

Chapter 13

The Commonwealth of Byzantium

The Early Byzantine Empire

- Capital: Byzantium
- On the Bosphorus
- Commercial, strategic value of location
- Constantine names capital after himself (Constantinople), moves capital there 340 CE
- 1453 falls to Turks, renamed Istanbul

The Later Roman Empire and Byzantium

- Byzantine Empire inherits Roman Empire after fall of Rome in 5th c. CE
- Eastern territories remain major power until 13th c. CE

The Later Roman Empire

- Roman infrastructure in place
 - Roads, institutional hierarchies
- Challenges from strong Persian empire (Sassanid dynasty, 226-641 CE)
- Invasions of Germanic peoples

Caesaropapism

- Power centralized in figure of Emperor
- Christian leader cannot claim divinity, rather divine authority
- Political rule
- Involved in Religious rule as well
- Authority absolute

The Byzantine Court

- Etiquette reinforces authority of Emperor
 - Royal purple
 - Prostration
 - Mechanical devices designed to inspire awe

Justinian (527-565 CE)

- The “sleepless emperor”
- Wife Theodora as advisor
 - Background: circus performer
- Uses army to contain tax riots, ambitious construction program
 - Hagia Sophia
- Law Code definitive for centuries

Byzantine Conquests

- General Belisarius recaptures much of western Roman Empire under Justinian
- Unable to consolidate control of territories
- Withdrew to defend empire from Sassanids, Slavs

The Byzantine empire and its neighbors 527-554 C.E.



Islamic Conquests and Byzantine Revival

- 7th century Arab Muslim expansion
- Besieged Byzantium 674-678, 717-718
- Defense made possible through use of “greek fire”

Imperial Organization

- *Themes* (provinces) under control of generals
- Military administration
- Control from central imperial government
- Soldiers from peasant class, rewarded with land grants

Tensions with Western Europe

■ Church

- Byzantine: Greek; Roman: Latin
- Conflicts over hierarchical control

■ Fealty of Germanic peoples

- Roman pope crowns Charlemagne in 800, a challenge to Byzantine authority

Byzantine Economy and Society

- Constantinople largest city in Europe, 5th-13th c.
- Dependent on small landholders, free peasants
- Earlier large landholdings destroyed by invasions in 6th-7th centuries
- *Theme* system rewards soldiers with land grants

Decline of the Free Peasantry

- Large landholdings on the increase
- Reduces tax revenues, recruits to military
- Last three centuries indicate steady decline of economy

Manufacturing and Trade

- Trade routes bring key technologies, e.g. silk industry
- Advantage of location causes crafts and industry to expand after 6th century
- Tax revenues from silk route
- Banking services develop

Urban Life

- Aristocrats: palances; artisans: apartments; working poor: communal living spaces
- Hippodrome
 - Chariot races, “greens vs. blues”
 - Politically inspired rioting

Orthodox Christianity

- Legacy of Classical Greece
 - Greek replaces Latin after 6th c. CE; language of New Testament
- Byzantine education sponsors development of large literate class for state bureaucracy
 - Training in classical canon

The Byzantine Church

- Church and state closely aligned
- Council of Nicea (325) bans Arian movement
 - Human/divine nature of Jesus
 - Constantine favors Arians, but supports Nicean condemnation
- Byzantine Emperors appoint Patriarchs
- Caesaropapism creates dissent in church

Iconoclasm

- Emperor Leo III (r. 717-741 CE)
- Destruction of icons after 726
- Popular protest, rioting
- Policy abandoned 843

Greek Philosophy and Byzantine Theology

- Attempt to reconcile Greek philosophy with Judeo-Christianity
- Constantine establishes school to apply philosophical methods to religious questions

Ascetism

- Hermit-like existence
- Celibacy
- Fasting
- Prayer
- St. Simeon Stylite
 - Lived atop pillar for years

Byzantine Monasticism and St. Basil (329-379 CE)

- Patriarch of Constantinople reforms monasteries
 - Communal living
 - Hierarchical structure
- Mt. Athos
 - No women, female animals allowed

Tensions between Eastern and Western Christianity

- Ritual disputes
 - Beards on clergy
 - Leavened bread for Mass
- Theological disputes
 - Iconoclasm
 - Nature of the Trinity

Schism

- Arguments over hierarchy, jurisdiction
- Autonomy of Patriarchs, or Primacy of Rome?
- 1054 Patriarch of Constantinople and Pope of Rome excommunicate each other
 - East: Orthodox Church
 - West: Roman Catholic

Social Problems in the Byzantine Empire

- Generals of *themes* become allied with local aristocrats
 - Intermarry, create class of elite
- Occasional rebellions vs. Imperial Rule

Challenges from the West

- Western European economic development
- Normans from Scandinavia press on Byzantine territories
- Crusades of 12th-13th centuries rampage through Byzantine territory
 - Constantinople sacked, 1204

Challenges from the East

- Muslim Saljuqs invade Anatolia
 - Threatens grain supply
- Defeat Byzantine army in 1071, creates civil conflict
- Period of steady decline until Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople in 1453
 - Renamed Istanbul

The Byzantine empire and its neighbors about 1100 C.E.



Influence on Slavic Cultures

- Relations from 6th c. CE
- Bulgaria influenced culturally, politically
- Saints Cyril and Methodius
 - Create Cyrillic alphabet
- Slavic lands develop orientation to Byzantium

Kievan Rus'

- Conversion of Prince Vladimir, 989
- Byzantine culture influences development of Slavic cultures
- Distinctively Slavic Orthodox church develops
- Eventual heir to Byzantium