

## Chapter 14

### *Civilization in Eastern Europe: Byzantium and Orthodox Europe*

#### OUTLINE

##### I. Introduction

Two civilizations survived in postclassical Europe: the Byzantine Empire and its culturally related cultures of eastern Europe and the Catholic cultures of western Europe. The Byzantine Empire was a political heir of Rome but with a different geographical focus. Byzantine civilization was more than a continuation of Roman culture. Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium, was one of the greatest European cities. Orthodox Christianity spread from Byzantium to the rest of eastern Europe. One of the most important cultural heirs of Byzantium was Russia. As in western Europe, Byzantine culture spread northward from the Mediterranean into the plains of Europe, stimulating the development of derivative political units. Eastern Europe retained its distinctive commercial, religious, and political patterns into the modern world.

##### II. The Byzantine Empire

###### A. Introduction

Although the Byzantine Empire's origins lay in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, it increasingly developed a separate identity with the fall of the western half of the ancient empire.

###### B. Origins of the Empire

The eastern half of the Roman Empire survived the barbarian invasions that ruined the West and flourished after the fourth century. From the capital of Constantinople, emperors ruled the eastern Mediterranean and northern Africa. Increasingly the eastern empire became culturally Greek rather than Roman and developed a highly centralized bureaucracy that shifted administrative control from the military.

###### C. Justinian's Achievements

After 533 C.E., Emperor Justinian attempted to restore the unity of the ancient Mediterranean. Justinian was responsible for rebuilding Constantinople, including construction of Hagia Sophia. Under his direction, bureaucrats recodified Roman law. Justinian's armies conducted campaigns against Germanic kingdoms in northern Africa and Italy. Victories in these regions proved to be short-lived. The attempts to conquer the western Mediterranean while continuing to defend the eastern borders against the Persians exhausted both the treasury and the emperor. Justinian died in 565 C.E.

###### D. Arab Pressure and the Empire's Defenses

Justinian's successors concentrated more on holding the eastern frontier than in conquering the

western Mediterranean. The Islamic explosion of the seventh century resulted in the loss of the empire's provinces along the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean. In the early eighth century, the Arabs besieged Constantinople, but the capital survived. Wars with the Muslims created greater taxation, weakened the position of the small farmers, and led to greater aristocratic control of the Byzantine countryside. Slavic kingdoms, especially Bulgari, produced pressure on the western frontiers of the empire. One Bulgar king was able to force the Byzantines to recognize him as an independent tsar in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Emperor Basil II defeated the Bulgarian kingdom in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century and restored its territories to Byzantium. Despite increasing pressure on the frontiers, the Byzantine Empire continued to demonstrate some strength.

#### E. Byzantine Society and Politics

The centralization of Byzantium resembled the political structure of early China. The emperor was head of both state and church. The power of the emperor was sustained through an elaborate bureaucracy. As in China, aristocrats dominated the bureaucracy, but there was some openness to all ranks of society. Provincial governors were appointed from the center, and a system of spies sought to preserve loyalty to the central government. The military consisted of soldiers recruited locally and granted land in return for service. The military requirement was hereditary. Hereditary military commanders were able to establish considerable regional control. The military system successfully held off the Muslim advance in eastern Europe until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Byzantine society and economy depended on the role of Constantinople. The imperial bureaucracy regulated all trade. Food prices were kept low to feed the enormous population, but taxes on the peasantry were high. The dominance of Constantinople led to the decline of other imperial cities. Trade linked Byzantium with Asia, the Middle East, and northern Europe. Luxury industries flourished in the capital. Although merchants became wealthy, they never exercised much political control. Cultural life centered on Hellenism and the development of Orthodox Christianity. Particularly in the monasteries, a tradition of icon-painting became prominent. In the eighth century, some emperors attacked the use of religious symbols, such as icons, in worship. Iconoclasm - the attack on icons in religious worship - created a popular reaction. The use of icons was eventually restored.

#### F. The Split Between East and West

Byzantine culture and trade accentuated the cultural differences with western Europe. Nowhere was the growing separation more evident than in the rift between Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism. In 1054, an Orthodox patriarch in Constantinople raised theological issues that led to a complete break between the Roman and Eastern versions of Christianity. The split from the West reflected not simply religious but also developing political and cultural differences.

