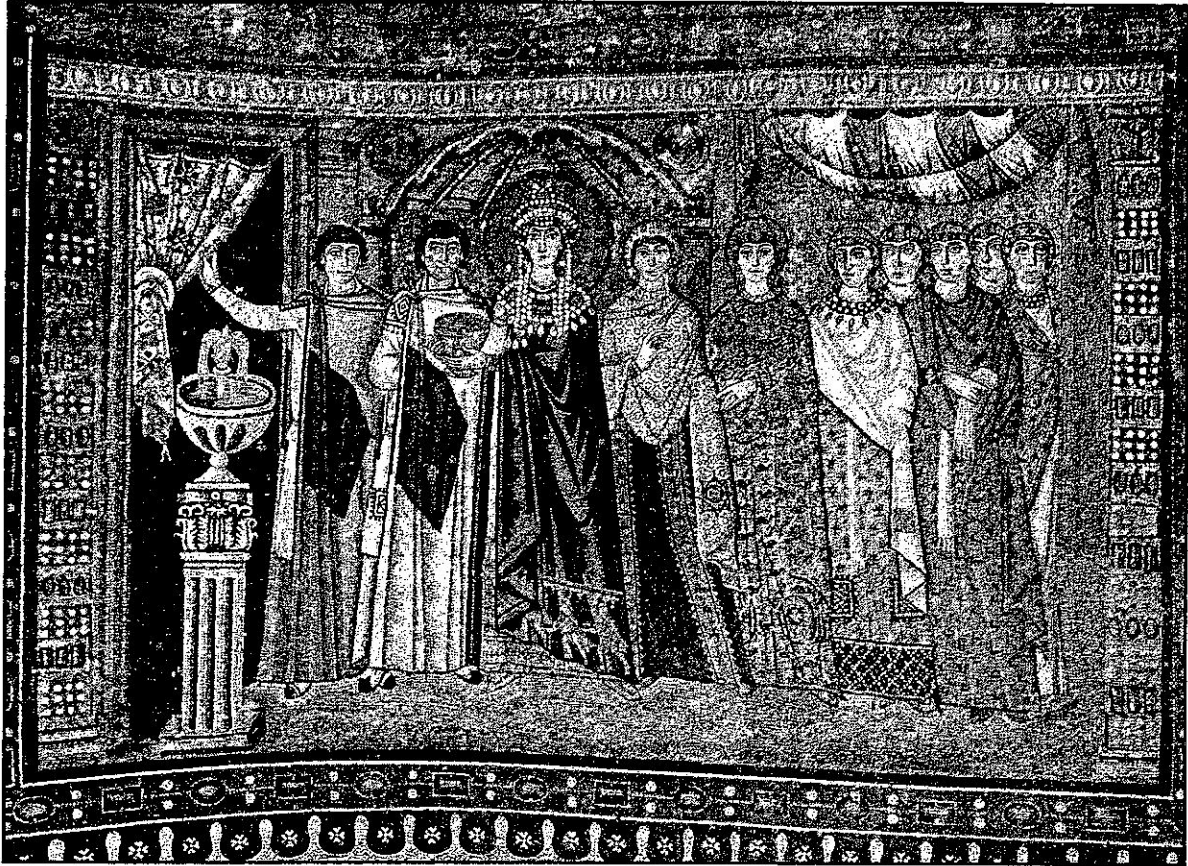


# What is the Primary Reason to Study the Byzantines?



A mosaic from the reign of Justinian, circa 527 CE

**Overview:** The Byzantine Empire and its capital city of Constantinople thrived for more than one thousand years and helped shape the history of the modern world. The empire is an important part of the reason why Christianity survived and Islam did not sweep across Europe. Its art and architecture dazzled visitors from Asia, Africa, and Europe. Its cultural heritage affects our lives in ways that most of us take for granted. Yet the Byzantines have been largely ignored in many U.S. classrooms. Hopefully, this Mini-Q will help change that.

