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The Byzantine Empire

In 284 A.D., the Roman Emperor Diocletian divided the Roman Empire into two parts. Diocletian divided the empire in an attempt to make governing the empire more manageable. Ultimately, the Western Roman Empire fell in 476 A.D. It fell due to barbarian invasions, high taxes, and corrupt rulers. However, the Eastern Roman Empire did not fall. It survived and became known as the Byzantine Empire. Therefore, the Byzantine Empire was formerly the Eastern Roman Empire. It lasted for a thousand years beyond the fall of Rome.

The Byzantine Empire was a natural center for trade. It was located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Silk and spices from the east, furs from Russia, grains, olives, and wines from the empire itself brought great wealth. Its capital, Constantinople, was a natural center for trade. The emperor held absolute power. The greatest Byzantine emperor was a man named Justinian. He became emperor in 527 A.D. He is remembered for three reasons. First, he tried to win back the Roman lands in the West. In fact, he conquered a great deal of land. Second, he made Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, more beautiful. He ordered the construction of one of the world's most beautiful churches – the Hagia Sophia. Its ceiling rises 180 feet from the floor.

Finally, Justinian is remembered for a code of laws. He asked a group of Greek and Latin scholars to collect and organize the laws of his empire. They published their code of laws in A.D. 529. Known as the Code of Justinian, it was a complete record of Roman law. The main ideas of this code later shaped the legal systems of Europe and the United States.

Questions:

1- Why is Diocletian important to the development of the Byzantine Empire?

2- Why was Constantinople important?

3- What are Emperor Justinian's achievements?

4- What was the Hagia Sophia?

5- What was the Code of Justinian and what is its impact today?

Answer questions 1-3 based on the following map.

Trade about A.D. 1000



Source: Farah and Karls, *World History, The Human Experience*, Glencoe/McGraw-Hill (adapted)

1. Based on the information provided by this map, which statement about Constantinople is accurate?

- (1) Africans traded more goods in Constantinople than in any other area.
- (2) Constantinople was a city located on the Mediterranean Sea.
- (3) Gold was the primary commodity that China sent to Constantinople.
- (4) Constantinople was an important trading center.

2. Constantinople was a thriving city in the 1200s mainly because of its location on a major trade route between

- (1) China and southern Africa
- (2) The Atlantic Ocean and the Baltic Sea
- (3) The Inca Empire and the Aztec Empire
- (4) Asia and Eastern Europe

3. The map supports which of the following statements?

- (1) Constantinople was a melting pot of cultures due to trade.
- (2) The Byzantine Empire developed a highly organized army.
- (3) The borders Byzantine Empire will reach China
- (4) Constantinople was owned by Greece for 100 years.

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Answer question 1-3 based on the following quotation.

“ . . . The circumference of the city of Constantinople is eighteen miles; one-half of the city being bounded by the continent, the other by the sea, two arms of which meet here; the one a branch or outlet of the Russian, the other of the Spanish sea. Great stir and bustle prevails [dominates] at Constantinople in consequence of the conflux [meeting] of many merchants, who resort thither [come there], both by land and by sea, from all parts of the world for purposes of trade, including merchants from Babylon and from Mesopotamia, from Media and Persia, from Egypt and Palestine, as well as from Russia, Hungary, Patzinakia, Budia, Lombardy and Spain. In this respect the city is equaled only by Bagdad, the metropolis of the Mahometans. . . .”

— Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, Manuel Komroff, ed., *Contemporaries of Marco Polo*, Boni & Liveright

1. This author would most likely agree with the idea that the

- (1) size of Constantinople limited trade
- (2) cities of western Europe were more impressive than Constantinople
- (3) location of Constantinople contributed to its prosperity
- (4) government of Constantinople failed to provide order

2. All of the following were things the visitor noticed about Constantinople except

- (1) the meeting of merchants
- (2) a city that has water on two sides of it
- (3) the city was not as special as Bagdad
- (4) people coming from Babylon, Russia and Spain

3. Which statement supports the idea that the author was amazed by the city of Constantinople?

- (1) “In this respect the city is equaled only by Bagdad, the metropolis of the Mahometans. . . .”
- (2) “. . . The circumference of the city of Constantinople is eighteen miles;...”
- (3) “Great stir and bustle prevails [dominates] at Constantinople in consequence of the conflux [meeting] of many merchants, who resort thither [come there], both by land and by sea,...”
- (4) “...including merchants from Babylon and from Mesopotamia, from Media and Persia, from Egypt and Palestine, as well as from Russia, Hungary, Patzinakia, Budia, Lombardy and Spain.”