#### G. The Empire's Decline

Shortly after the religious schism with the West, the Byzantine Empire entered a long period of decline. The Seljuk Turks seized most of the Asiatic provinces in the 11<sup>th</sup> century following their defeat of Byzantine forces at the battle of Manzikert in 1071. Appeals to Western leaders helped initiate the Crusades but did little to relieve the military decline of the Byzantines. The Fourth Crusade resulted in the conquest of Constantinople and the establishment of a brief Latin Empire in 1204. In the Balkans, new kingdoms emerged to limit the influence of the Byzantines. Constantinople finally fell to the Turks in 1453, ending the Byzantine Empire.

### III. The Spread of Civilization in Eastern Europe

#### A. Introduction

Missionary expeditions, Byzantine conquests in the Balkans, and commercial relations with northeastern Europe created contacts with Slavic peoples, particularly the Russians. In 864 Cyril and Methodius converted peoples in the Balkans and southern Russia to Orthodox Christianity. One of their most important contributions was the development of a Cyrillic script for the Slavic alphabet.

#### B. The East Central Borderlands

Orthodox and Catholic missionaries both experienced some success in converting the peoples of eastern Europe. In the centuries after conversion, much of the region was organized into loosely governed regional monarchies. Trade and industry were significant. Jews, fleeing from western Europe, settled in the newly formed kingdoms, where they most often became active in commerce.

#### C. The Emergence of Kievan Rus'

The centuries of Byzantine influence were important to the eventual form of Russian culture. The Slavs moved into the region of Russia during the period of the Roman Empire. Slavic political and social organization were typically tribal--based on kinship and family. Their early religious beliefs were animistic. In the sixth and seventh centuries, Scandinavian traders established routes from the north along Russian rivers to Byzantium. More powerful than the Slavs, the Scandinavians set up governments along the trade route, most notably at Kiev. Rurik of Denmark, according to legend, was the first prince of Kievan Rus' by about 855 C.E. The Kievan principality flourished until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. A descendant of Rurik, Prince Vladimir I converted his entire kingdom to Orthodox Christianity. Early church leaders were imported from Byzantium, but the king remained head of the Russian Orthodox Church. The last of the great Kievan monarchs, Yaroslav I, codified Russian law.

#### D. Institutions and Culture in Kievan Rus'

Russia adopted many of the cultural attributes of Byzantium, particularly with respect to the practice of religion. Orthodox liturgy, monasticism, and the use of icons became common in the Kievan Rus'. Russian literature that developed using the Cyrillic alphabet chronicled religious and royal events. Divine interference played a major role in historical interpretation. Just as Russian culture evolved separately from that of western Europe, so did the Russian economy and social organization. Russian peasants remained largely free, although aristocratic landholders--boyars--existed. Russian aristocrats exercised little political influence.

#### E. Kievan Decline

The Kievan principality declined after the 12<sup>th</sup> century for a host of reasons: succession disputes, conflict with regional princes, invasions from Asia, and the collapse of their commercial ties to Byzantium. In two invasions during the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, much of Russia fell to the Mongols, or Tatars. For two centuries, the Mongols controlled the Russian cities. The Mongol supervision cut the north-south trade axis, but did not disrupt the development of Russian Orthodoxy. The indigenous aristocracy continued to exist. When the Tatars were finally expelled in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Russians were prepared to take up the cultural mantle of the Byzantine Empire as the "third Rome."

F. The End of an Era in Eastern Europe

With both Russia and Constantinople in the hands of invaders, east European civilization was in decline at the end of the postclassical era. The capture of eastern Europe confirmed the cultural and political separation of the East from the rest of Europe. Tatar control and the Byzantine collapse in the face of the Turkish invasion helped to truncate cultural ties to Byzantium, although Orthodox Christianity continued to thrive in Russia.