## The Documents:

- Document A: The Byzantine Empire, 1050 (map)
- Document B: The Walls of Constantinople
- Document C: Eastern Orthodox Christianity (chart)
- Document D: Justinian's Code
- Document E: Preserving the Greek Classics (chart)

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

## Hook Exercise: Cultural Diffusion

There are words and names in history that are “loaded,”—that is, they trigger certain feelings and emotions. For some people, the word “Mongols” calls up images of unwashed barbarians riding across the plains. “Huns” and “Vandals” carry thoughts of pillage and destruction. The word “communist” produces fears of an “evil empire.” There are historical facts to back up some of these negative reactions, but much of bad feeling is unfair. For example, there were Huns and Vandals who became Catholic priests; communists are no more evil than anybody else.

This Mini-Q is about something called the Byzantine Empire. Although it lasted more than 1,000 years, it often gets slighted in textbooks and history classes. One possible reason is that “Byzantine” has become a loaded word.

The Byzantine Empire was not known by that name during its time. The Byzantines called themselves Rhomaioi (“roo-my-oy”), which is Greek for “Romans.” The term “Byzantine” was popularized centuries after the empire ended and was used mainly by people in western Europe to distinguish their history from that of Constantinople and the east.

Later, the term “Byzantine” took on a different meaning. Perhaps because of the empire’s shifting boundaries, high turnover of emperors (many of them murdered) and elaborate court rituals, “Byzantine” took on a negative meaning. In fact, dictionaries today define the term Byzantine as “strangely complicated” or “devious, sneaky.”

**Task 1:** For each of the two sentences below, write a word or phrase that would be a good substitute for “Byzantine.”

“My science teacher drives me crazy. His explanations are always so Byzantine.”

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“The governor was removed from office because of his Byzantine behavior when choosing the person to replace Barack Obama in the Senate.”

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**Task 2:** Think about the idea of “loaded” words. How might the popular definition of “Byzantine” affect our understanding of the value and importance of the Byzantine people and their empire?

## What is the Primary Reason to Study the Byzantines?

In 323 CE, a young Roman military officer, born in Moesia (modern-day Serbia) and recently stationed in Britain, successfully defeated three other generals to become the Emperor of Rome. The young emperor's name was Constantine and he was quick to make two decisions that would change European and Middle Eastern history. First, he gave Christianity legal standing within the empire. Second, in 330 CE, he moved the **imperial capital** from Rome to Byzantium, a small seaside trade town in modern-day Turkey. Constantine relocated the government for two reasons: He wanted to be able to pay closer attention to challenges from Persia and the Germanic tribes along the Danube River. He also wanted to be nearer to the spiritual and cultural richness of cities like Jerusalem, Nicomedia, and ancient Troy.

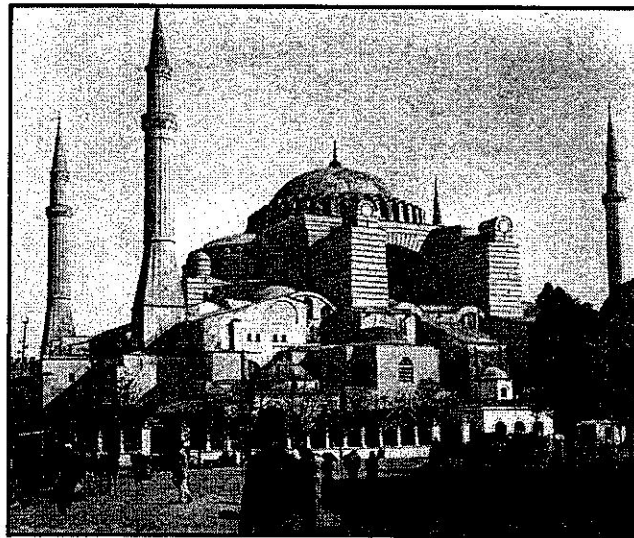
Constantine lavishly built up Byzantium and renamed it after himself – **Constantinople**. The city would grow to 500,000 people and in time showcase the **Hagia Sophia** and other stunning architectural wonders. Constantinople would remain the capital and holy city of the Eastern Roman Empire until its capture by the Turks in 1453.<sup>1</sup>

Constantine had made a wise decision to get out of Rome. Tribes from the frontier soon overran the once-mighty city; Constantinople was spared much of this early onslaught. Constantine's empire was also fortunate to have a second great leader, **Justinian**, who reigned from 517 to 565. Known as "the emperor who never sleeps," Justinian found time between his prayers, his study, and his rule to organize the writing of the Justinian Code, which is one of the features in this Mini-Q.

