black soil of the region was rich and plentiful. Northern areas produced barley, oats, and rye, while wheat was the principal crop farther south. Farmers divided their lands into two parts, leaving each one fallow, or

uncultivated, in alternate years. Eventually this alternation evolved into a three-field system, in which a parcel of land would be sown in one year with a spring crop, in the second year with a winter crop, and in the third with no crop at all. This system enhanced the fertility of the soil and increased food production.

Grain cultivation was supplemented by cattle raising and beekeeping, which supplied candle wax to light homes and honey to sweeten food and drink. Fishing and hunting were also important. Russia was a snowy land, but its vast forests and numerous lakes and rivers contained enough game and fish to feed a population much larger than the one that lived there. The majority of that population, of course, was rural; in Kievan Rus there were many towns but few cities. Most townspeople, including artisans who practiced skills in tanning, metalworking, and woodworking, also worked on the land.

Kiev connects southwestern Russia commercially

Townspeople were also merchants. Kiev's location on the Dnieper River north of the Black Sea gave it control of, or easy access to, the principal trade routes of southwestern Russia. The Grand Prince was in some ways the chief merchant as well as the chief executive. Collecting tribute from subject peoples in the form of honey, beeswax, furs, hides, and slaves, he presided over an active and complex trade with Byzantium, Bulgaria, and Baghdad. Relations with Constantinople were commercial as well as cultural and religious.

In addition to directing trade, waging war, and regulating affairs of state, the Grand Prince presided over a social and governing elite centered on his siblings and cousins. His courtiers intermarried with local Kievan nobles to form the **boyar class**, an aristocracy that played a significant role throughout much of Russian history. Most Kievan peasants were free, although some fell into debt so burdensome that they were scarcely better off than the slaves who formed the base of the social structure.

Byzantine Christianity influences Kiev

From bottom to top, Kievan society was interlaced with Byzantine Christianity. The Orthodox Church offered much more than services on Sundays and holy days. It provided a colorful, enriching series of rituals designed to guide the believer from birth through life to death. It owned and administered early forms of charitable institutions, hospitals, and schools. It dominated Russian art, architecture, and literature, giving each a distinctively Byzantine flavor. In addition, its married clergy sent their children not only back into the Church but into all other walks of life, spiritualizing Kievan society to a degree unmatched in Western Christendom.

The End of Early Russian Civilization

The spiritual richness of Kiev, impressive though it was, could not prevent the state's collapse. A number of factors converged to make that outcome possible. Economically, in the eleventh century, Kiev began to lose its privileged commercial position, as Polovtsy occupation of the south disrupted Kievan connections with both the Byzantine Empire and Islamic southern Asia. Socially, a gradual reduction in peasant status led to serious unrest in the twelfth century. Politically, Kievan Russia failed to develop as a fully centralized state. It was instead a loose federation of principalities, which only unusually talented rulers such as Vladimir and Iaroslav could hold together.

Nomads besiege Kievan Rus

Recurrent civil strife in turn left Kiev vulnerable to unending attacks by Turkic-speaking nomads such as the Khazars, Pechenegs, and Polovtsy. Although Russia defeated them time and again, they continued to undermine its vitality. In 1240, the Mongols sacked Kiev, ending the third period of early Russian civilization.

Chapter Review

Putting It in Perspective

In the fourth century C.E., when Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity, took a leading role in Church affairs, and moved the Roman Empire's capital eastward to Constantinople, he laid the foundations of the Byzantine realm. After 476, when Germanic forces conquered Rome and ended the empire in the west, the Eastern Roman Empire continued to develop a distinctive society, blending Roman traditions with Greek culture and a vibrant version of the Christian faith that united Church and state authority in the person of the emperor.

Byzantine emperors continued to claim all the western territory they had lost, but their efforts to retake it achieved no lasting success. Far more significant were the achievements of Byzantium itself. Among these were Justinian's Code, which systematized Roman law and guaranteed its survival into modern times. In the area of religion, Byzantine Christianity developed a rich set of rituals that preserved early Christian practices to the present day. And, beginning in the tenth century, Byzantine religion and culture took root in Russia, where they were destined to outlast the Byzantine Empire itself.

Byzantium's culture was splendid, its commercial connections were extensive, and many of its emperors were effective, capable leaders. Some, however, proved to be incompetent or corrupt. A political system that restrained executive power could have survived the mistakes of these emperors, but the Byzantine Empire's caesaropapist heritage exalted the ruler's authority, even if he or she was disastrously ineffective. Although the emperors worked to unify their people religiously, Byzantium's chronic quarrels over doctrinal differences that could not be resolved frustrated their efforts and weakened the empire in the face of its enemies.

In the end the empire's enemies proved its undoing. Drastically diminished by Arab conquests during the seventh century, the realm regrouped and regained a measure of power and prosperity, only to be battered by the Turks beginning in the eleventh century. Both the Arabs and Turks were driven by a compelling, militant new faith that arose in Arabia in the early 600s. That dynamic force, to which we now turn, was known as Islam.

Reviewing Key Material

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ASK YOURSELF

1. Why was caesaropapism important in the administration of the Byzantine Empire? How did Justinian and Theodora utilize it?
2. Why was Byzantium unable to reconquer and hold Rome?
3. Could the Great Schism of 1054 have been avoided? Why or why not?
4. How and why did Kievan Rus emerge as a powerful state in Russia? How was Kievan Rus affected by Byzantium?
5. Which features were distinctive about Byzantine civilization? Which of these features were passed on to later cultures?

GOING FURTHER

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Key Dates and Developments

The Byzantine Empire

284 C.E.	Diocletian's division of the Roman Empire
325	Constantine's intervention at the Council of Nicaea
527–565	Rule of Justinian and (until 548) Theodora
529	Code of Justinian
541	Bubonic Plague appeared in Constantinople
681	Council of Constantinople defined the nature of Jesus
726	Leo III's ban on icons and images; Iconoclasm
1054	The Great Schism
1071	Battle of Manzikert Kievan Rus
700–200 B.C.E.	Scythians controlled southern Russia
200 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.	Sarmatians controlled southern Russia
200–650 C.E.	Germanic invasions
7th century C.E.	Arrival of the Khazars
ca. 862	Varangians arrived in northwestern Russia
882–972	Foundation and First Period of Kievan Rus
945–962	Regency and Conversion of Olga
962–972	Rule of Sviatoslav
980–1054	Second Period of Kievan Rus; Vladimir as Grand Prince (980–1019)
988	Conversion of Russia to Byzantine Christianity
1054–1240	Third Period of Kievan Rus
1240	Mongol conquest of Kiev