IV. Global Connections: Eastern Europe and the World

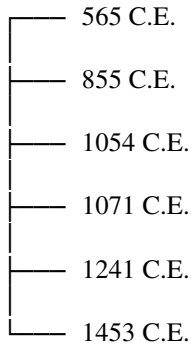
The Byzantine Empire was active in trade, linking Northern Europe, the Mediterranean, and China. Russia's geographic position created contacts with Europe and western Asia, but its dependence on Byzantium isolated Europe as Byzantium declined, as did the Mongol conquest.

## TIMELINE

*Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.*

end of Mongol invasions of Russia  
death of Justinian  
capture of Constantinople by the Turks

Rurik becomes king of Kievan Rus'  
schism between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism  
battle of Manzikert



## TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

*The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.*

Byzantine Empire  
Hagia Sophia  
Belisarius  
icons  
Rurik  
Yaroslav I

Balkans  
Justinian  
Greek fire  
iconoclasm  
Vladimir I  
boyars

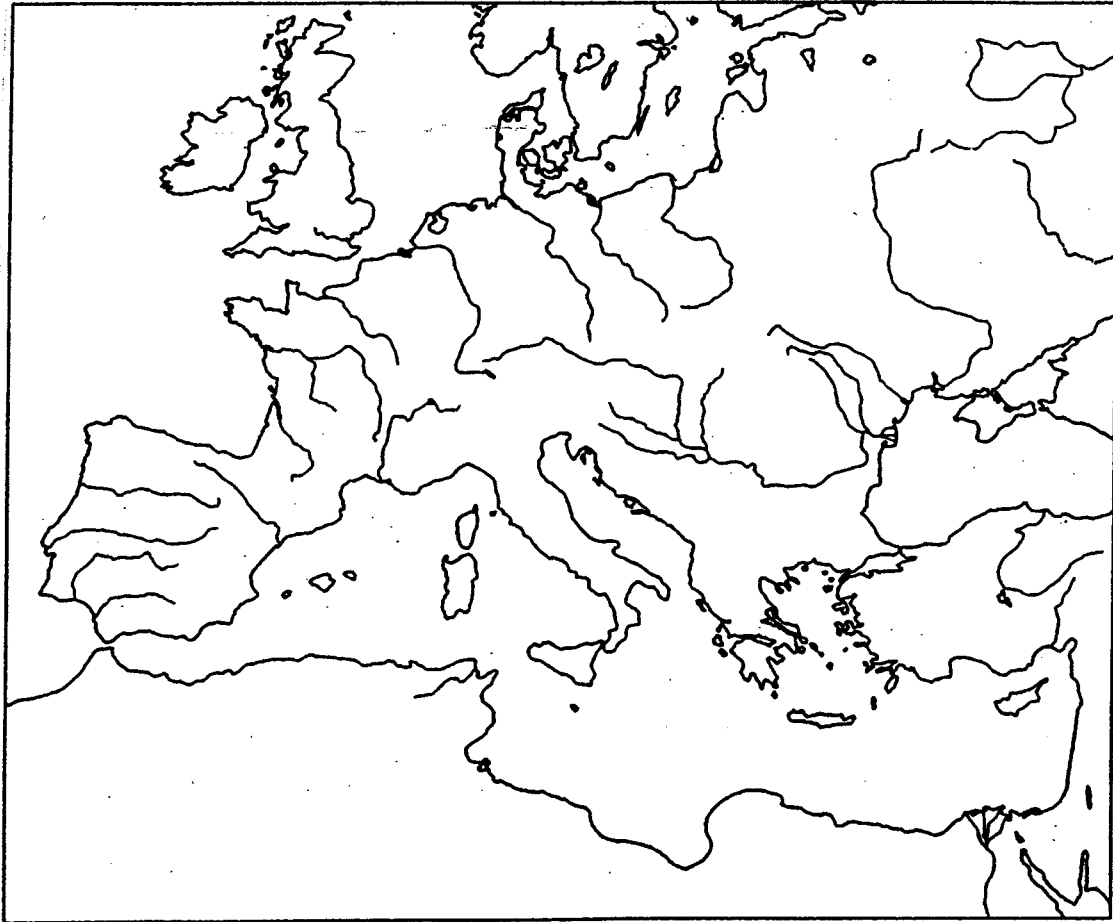
Manzikert  
Theodora  
Bulgaria  
Cyril and Methodius  
Russian Orthodoxy  
Tatars

## MAP EXERCISE

*The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.*

Constantinople  
boundaries of Kievan Rus'  
Dnieper River

Kiev  
Rome



Draw a boundary separating those nations that were converted to Roman Catholicism from those that were converted to Orthodox Christianity. What natural features tended to facilitate conversion to one form of Christianity or the other? How close were the religious capitals to the frontier?