In the years after Constantine, Latin replaced Greek as the language of court and the church, though Greek remained the language heard on the street. Also, the Byzantine Orthodox Church grew apart from the Catholic Church of the Romans. These differences led to an official split in 1054, which continues to this day.

Throughout its 1,123-year history, the Byzantine Empire expanded and collapsed much like an accordion. It grew early and then shrank in the 600s under pressure from the Arabs. It rose again in the 900s and 1000s and then fell back under attacks by the **Crusaders** in the 1200s. It recovered, but gradually gave way to the Turks before collapsing for good in 1453. The Turks changed Constantinople's name to Istanbul and made Islam the official religion. The Byzantine Empire was no more.

For whatever reason, Byzantine history is often ignored or downplayed in American classrooms. This is puzzling, since the achievements of the Byzantines reach to the present day. Can you make a case for giving the Byzantines more attention? Examine the documents that follow and decide what aspects of the Byzantine Empire are most impressive. Then answer the question: *What is the primary reason to study the Byzantines?*



Hagia Sophia, famous Byzantine church, now a mosque

## Background Essay Questions

1. Who was Constantine?
2. What two decisions did Constantine make that changed European history?
3. For how many years was Constantinople the imperial capital of the Byzantine world?
4. What was the primary language of the Byzantine Empire?
5. Why is Byzantine history compared to an accordion?
6. When and why was the name of Constantinople changed to Istanbul? In which modern country is that city located?
7. Define these terms:

imperial capital

Constantinople

Hagia Sophia

Justinian

Crusaders

- 
- 330 CE** – The Roman emperor Constantine moves the capital of his empire to Constantinople.
- 529** – The Byzantine emperor Justinian I replaces the old law code with a new code.
- 620s** – Muhammad founds the religion of Islam.
- 672** – The Persians attempt to capture Constantinople.
- 717** – The Byzantines defeat the Muslim Arab's siege of Constantinople.
- 1054** – The Christian Church splits into eastern and western halves. The western half becomes the Roman Catholic Church and the eastern half becomes the Orthodox Church.
- 1204** – Crusaders take Constantinople and hold it for nearly 50 years.
- 1347** – The bubonic plague reaches Europe on ships passing through Constantinople.
- 1453** – The Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire.

## Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

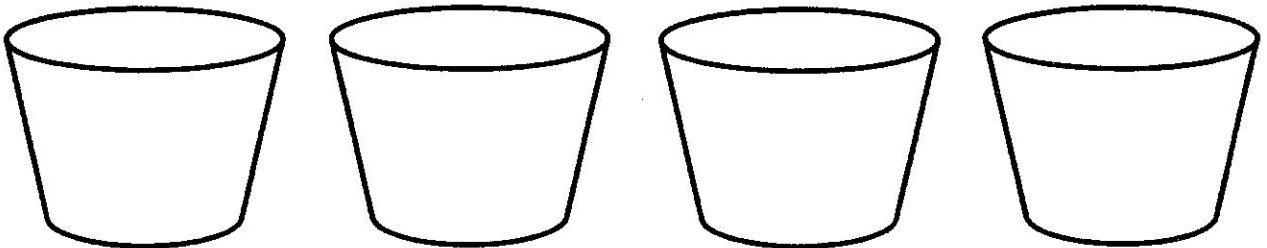
### Understanding the Question

1. What is the analytical question asked by this Mini-Q?
2. What terms in the question need to be defined?
3. Rewrite the question in your own words.

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### Pre-Bucketing

**Directions:** Using any clues from the Mini-Q question and the document titles on the cover page, guess the analytical categories and label the buckets.

