

# Reading Essentials and Study Guide



## The Byzantine Empire and Emerging Europe, A.D. 50–800

### Lesson 5 The Byzantine Empire

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

*How can religion impact a culture? What factors lead to the rise and fall of empires?*

#### Reading HELPDESK

##### Academic Vocabulary

**legal** relating to law; founded on law

**enormous** huge; vast; immense

##### Content Vocabulary

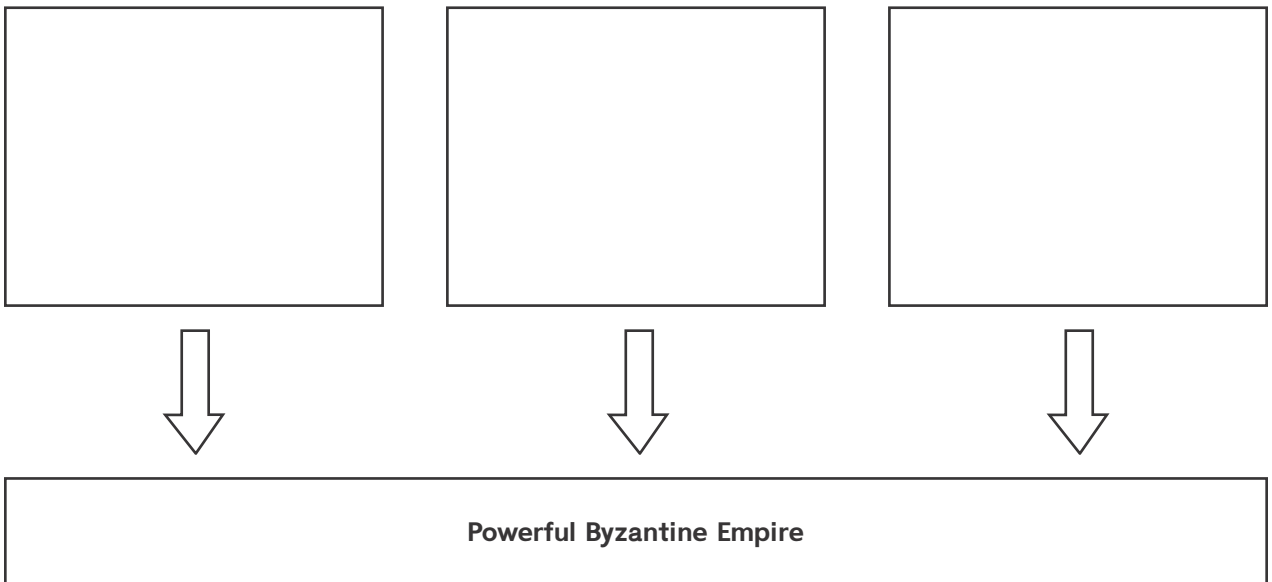
**patriarch** the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church, originally appointed by the Byzantine emperor

**icons** a conventional religious image typically painted on a small wooden panel and venerated itself as sacred by Eastern Christians

**idolatry** the worship of a physical idol as a god

#### TAKING NOTES: *Determining Cause and Effect*

**ACTIVITY** As you read, use a diagram like the one below to identify the causes of a powerful Byzantine Empire.



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#### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire began to separate in the fourth century. In the fifth century, the Germanic tribes moved into the western part of the empire. They helped create a new European civilization. At the same time, the Eastern Roman Empire, with Constantinople as its capital, developed into a new empire.

#### Eastern Roman Empire and Justinian

**Guiding Question** *How did the Eastern Roman Empire evolve into the Byzantine Empire?*

When he became emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Justinian (527–565) was determined to reestablish the Roman Empire in the entire Mediterranean world. His army was led by Belisarius. He was probably the best general of the late Roman world. He sailed into North Africa and then quickly moved into Italy and defeated the Ostrogoths.

