



A New Rome

The Byzantines

An Essay By Euan McGuire

Introduction

Hello, my name is Euan McGuire and today I am writing about the Byzantine Empire. My interest in history was piqued when we were starting a project and we were trying to decide on the empire we were going to study. When I started researching I thought the Byzantines sounded interesting. So here we are.

A New Rome

The Byzantines were originally an ancient Greek colony founded by Byzas. This colony was located on the European side of the Bosphorus after the first split of the Roman Empire into eastern and western states. Byzantium was located in the perfect place for trade between Rome and Asia Minor. In 324CE, Roman Emperor Constantine made the decision to found a new capital in Byzantium called Nova Roma. Finished in 330CE, it became known as Constantinople after his death. In 395CE when the Empire was split again Constantinople became the capital of the Eastern Empire. Ruled from Constantinople, the Eastern Empire eventually became a great and powerful empire, pretty much founding Christianity.

Survival of Byzantine Empire

The eastern half of the Roman Empire proved less vulnerable to external attack, thanks in part to its location. With Constantinople located on a strait, it was extremely difficult to breach the capital's defences. It also benefited greatly from a stronger administrative centre and internal political stability, as well as great wealth compared with other states of the early medieval period. The eastern emperors were able to have more control over the empire's economic resources and more effectively get sufficient manpower to combat invasion. As a result of these advantages, the Byzantine Empire was able to survive for centuries after the fall of Rome.

Religion and Politics

Though Byzantium was ruled by Roman law and Roman politics, and its official language was Latin, Greek was also widely spoken and students received education in Greek history, literature and culture. In terms of religion, the Council of Chalcedon in 451CE officially established the division of the Christian world into five Patriarchates, each ruled by a Patriarch: Rome (Now the Pope), Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. The Byzantine emperor was the pope of Constantinople, and the head of both church and state.

The rise of Iconoclasm

Emperors (beginning with Leo III in 730) spearheaded a movement that denied the people their God. During the eighth and early ninth centuries, the Empire destroyed icons and religious images and prohibited their worship. Known as Iconoclasm—literally "the smashing of images"—the movement waxed and waned under various rulers, but did not end until 843, when a Church council under Emperor Michael III ruled in favour of the display of religious images.

During the late 10th and early 11th centuries, under the rule of the Macedonian dynasty founded by Michael III's successor, Basil, the Byzantine Empire enjoyed a golden age. Though it stretched over less territory, Byzantium had more control over trade, more wealth and more international prestige than under Justinian. The strong imperial government patronized the arts, restored churches, palaces and other cultural institutions and promoted the study of ancient Greek history and literature. Greek became the official language of the state, and a flourishing culture of monasticism centered on Mount Athos in north-eastern Greece. Monks administered many institutions (orphanages, schools, hospitals) in everyday life, and Byzantine missionaries won many converts to Christianity among the Slavic peoples of the central and eastern Balkans (including Bulgaria and Serbia) and Russia.

Byzantium and the Crusades

The end of the 11th century saw the beginning of the Crusades, the series of holy wars waged by Western Christians against Muslims in the Near East from 1095 to 1291. With the Sejjuk Turks of central Asia bearing down on Constantinople, Emperor Alexius I turned to the West for help, resulting in the announcement of "holy war" by Pope Urban II at Clermont (France) that began the First Crusade. As armies from France, Germany and Italy poured into Byzantium, Alexius tried to force their leaders to swear an oath of loyalty to him in order to guarantee that land regained from the Turks would be restored to his empire. After Western and Byzantine forces recaptured Nicaea in Asia Minor from the Turks, Alexius and his army retreated, drawing accusations of betrayal from the Crusaders.

During the subsequent Crusades, hatred continued to build between Byzantium and the West, combining in the conquest and looting of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. The Latin regime established in Constantinople existed on shaky ground due to the open hostility of the city's population and its lack of money. Many refugees from Constantinople fled to Nicaea, site of a Byzantine government-in-exile that would retake the capital and overthrow Latin rule in 1261.

The Fall of the Byzantine Empire & Its Legacy

During the rule of the Palaiologan emperors, beginning with Michael VIII in 1261, the economy of the once-mighty Byzantine state was crippled, and never regained its former stature. In 1369, Emperor John V unsuccessfully sought financial help from the West to confront the growing Turkish threat, but was arrested as a debtor in Venice. Four years later, he was forced—like the Serbian princes and the ruler of Bulgaria—to become a vassal of the mighty Turks. As a vassal state, Byzantium paid tribute to the sultan and provided him with military support. Under John's successors, the empire gained sporadic relief from Ottoman oppression, but the rise of Murad II as sultan in 1421 marked the end of the final respite. Murad revoked all privileges given to the Byzantines and laid siege to Constantinople; his successor, Mehmed II, completed this process when he launched the final attack on the city. On May 29, 1453, after an Ottoman army stormed Constantinople, Mehmed triumphantly entered the Hagia Sophia, which would become the city's leading mosque. Emperor Constantine XI died in battle that day, and the decline and fall of the Byzantine Empire was complete.

In the centuries leading up to the final Ottoman conquest in 1453, the culture of the Byzantine Empire—including literature and art—flourished once again, even as the empire itself faltered. Byzantine culture would exert a great influence on the Western intellectual tradition, as scholars of the Italian Renaissance requested help from Byzantine scholars in translating Christian writings. Long after its "end" Byzantine culture and civilization continued to exercise an influence on countries that practiced its religion, including Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, among others.