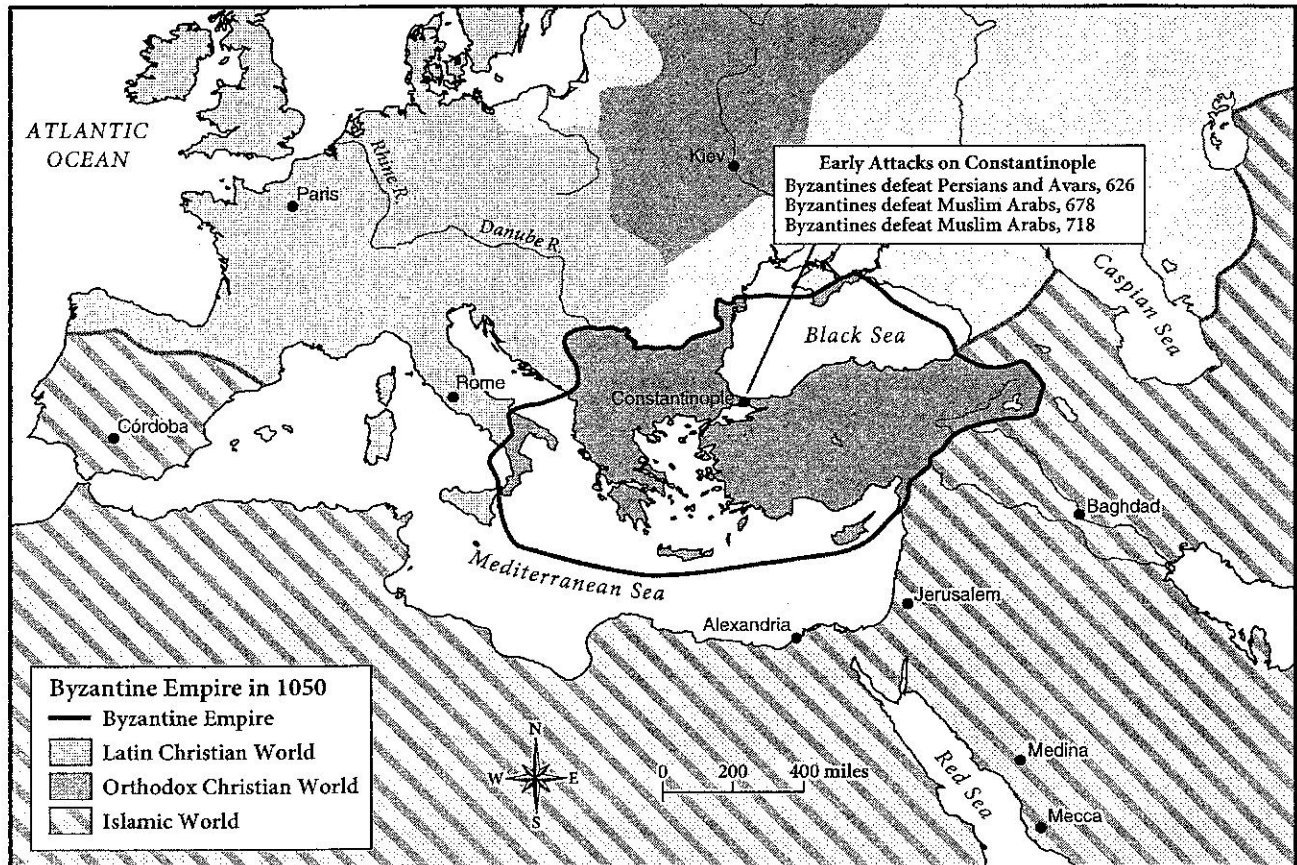


## Document A

Sources: John Julius Norwich, *A Short History of Byzantium*, Vintage, 1998. Map created from various sources.

The Byzantines ... [withstood] five years of siege by [the Arabs] hitherto considered irresistible, and in doing so ... saved Western civilization. Had the [Arabs] captured Constantinople in the seventh century...all Europe - and America - might be Muslim today.

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## Document Analysis

1. What religion dominated western and eastern Europe in 1050? What religion dominated northern Africa and southwest Asia?
2. What Christian city was closest to Muslim lands in Asia?
3. What is the significance of the quote from John Julius Norwich's book?
4. Based on this document, why should we study the Byzantines?