By 552, Justinian appeared to have met his goals. He had restored the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean. His empire included Italy, part of Spain, North Africa, Asia Minor, Palestine, and Syria. But the conquest of the western empire was fleeting. Only three years after Justinian’s death the Lombards took over much of Italy. Soon other areas were lost.

Justinian’s most important contribution was his codification (arrangement of laws into an organized system) of Roman law. The eastern empire had inherited a vast quantity of **legal** materials, which Justinian wished to simplify. The result was The Body of Civil Law. This codification of Roman law became the basis of imperial law in the Eastern Roman Empire until its end in 1453. More importantly, because it was written in Latin it was also used in the West and became the basis for much of the legal system of Europe. (It was the last product of eastern Roman culture to be written in Latin. The eastern culture replaced Latin with Greek.)



#### Reading Progress Check

**Assessing** What was the significance of *The Body of Civil Law*?

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#### From Roman to Byzantine Empire

**Guiding Questions** *How did the Eastern Roman Empire evolve into the Byzantine Empire? What were the cultural contributions of the Byzantine Empire?*

Justinian’s accomplishments had been spectacular. However, the Eastern Roman Empire was left with serious problems. The empire’s treasury was empty, and the population was smaller after suffering a plague. It had a great deal of territory that was far from Constantinople and that it could not protect. In addition, it faced new threats on its frontiers. In the first half of the seventh century, the empire

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The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a starburst or network pattern.

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faced attacks from the Persians to the east and the Slavs to the north. The empire survived, only to face a new series of threats.

The most serious challenge to the Eastern Roman Empire came from the rise of Islam. This religion unified, or brought together, the Arab tribes. It created a powerful new force that swept through the east. The Eastern Roman empire lost the provinces of Syria and Palestine in 636 when its army was defeated at Yarmuk. Problems arose along the northern frontier, especially in the Balkans. In 679 the Bulgars defeated the eastern Roman forces. They took the lower Danube valley and created a strong Bulgarian kingdom.

The Eastern Roman Empire was a much smaller state by the beginning of the eighth century. It included only the eastern Balkans and Asia Minor. The external challenges had produced important internal changes. By the eighth century, this smaller Eastern Roman Empire had become what historians call the Byzantine Empire. It was a civilization with its own unique character. The empire lasted until 1453.

The Byzantine Empire was both a Greek state and a Christian state. Greek became both the common and the official language of the Byzantine Empire. As a result, Latin was no longer used. The Byzantine Empire was also a Christian state. The empire was built on the Christian faith in Jesus that was shared by almost all its citizens. An **enormous** amount of artistic talent was used to create churches, church ceremonies, and church decoration to honor this faith.

The emperor occupied a crucial position in the Byzantine state. He was believed to be chosen by God and was crowned in sacred ceremonies. His subjects were expected to prostrate themselves, or stretch out with faces on the ground, in his presence. His power was absolute. The emperor also appointed the head of the church, known as the **patriarch**. The emperor controlled both church and state. The Byzantines believed that God had commanded their state to preserve the true Christian faith. The emperor, church, and state officials were all bound together in service to this goal. Spiritual values truly held the Byzantine state together.

Constantinople was destroyed during riots in 532. As a result, Emperor Justinian rebuilt Constantinople. The city was given the appearance it would keep for almost a thousand years. Constantinople had a population estimated in the hundreds of thousands. It was the largest city in Europe during the Middle Ages. Constantinople was seen as a center of an empire and a special Christian city.

Until the twelfth century, Constantinople was the greatest center of commerce in Europe during the Middle Ages. The city was the chief center for the exchange of products between West and East. Highly desired in Europe were the products of the East. These products include silk from China and spices from Southeast Asia and India. It also included jewelry and ivory from India. These were used by Byzantine craftsmen for church items. Europe also wanted wheat and furs from southern Russia and flax and honey from the Balkans. Many of these Eastern goods were then shipped to the Mediterranean area and northern Europe. Imported raw materials were used in Constantinople for local industries. In Justinian's reign, silkworms were smuggled from China by two Christian monks to begin a Byzantine silk industry. The state controlled the production of silk cloth. In fact, the workshops themselves were housed in Constantinople's royal palace. European demand for silk cloth made it the city's most profitable product.

