

Byzantine Empire

(395 CE – 1453 CE)

By the 4th century CE (AD) the Roman Empire had become too large to defend and govern effectively from Rome. The borders of the Empire were under constant attack from groups of invaders.

At first Roman Emperor Constantine build a new capital city, **Constantinople**, in 330 CE, on the Bosphorus Strait in what is now Turkey and moved the government from Rome to Constantinople.

Soon after it became clear that the Empire was still too difficult to govern and the Empire was divided into 2 parts with 2 capital cities – **Rome for the Western Empire** and **Constantinople for the Eastern Empire** - each with their own emperor. The Eastern Empire became known as the **Byzantine Empire** in 395 CE.

Roman Empire - 395 CE



The **Western Empire** continued to come under attacks from groups of northern invaders and in **471 CE (AD)** the city of **Rome** fell and the last Roman Emperor was captured by the Barbarians.

The **Byzantine Empire** would continue for another 1,000 years until the Turks from the **Ottoman Empire** captured **Constantinople** in **1453**.



Over the next 1,000 years the **Byzantine Empire** would become the longest lasting empire outside of China. During Emperor Justinian, it would recapture parts of the old Western Empire. It would hold this land for a few years but unfortunately the Empire was under constant attacks from the Franks in the west, the Bulgarians in the north, the Ottomans Turks in the east and the Islamic Arabs in the Middle East and Africa.



The Crusaders of Fourth Crusade in 1204 CE raided and looted (stole from) Constantinople. They left the city badly damaged and weakened the Empire.

By 1453 CE, at the time of the capture of its capital, Constantinople, and its official end by the Ottomans, the Empire had been reduced to just a small portion of its original size. At its end the Byzantine Empire was completely surrounded by the Ottoman Empire.

Important Leaders of the Byzantine Empire

Constantine the Great (reign/ruled 306-337 CE) - The Emperor Constantine was one of the first to realize the impossibility of managing the empire's problems from distant **Rome**. He is responsible for building the new capital Constantinople and moving the capital city of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople.

Justinian (527-565 CE) – The emperor Justinian led an army to recapture from the barbarians part of the Western Empire that had fallen under their control. Under Justinian, The Code of Justinian, a collection of all the imperial laws, was published in 529 CE. Soon afterwards the Institutions (a handbook) and the Digests (fifty books of jurisprudence – study and theory of law), were added.

Cultural Life and Contributions to the World

Christianity

The **Byzantine Empire** was a Christian state. The leader of the Christian Church in Constantinople was the second most powerful person after the pope in Rome. When the Christian church divided the church lead by Constantinople became the **Eastern Orthodox Church**. It was the first empire in the world to be founded not only on worldly power, but also on the authority of the Church.

Government

For its age, the Byzantine Empire was quite modern. Its tax system and administration were so efficient that the empire survived more than a thousand years. Peoples of all religions and nationalities were allowed to live freely within their own quarters (sections) of the city.



Culture, Science and the Arts

Art of Byzantium was rich and plentiful. It is famous for its religious **icons** – religious paintings on wood. **Science and technology** were also very important. Three examples of scientific inventions are the grenade, pointed arch bridge and flame thrower.

The Byzantine tradition of **public debates** were very important with even emperors taking part in them. The debates kept knowledge and admiration for the Greek philosophical and scientific heritage alive. Byzantine intellectuals quoted the ancient Greeks with great respect, even though they had not been Christians. The Byzantines are also responsible for passing on of the Greek legacy to the Muslims, who later helped Europe to regain this knowledge at the beginning of European Renaissance.