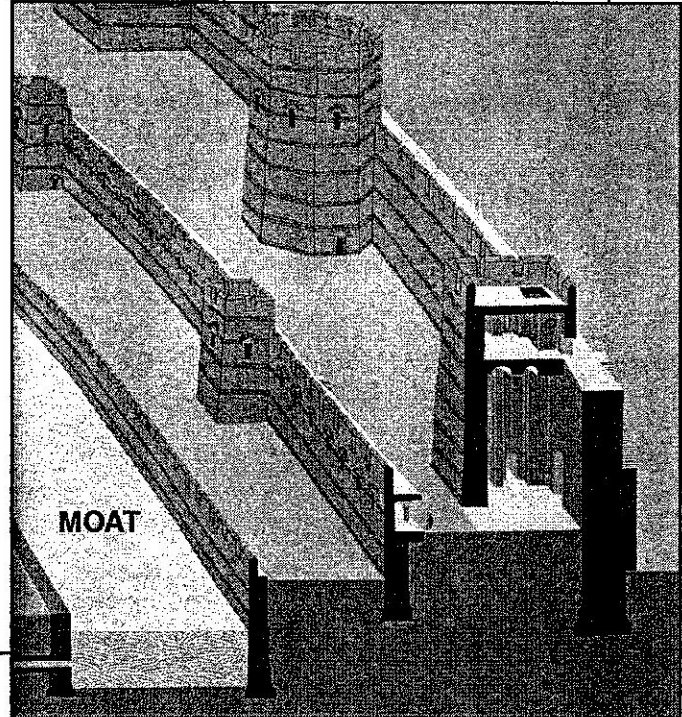


## Document B

**Source:** Philip Sherrard, *The Great Ages of Man: Byzantium*, Time-Life Books, New York, 1966; drawing courtesy of the David Klein estate.

The elaborate defense works that surrounded Constantinople made it in its day the best-fortified city in the world.... The walls were erected in the Fifth Century to protect the city against the Goths and Huns, who had captured Rome. They served their purpose well, holding off invaders for nearly one thousand years ... a single wall bounded the city's seaward sides, which were defended by the Byzantine fleet. On the land side, the Byzantines constructed a moat and three walls that were 25 feet thick. As indicated in the sketch ... invaders were faced first with the moat some 60 feet wide and 22 feet deep that was normally dry but could be flooded by pipes. Behind the moat was a low wall to shield a line of archers. Even if the attackers could overcome this first defense, they were confronted by a second wall, 27 feet high, which sheltered more troops. Beyond the second wall lay

the third and strongest bulwark. Its towers, some 70 feet high, housed more archers and missile throwers. Only the force of gunpowder finally demolished the protecting walls, bringing Constantinople down.



**Note:** During the 1,100-year history of the Byzantine Empire, 24 efforts were made to capture the city of Constantinople. Only two were successful. The Crusaders entered the city in 1204 but were eventually thrown out a few decades later. The Turkish invasion in 1453 marked the end of the Byzantine Empire.

### Document Analysis

1. Why were the walls of Constantinople built? Why was it so difficult for an attacking enemy to break through them?
2. Why couldn't an enemy attack on the seaward side of the city?
3. In its 1,100-year history, how many attempts were made to take the city? How many were successful?
4. Judging from the illustration, what conclusions can you draw about Byzantine engineering and architecture?
5. Based on this document, why should we study the Byzantines?

## Document C

Source: Chart compiled from *The World Fact Book*, 2011.

**Document Note:** In the centuries that followed Emperor Constantine's move to Byzantium, the Christian Church of Rome and the Christian Church of Constantinople gradually grew apart. The final split occurred in 1054, a separation that continues to this day. The reason for the split had to do with some spiritual interpretations of the Bible, whether or not a priest could get married (the Byzantine Church said "yes"), and the refusal by Constantinople to accept the supreme authority of the Pope. Today the Eastern Orthodox Church has a ceremonial leader, the Bishop of Constantinople, also known as the Patriarch, and a number of very independent branches - Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, and Ukrainian Orthodox.