Justinian's rebuilding in the sixth century affected Constantinople's appearance in the Early Middle Ages. The city was dominated by a huge palace complex, hundreds of churches, and a large arena known as the Hippodrome. No residential district was particularly fashionable. Palaces and slums

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existed side-by-side. Justinian added many new buildings. His public works projects included roads, bridges, walls, public baths, law courts, schools, churches, and colossal underground reservoirs to hold the city's water supply.

The Hippodrome was a huge amphitheater. It was constructed of brick covered by marble. It would hold between 40,000 and 60,000 spectators. Although gladiator fights were held there, the main events were the chariot races. Twenty-four races would happen in one day. The citizens of Constantinople were passionate fans of chariot racing. Successful charioteers were publicly praised as heroes and honored with statues. The loss of a race in the Hippodrome often caused bloody riots.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Contrasting** How was the Byzantine Empire different from the Roman Empire?

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## New Heights and New Problems

**Guiding Questions** *What role did the Christian Church play in the Byzantine Empire? What threats did the Byzantine Empire face in the eleventh century?*

By 750, the Byzantine Empire consisted only of Asia Minor, some lands in the Balkans, and the coastal areas of Italy. However, Byzantine Empire recovered. It did not only endure, but it also expanded. The expansion was the result of the efforts of a new dynasty of Byzantine emperors who were known as the Macedonians.

### The Macedonian Emperors

The Macedonian emperors ruled from 867 to 1081. They managed to fight off outside enemies and begin an offensive. The empire was expanded to include Bulgaria in the Balkans, Syria, and the islands of Crete and Cyprus. By 1025, the Byzantine Empire was the largest it had been since the seventh century.

The Macedonian emperors also helped create a period of economic prosperity. They expanded trade relations with western Europe, especially by selling silks and metalworks. Thanks to this prosperity, the city of Constantinople flourished. Foreign visitors continued to be amazed by the size, wealth, and physical surroundings of the city. To them, it seemed a place that existed only in legends and fables.

The Macedonian dynasty of the tenth and eleventh centuries had restored much of the power of the Byzantine Empire. However, its successors were incompetent. They soon lost most of the Macedonian gains. Struggles for power between ambitious military leaders and aristocratic, or high-ranking, families led to political and social disorder in the late eleventh century.

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#### Schisms

The Byzantine Empire faced another problem. The split between the Catholic Church of the West and the Eastern Orthodox Church of the Byzantine Empire grew. Trouble began in A.D. 730 when the Byzantine emperor Leo III outlawed the use of **icons**, or artwork that showed religious figures. He claimed that their use was **idolatry**, or worship of idols. The result was strong resistance, especially from monks like John of Damascus. He wrote defenses of the use of holy images. Roman Catholic popes also condemned this act. Late in the eighth century, the Byzantine emperors reversed their decision and allowed icons. However, the damage between the churches due to the iconoclast disagreement was done.

The Eastern Orthodox Church was unwilling to accept the pope's claim that he was the only head of the church. In 1054 Pope Leo IX and the Patriarch Michael Cerularius, head of the Byzantine church, formally excommunicated each other—each took away the other's right of church membership. This began a schism, or division, between the two great branches of Christianity that has still not been completely healed.

The Byzantine Empire faced threats from abroad as well. The Seljuk Turks presented the greatest challenge. They had moved into Asia Minor, which was the heartland of the Byzantine Empire and its main source of food and manpower. In 1071 a Turkish army defeated Byzantine forces at Manzikert. As a result, Emperor Alexus I turned to Europe for military help to fight the Turks. This problem led to Byzantine involvement in the Crusades. In the end, that involvement helped bring about the downfall of the Byzantine Empire.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Determining Cause and Effect** What effects did the expansion of trade have on the Byzantine Empire?

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