

# Byzantine Empire & Kievan Russia

AN AGE OF ACCELERATING CONNECTIONS (600 – 1450)



- While the remnants of the Roman Empire in the West were experiencing the “Dark Ages” the Byzantine Empire (really the old Roman empire that moved east to Constantinople) maintained and reinterpreted Roman traditions.

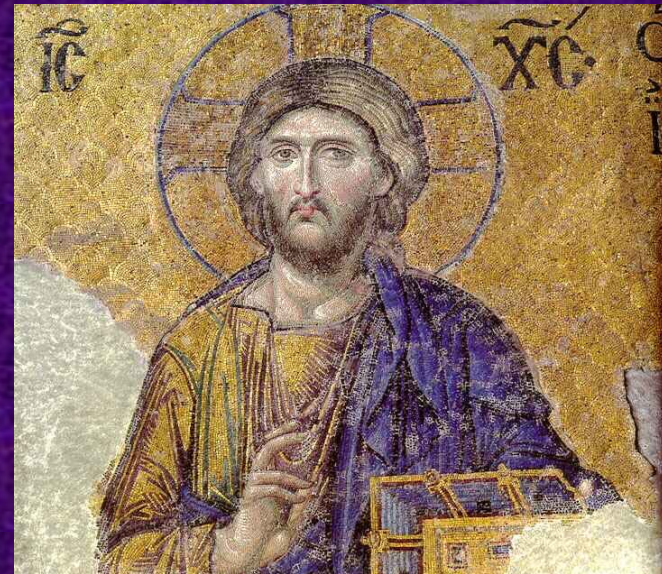






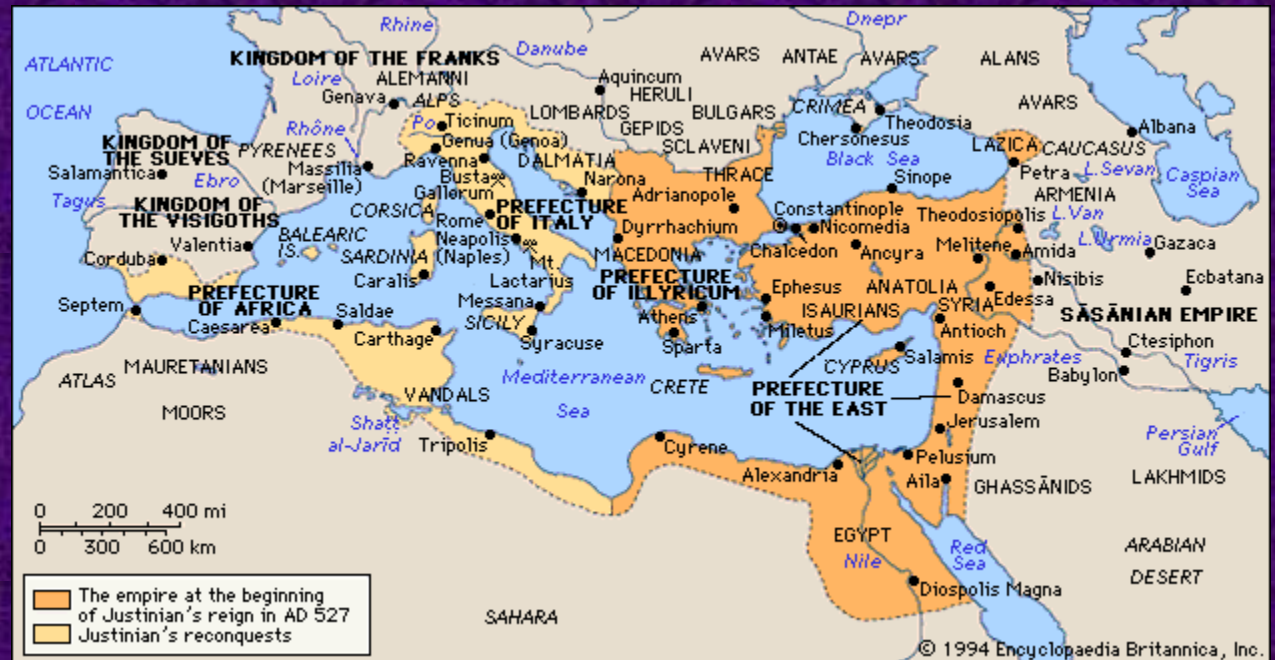
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- The Byzantine Empire made Christianity the official religion of the empire and reformed their system of laws into a unified code.
- Therefore, they avoided the breakup and creation of various principalities as was occurring in the west.





- Emperor Justinian (527-565) is credited for making the reforms / attempt to salvage the once great empire.
  - Justinian Code (The Body of Civil Law)
  - He launched a massive public building program



- The Hagia Sophia was considered the most splendid church in the Christian world.
- Byzantine art often showed religious figures against gold backgrounds; the use of mosaics was also common.





- Despite the efforts of Justinian to resurrect an empire that encompassed all of Europe, there were clear distinctions emerging between the Byzantines and their counterparts further west.
- In Western Europe . . .
  - A demographic change occurred that saw the movement of people from urban areas to the rural countryside (Some of this was also occurring in the east because of a plague during the time of Justinian that encouraged people to move to less populated places, but by and large urban areas in the east were more prevalent than those in the west).
  - Stories of saints coming from cities were replaced with narratives about saints who originated as peasants.
  - A barter system replaced money transactions.
- The Great Schism (1054) divided Christianity into the Latin and Orthodox Churches, which worsened the empire's relations with leaders in the west.

- Byzantine woman found less freedom than their Roman counterparts (they were often confined to the home and concealed their faces with veils while in public). Paradoxically, the wives of Byzantine emperors did rule alongside their husbands (Theodora).
- Economically, Byzantine rulers heavily regulated the economy (set prices, organized trade).





- Nevertheless, the expansion of Islam and Arab armies did pose a threat to the Byzantines.
  - Arab armies took over Byzantine Egypt, Syria, & Tunisia
  - Christians in these former territories adopted the Muslim faith

*I'm really scared.*



- Christian Crusaders were able to reestablish Christian principalities along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean, but that was only temporary (*The Crusades would continue*).
- Conflict with new groups of people like the Slavs and Turks would further dent the empire.







- In the area of modern western Russia lived a group of people known as the Slavs.
- They were mostly forest dwellers or farmers and depended upon local trade of furs and grains.





- Over time they began to blend their culture with emigrated Vikings from the north and traded with the people of Constantinople.



- The Swedish Vikings (Varangians) eventually came to dominate the Slavs (880s). The native people ruled by the Vikings came to be known as the Rus, hence the name Russians.





- These early Russian princes tended to deal with the Byzantines more than with the Muslim world because of the flow of rivers (Dnieper River) flowed into the Black Sea.



- The Russians became heavily influenced by Byzantine traditions and even converted over to Orthodox Christianity (Islam forbid alcohol).
- Byzantine rulers sent missionaries to Russia; as a result the state became a barrier to Catholic expansion (Occasionally polytheistic uprisings occurred, such as during famines).







- Under the leadership of Vladimir and Yaroslav the Wise Russian (late 900s) cities began to prosper (unlike Western Europe political power in Russia at this time was more closely connected to trade than to landholding).



- The city / principality of Kiev (originally settled by the Viking leader Oleg) expanded to control the territory between the Baltic and Black Seas, and the Danube and Volga Rivers.
- Kiev & Novgorod may have had 50,000 people equivalent to London or Paris at the time, but much smaller than Constantinople or Baghdad.