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### Eastern Orthodox Christianity Around the World

Nation	World Rank in Orthodox Population	Eastern Orthodox Population *	Percentage of Nation's Population that is Eastern Orthodox
Russia	1	106,445,473	75 %
Ukraine	2	34,862,521	76 %
Ethiopia	3	34,461,135	44 %
Romania	4	18,726,322	88 %
Greece	5	11,080,059	98 %
United States	11	5,269,864	2%

\* As of 2010, there were about 250,000,000 Eastern Orthodox in the world. This compares with a total Christian population of about 2 billion.

### Document Analysis

1. Why did the Eastern Orthodox Church separate from the western Roman Catholic Church?
2. Which country listed on the chart has the world's highest Eastern Orthodox population?
3. Which country on the chart has the highest percentage of Eastern Orthodox Christians?
4. Would it be accurate to say that the Patriarch of Constantinople (who used to be the Patriarch of the entire Byzantine Empire) has great power over Russia, Ukraine, and Ethiopia today? Explain.
5. How can you use this document to argue why it is important to study Byzantine history?



## Document D

**Document Note:** Justinian I ruled the Byzantine Empire from 527 to 565 CE. When he became emperor, the laws of the crumbled Roman Empire in the West were very disorganized and sometimes contradicted each other. Lawyers often took advantage of this confusion by using long-forgotten laws to support their cases. Justinian knew that a clear and fair legal code was necessary to a unified empire. He therefore appointed a commission of ten experts who created a new code of 4,652 laws. These laws were written (by hand, of course) in 50 books which were further simplified into a single text called *The Institutes*. Together, these writings are called Justinian's Code. The Code dealt with everything from property rights to punishments for religious heresy (crimes). Historians credit Justinian's Code with shaping our basic ideas about law and justice today.

**Source:** *The Institutes of Justinian's Code*, 531 CE.

Justice is the constant and perpetual [continuous] wish to render every one his due ... The maxims [main guidelines] of law are these: to live honestly, to hurt no one, to every one his due.

**Source:** *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, John Locke, 1690.

**Note:** John Locke was an influential English political philosopher.

The state of nature...teaches all man kind, who will but consult it, that being equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.

**Source:** The Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, 1776.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

### Document Analysis

1. Why did Justinian create a new legal code for the Byzantine Empire?
2. According to *The Institutes*, what are the three main guidelines one should follow when writing laws?
3. What is the meaning of "to everyone his due"?
4. What evidence is there that the English philosopher John Locke might have borrowed some ideas from Justinian's Code?
5. According to the Declaration of Independence, what are three unalienable rights that people have? Are any of these rights similar to ideas in the Code? Explain.
6. How can you use this document to argue why it is important to study the Byzantines?

## Document E

Source: Cyril Mango, "The Revival of Learning," *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

The most important achievement of the Byzantine revival lay ... in the preservation of a sizable portion of the ancient Greek classics.... From the point of view of Western culture it may even be said that this act of salvage constitutes our greatest debt to Byzantium ... all the [saved classic] literature ... survived because men in the ninth and tenth centuries ... recopied [it] at the time in minuscule script,\*... It is remarkable how much has survived.

\*A cursive script that made hand-copying much faster

### Ancient Greek literature preserved by Byzantine scribes

<b>Homer</b>	The <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i> are among most widely read poems in American and European schools and colleges today.
<b>Sophocles</b>	Theatrical plays, including <i>Oedipus Rex</i> , helped to define a form of literature called tragedy.
<b>Socrates</b>	Known to us through the writings of Plato and others, Socrates crafted a form of inquiry and debate, called the Socratic Method, that is used in classrooms today. It features questions rather than answers.
<b>Plato</b>	One of Plato's works, <i>The Republic</i> , describes an ideal society and explores the importance of justice in that society.
<b>Aristotle</b>	His many scientific and philosophical writings advanced the use of logic and scientific thought.
<b>Euclid</b>	He made inquiries into astronomy, music, and mathematics. Regarded as the father of geometry.
<b>Hippocrates</b>	His medical works and his ethical standards led to the still-used Hippocratic Oath taken by all doctors.