## **MAKING CONNECTIONS**

*The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.*

1. What was the significance of the Byzantine Empire to the civilization of Europe?
2. Compare and contrast the development of civilization in eastern and western Europe.
3. How is Byzantine political organization similar to ancient China?
4. What accounts for Byzantine decline?
5. How did the Byzantine Empire influence Russia?
6. How did eastern Europe fall behind western Europe in terms of political development?

## **PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER**

*The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.*

1. What was the essential nature of Byzantine political organization and culture? How did it affect the development of eastern Europe?
2. Compare and contrast the impact of Byzantium on eastern Europe with the impact of the Islamic core on Africa and southern Asia.

## SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. The significance of the Byzantine Empire included all of the following *EXCEPT*
  - a. the empire's ability to survive for almost 1,000 years.
  - b. the importance of the empire's capital as a major urban center.
  - c. the ability of the empire to spread its cultural and political influence to the Balkans and southern Russia.
  - d. the empire's conquest of the Ottoman Empire and its inclusion of all of the Middle East.
  
2. Which of the following represents a similarity between the spread of civilization in eastern and western Europe?
  - a. The political and theological organization of Christianity was identical.
  - b. Commercial patterns in both cases ran east-west.
  - c. More northerly political units in both halves of Europe struggled for political definition.
  - d. Western and eastern Europe enjoyed similar levels of political sophistication and organization during most of the postclassical period.
  
3. The capital of the Byzantine Empire and its commercial center was located at
  - a. Rome.
  - b. Nicaea.
  - c. Constantinople.
  - d. Baghdad.
  
4. The great church built by Justinian was
  - a. St. Peter's.
  - b. The Cathedral of St. Dimitry.
  - c. Sts. Cyril and Methodius.
  - d. Hagia Sophia.
  
5. Which of the following was a result of Justinian's wars of conquest?
  - a. the weakening of the empire's defenses along its eastern frontier
  - b. the permanent addition of North Africa and Italy to the Byzantine Empire
  - c. the loss of the Balkans to the Visigoths
  - d. Justinian's assassination at the hands of an angry mob in the Hippodrome
  
6. Which of the following was a result of the conflict between the Byzantine Empire and the Arab Muslims?
  - a. The Islamic threat to the Byzantine Empire was permanently removed.
  - b. The position of the small farmers in the empire was weakened as a result of heavy taxation.
  - c. The Byzantine Empire was able to recover Syria, Palestine, and Egypt.
  - d. The commercial dominance of Constantinople was destroyed during the eighth century.



7. In which of the following ways were the Byzantine Empire and China similar?
  - a. Merchants were able to secure key positions in the social and political hierarchies.
  - b. Both empires relied almost exclusively on “barbarians” from outside their territories for military recruitment.
  - c. The concept of a firm social hierarchy was lacking in both empires.
  - d. There was an elaborate, trained bureaucracy whose education was based on classical models.
  
8. The military force of the Byzantine Empire
  - a. was recruited from ‘barbarians’ outside the empire’s frontiers.
  - b. was a paid, professional army located in Constantinople.
  - c. was recruited from the peasants of the empire in return for grants of heritable land.
  - d. was impermanent, only recruited for the few military crises of the empire.
  
9. Images of religious objects venerated as part of the religious practices of the Orthodox Church were
  - a. icons.
  - b. idols.
  - c. filioque.
  - d. adiaphora.
  
10. Cyril and Methodius were responsible for what accomplishment?
  - a. the solution to the iconoclastic controversy
  - b. the creation of a written script for the Slavic language
  - c. the conversion of Poland to Orthodox Christianity
  - d. the conversion of what is now the Czech Republic to Roman Catholicism