

# Chapter 13 THE COMMONWEALTH OF BYZANTIUM

## I. The early Byzantine empire

- A. The later Roman empire and Byzantium
  - 1. Fifth century, eastern half of empire remained intact while west crumbled
  - 2. Challenges: Sasanids and Germans
  - 3. Highly centralized state
    - a. Emperor with aura of divinity--Caesaropapism
    - b. Large and complex bureaucracy
- B. Justinian (527-565 C.E.) and his legacy; Theodora (empress)
  - 1. Rebuilt Constantinople, including Hagia Sophia
  - 2. Codified Roman law\_ *Corpus iuris civilis* (*The Body of the Civil Law*)
  - 3. Sent Belisarius to reconquer the western Roman empire (didn't last)
- C. Islamic conquests and Byzantine revival
  - 1. The emergence of the Islamic state, seventh century
    - a. Arab peoples conquered the Sasanid empire and part of Byzantium
    - b. Prolonged sieges of Constantinople by Islamic armies
    - c. Byzantium survived partly because of Greek fire
  - 2. Byzantine society reorganized
    - a. Provinces (*themes*) under generals
    - b. Armies of free peasants helped agricultural economy
- D. Byzantium and western Europe: ecclesiastical and political tensions

## II. Byzantine economy and society

- A. Rural economy and society
  - 1. Large agricultural base to support cities
  - 2. Economy strongest when large class of free peasants (*themes*) existed
  - 3. Economy weakened when large landholders consolidated and made peasants dependent
- B. Industry and trade
  - 1. Constantinople was major site of crafts and industry
    - a. Glass, linen, textiles, gems, jewelry, gold, and silver
    - b. Silk developed into major industry in sixth century; secrets came from China
  - 2. Constantinople was clearinghouse for trade
    - a. Byzant was the standard currency of Mediterranean basin
    - b. Western anchor of trade route revived silk roads
  - 3. Banks and partnerships supported commercial economy
- C. Urban life
  - 1. Housing in Constantinople varied widely by class
  - 2. Attractions of Constantinople: baths, taverns, theaters
    - a. Hippodrome used for mass entertainment
    - b. Chariot races most popular; Greens and Blues rivalry

## III. Classical heritage and Orthodox Christianity

- A. The legacy of classical Greece
  - 1. Official language went from Latin to Greek
  - 2. State-organized school system trained workforce
    - a. Primary education: reading, writing, grammar

- b. Later education: classical Greek, literature, philosophy, science
    - c. Higher education in Constantinople: law, medicine, philosophy
  - 3. Byzantine scholarship emphasized Greek tradition
    - a. Wrote commentaries on Greek literature
    - b. Preserved and transmitted Greek thought to later cultures
- B. The Byzantine church
  - 1. Most distinctive feature was involvement of the emperor
    - a. Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) in which Arianism was declared heresy
    - b. Iconoclasm controversy (726-843) was started by Leo III
  - 2. Greek philosophy applied to Byzantine theology
- C. Monasticism and popular piety
  - 1. Monasticism origins in early Christian ascetics (hermits)
    - a. "Pillar saints" like St. Simeon Stylite
    - b. St. Basil of Caesarea (329-379 C.E.) organized monastic movement
  - 2. Mt. Athos, monastery in northern Greece from ninth century to present
  - 3. Monks/nuns very popular with laity
    - a. Provided social services to the community
    - b. Opposed iconoclasm
- D. Tensions between eastern and western Christianity
  - 1. Constantinople and Rome: strains mirrored political tensions
  - 2. Ritual and doctrinal differences, such as iconoclasm
  - 3. Schism in 1054--Eastern Orthodox versus Roman Catholic

#### **IV. The influence of Byzantium in eastern Europe**

- A. Domestic problems and foreign pressures
  - 1. Generals and local aristocrats allied; new elite class challenged imperial power
  - 2. Western Europe took parts of Byzantium
    - a. Normans in southern Italy and Sicily
    - b. Crusaders carved out states and sacked Constantinople (1204)
  - 3. Muslim Saljuq Turks invaded Anatolia, defeated Byzantines at Manzikert, 1071
  - 4. Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, the end of the empire
- B. Early relations between Byzantium and Slavic peoples
  - 1. Byzantines began to influence Bulgarian politics and culture after the eighth century
  - 2. Missions to the Slavs
    - a. Saints Cyril and Methodius, mid-ninth century
    - b. Cyrillic writing stimulated conversion to Orthodox Christianity
    - c. Education and religion tied together, led to more conversions
- C. Byzantium and Russia
  - 1. Mid-ninth century, Russians started to organize a large state: Kiev
  - 2. The conversion of Prince Vladimir, 989
    - a. Kiev served as a conduit for spread of Byzantine culture and religion
    - b. Cyrillic writing and literature and Orthodox missions spread Byzantine culture
    - c. Byzantine art and architecture dominated Kiev: icons and onion domes
  - 3. Princes established caesaropapist control of Russian Orthodox church
  - 4. Russian culture flourishes from eleventh century
    - a. Moscow claimed to be world's "third Rome"
    - b. Sent out many missionaries from sixteenth century on