### Document Analysis

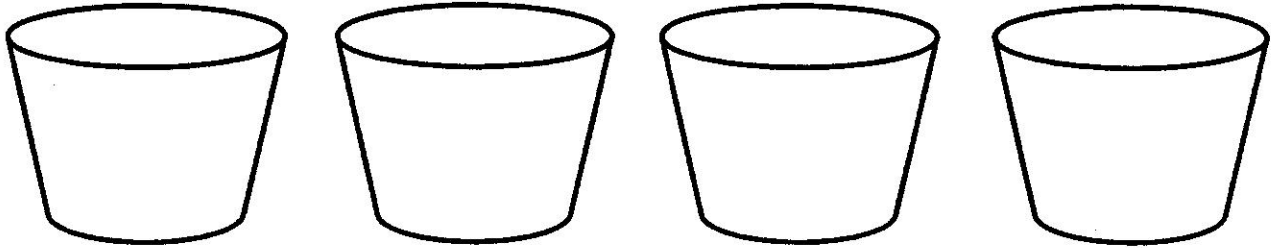
1. How were the Byzantines able to preserve Greek classics?
2. What Greek thinkers influenced science and mathematics?
3. What Greek thinkers influenced literature?
4. Which Greek cultural figure is most likely imitated by a classroom teacher?
5. How can you use this document to argue why it is important to study Byzantine history?

## Bucketing – Getting Ready to Write

### Bucketing

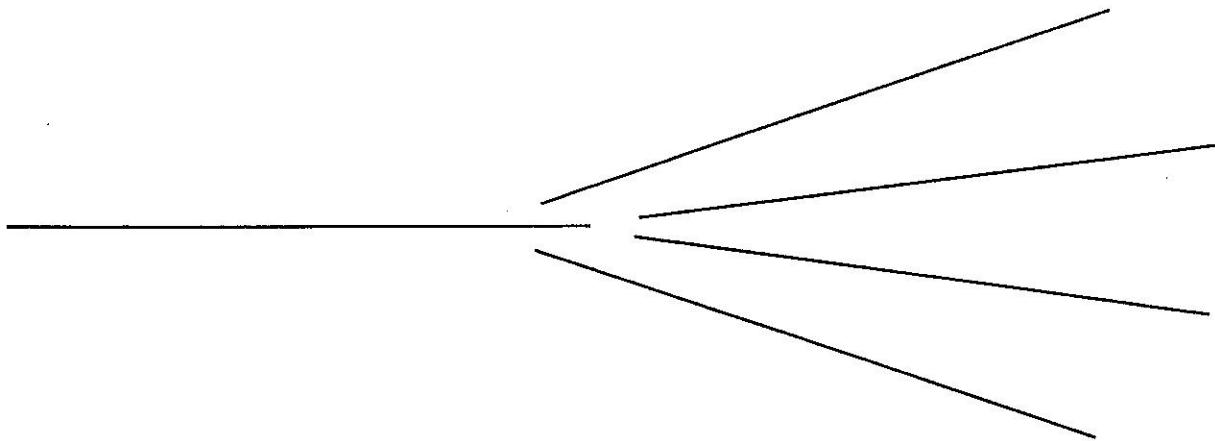
Look over all the documents and organize them into your final buckets. Write labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. Remember, your buckets are going to become your body paragraphs. The fourth bucket should be your primary reason for studying the Byzantine Empire.

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### Thesis Development and Road Map

On the chicken foot below, write your thesis and your road map. Your thesis is always an opinion and answers the Mini-Q question. The road map is created from your bucket labels and lists the topic areas you will examine in order to prove your thesis.



# From Thesis to Essay Writing

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## Mini-Q Essay Outline Guide

### Working Title

#### Paragraph #1

Grabber

Background

Stating the question with key terms defined

Thesis and road map

#### Paragraph #2

Baby Thesis for bucket one (3 reasons, but not the most important)

Evidence: supporting detail from documents with document citation

Argument: connecting evidence to the thesis

#### Paragraph #3

Baby Thesis for bucket two (most important reason to study the Byzantines)

Evidence

Argument

#### Paragraph #4

Conclusion: Restatement of main idea along with possible insight or wrinkle

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