Justinian Code v. Present Laws

“Things which are common to all and not capable of being owned are: the air, running water, the sea, and the seashores.”

-Justinian Code

Laws about	Justinian Code	American Laws
Women's Rights	All women can own property, make contracts and will, and bring a lawsuit.	All women can own property, make contracts and wills, bring a lawsuit. Women are guaranteed the same right as men.
Robbery	Robbery was not a crime. The victim could sue the robber for up to four times the value of the stolen property.	Robbery is a crime and is punishable by a fine and/ or a prison sentence.
Failure to pay debts	People owed something had to the person owing them to gain debt back.	People owed something had to the person owing them to gain debt back.
Murder	Murder was punished by banishment	Murder is punished by a prison sentence or death.
Inheritance	Women could not inherit property from their husbands unless it was provided in a will. Children received equal amounts of the father's estate.	Standard law allows wives and children to divide an estate. Other directions can be provided for in a will.

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the chart.

1. How are the rights of women similar under the Justinian Code and current American law?

2. What is the difference in the treatment of robbery between the two law systems?

3. Under which law system could women benefit most from an inheritance? Why?

4. Which current law has basically unchanged when compared to the Justinian Code?

5. Which legal system is “softer” on murderers?

The Byzantine Influence on Russia

The Byzantines greatly influenced the people of Eastern Europe. The people of Eastern Europe are called Slavs. The Slavs moved from central Asia into the present-day countries of Russia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Croatia, and Poland. The largest group of Slavs was the Russians.

The Slavs admired Byzantine civilization. Around 900 A.D., two monks or members of a religious order, began to preach to the Slavs. The monks, Cyril and Methodius, converted many Slavs to Christianity. The Slavs had no written language. The monks invented an alphabet for their spoken language. This alphabet is called the Cyrillic alphabet. Byzantine Christianity helped bring the people of Eastern Europe together. The Slavs accepted the Eastern Orthodox Church, the religion of the Byzantines. However, most of the rest of Europe belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. This difference isolated the Slavs from the rest of Europe.

The Byzantines traded greatly with Russia. Trade encouraged cultural diffusion. The Russians built their churches to look like Byzantine churches. In addition, the absolute power held by Byzantine emperors became a model for future Russian rulers. The roots of Eastern European culture can be traced to the contributions of the Byzantines.

Questions:

1- Who were the Slavs and who were the largest group of Slavs?

2- Who were Cyril and Methodius and how did they influence the Slavs?

3- How did the work of Cyril and Methodius isolate the Slavs from the rest of Europe?

4- How did trade with the Byzantine Empire influence the Russians?

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The Development of the Eastern Orthodox Church

The Byzantine Empire does not exist anymore yet its influence survives. In 1054 A.D., a split occurred in the Christian church. The church in West of the former Roman Empire became known as the Roman Catholic Church. The church in the East became known as the Eastern Orthodox Church.

What caused a split in the Christian church?

- The Great Schism of 1054 was the split between the Eastern and Western Christian churches.
- The Pope is the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. However, each local Bishop and Patriarch (in charge of a group of Bishops) is responsible for the care of Christians in their Orthodox region.
- The Roman Catholic Church accepts the doctrine of original sin (all people are born with Adam's sin of disobeying God). Orthodox Christians do not accept the doctrine of original sin.
- The Roman Catholic Church accepts the concept of Purgatory or a place where people who have committed small sins go before admission to Heaven. The Orthodox Church does not accept the concept of Purgatory.
- Orthodox Christians use icons or small pictures of saints and Jesus. Icons help in the education of Christians as well as provide ornamentation to Christian churches.

Questions:

1- What and when was the Great Schism?

2- What are some of differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Christian Church?

3- How do Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians view purgatory and original sin differently?

4- What are icons and what is their purpose in the Orthodox faith?