Emperors

Basil II, c.958–1025, Was the emperor from 976 to 1025, surnamed Bulgaroktonos (Bulgar slayer). With his brother, Constantine VIII, he technically succeeded his father, Romanus II, in 963, but had no share in the government during the rule of the General Nicephorus II . He was a successful general under Constantine VII and Romanus II. On Romanus' death in 963 he married the emperor's widow, Theophano, and was made emperor by his troops.

Primarily a soldier, Basil exercised virtually sole rule from 976, while his dodgy brother was emperor only in name. Basil suppressed a series of revolts in 976 to 989 of the great landowners led by Bardus Sclerus and revived and strengthened the laws directed against them by Romanus I. An admiral, he took the throne during the reign of his son-in-law, Constantine VII. He defended Constantinople against the Bulgars under Simeon I and in 927 made peace with Simeon's son.



He took Bulgaria in 1018, although leaving it some measure of independence, and later extended the eastern frontier of his empire to the Caucasus. During his reign the division between the Roman and the Eastern churches widened. Basil was succeeded by Constantine VIII who reigned 1025–28 and by Constantine's daughter Zoë.

The Art of the Byzantine Empire

Most Byzantine art is religion based and alot displayed in the Hagia Sophia. Some of this has been painted over and only recently uncovered, so most art during the Iconoclastic age was geometric and this is shown in this picture. Some of the original religious art is displayed in the corners near the sides of the dome. Mosaics were uncovered and paintings re-displayed in this amazing building. It combines Christianity and Islam in one place, unseen outside of the empire.



Timeline*

330: Constantine founds the new capital of the Roman Empire on the existing site of the ancient Greek city Byzantium: Byzantium was renamed Constantinople and it would become the capital of the Byzantine Empire.

395: The Roman Empire divides in half, with the Eastern Roman Empire based in Constantinople and the Western Roman Empire based in Rome/Ravenna.

476: The Western Empire Falls: The Eastern Empire survives and now is labeled as the Byzantine Empire.

526: Justinian's reign begins. He reconquers parts of the fallen Western Empire (Africa and Italy, Spain). He codifies the Previous Roman Laws into one document. Constantinople is the most glorious city in Europe, with 500,000 inhabitants. The Hagia Sofia is constructed. Justinian is the last emperor to use the title "Caesar".

568: Lombards invade Italy, eventually taking Northern Italy from the Byzantines.

610: Heraclius becomes emperor. Temporary possession of Mesopotamia. The theme system is installed. The Empire's language changes to Greek. Eventual Loss of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt to Muslims.

693: Muslims attack Constantinople.

690: Loss of North Africa to Muslims.

717-718: A large Muslim force besiege Constantinople by land and sea. The attack is held off.

721: Regains control of Asia Minor from the Muslims

726: Emperor Leo III bans the use of Icons.

800: Charlemagne, king of the Franks, is crowned "Emperor of the Romans" by Pope Leo III in Rome. For the first time in 300 years, there is an emperor of the "East" and an emperor of the "West".

843: The use of Icons is restored.

917: Bulgars under Symeon overrun Thrace.

924: Bulgars unsuccessfully attack Constantinople unsuccessfully.

941: Prince Igor of Kiev attacks Bithynia and later attacks Constantinople: The Byzantines destroy the Russian fleet.

- 976:** Basil II becomes Emperor.
- 992:** Venetians granted extensive trading rights in the Byzantine Empire
- 995:** Basil II reconquers Syria from the Muslims.
- 996:** Basil II reconquers Greece from Bulgars.
- 1014:** Basil II destroys the Bulgar army, earning the epithet *Bulgaroktonos* ("Bulgar Slayer").
- 1055:** Loss of southern Italy to the Normans.
- 1071:** Defeat at Manzikert to the Seljuk Turks. Permanent loss of most of Asia Minor.
- 1075:** Loss of Syria to Muslims.
- 1054:** The Great Schism: The Latin Roman Church and the Greek Orthodox Church excommunicate each other.
- 1087:** Byzantines defeated in Thrace.
- 1095:** Alexius appeals to Urban II at Council of Piacenza for help against the Turks. The First Crusade is proclaimed at Council of Clermont.
- 1096:** Crusaders arrive at Constantinople. The Crusaders are successful, but eventually withdraw from cooperation with the Byzantines.
- 1121:** Reconquest of southwestern Asia Minor.
- 1179:** Byzantine Army defeated by the Sultanate of Rum at Myriokephalon. Hopes of regaining Asia Minor are lost.
- 1202:** Fourth Crusade is assembled at Venice.
- 1204:** Fourth Crusade captures Constantinople. The Latin Empire of Constantinople is formed as well as many Byzantine successor states. The capture of Constantinople in 1204 was a blow from which the Byzantines never fully recovered.
- 1261:** The successor state of Nicaea recaptures Constantinople and restores the Byzantine Empire.
- 1453:** Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans. End of the Byzantine Empire.

Map



Sources	Primary/Secondary
http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/imperialism/notes/byzantinechron.html	Primary
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/byzantium/	Primary
Alistair Walpole (My Uncle)	Secondary
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/87186/Byzantine-Empire	Primary
Oxford Encyclopaedia	Primary

*The Timeline is Copy/Paste(508 Words)