The Byzantine Empire and Crisis and Recovery in the West

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND FOCUS QUESTIONS

From Eastern Roman to Byzantine Empire
Q How did the Byzantine Empire that had emerged by the eighth century differ from the empire of Justinian and from the Germanic kingdoms in the west? How were they alike?

The Zenith of Byzantine Civilization (750–1025)
Q What were the chief developments in the Byzantine Empire between 750 and 1025?

The Decline and Fall of the Byzantine Empire (1025–1453)
Q What impact did the Crusades have on the Byzantine Empire? How and why did Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire fall?

The Crises of the Fourteenth Century in the West
Q What impact did the Black Death have on Europe and Asia in the fourteenth century? What problems did Europeans face during the fourteenth century, and what impact did these crises have on European economic, social, and religious life?

Recovery: The Renaissance
Q What were the main features of the Renaissance in Europe, and how did it differ from the Middle Ages?

CRITICAL THINKING
Q In what ways did the Byzantine, European, and Islamic civilizations resemble and differ from each other? Were their relationships generally based on cooperation or conflict?

AT THE SAME TIME that medieval European civilization was emerging in the west, the eastern part of the Late Roman Empire, increasingly Greek in culture, continued to survive. While serving as a buffer between Europe and the peoples to the east, especially the growing empire of Islam, the Late Roman Empire in the east (Byzantine Empire) also preserved the intellectual and legal accomplishments of the Greeks and Romans.

In its early decades, the Eastern Roman Empire was beset by crises. Soon after the beginning of his reign, the emperor Justinian was faced with a serious revolt in the capital city of Constantinople. In 532, two factions, called the Blues and the Greens because they supported chariot teams bearing those colors when they competed in the Hippodrome (a huge amphitheater), joined together and rioted to protest the emperor's taxation policies. The riots soon became a revolt as insurgents burned and looted the center of the city, shouting “Nika!” (victory), the word normally used to cheer on their favorite teams. Aristocratic factions joined the revolt and put forward a nobleman named Hypatius as a new emperor. Justinian seemed ready to flee, but his wife, the empress Theodora, strengthened his resolve by declaring, according to the historian Procopius, “If now, it is your wish to save yourself, O Emperor, there is no difficulty. For we have much money, and there is the sea, here the boats. However, consider whether it will not come about after you have been saved that you would gladly exchange that safety for death. As for myself, I approve a certain ancient saying that royalty is a good burial-shroud.”1 Shamed by his wife's words, Justinian resolved to fight. He ordered troops, newly returned from fighting the Persians, to attack a large crowd that had gathered in the Hippodrome to acclaim Hypatius as emperor. In the ensuing massacre, the imperial troops
slaughtered 30,000 of the insurgents, about 5 percent of the city’s population. After crushing the Nika Revolt, Justinian began a massive rebuilding program and continued the autocratic reign that established the foundations of the Byzantine Empire (as it came to be known beginning in the eighth century).

Despite the early empire’s reversals, the Macedonian emperors in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries enlarged the empire, achieved economic prosperity, and expanded its cultural influence to eastern Europe and Russia. But after the Macedonian dynasty ended in 1056 C.E., the empire began a slow but steady decline. Involvement in the Crusades proved especially disastrous, leading to the occupation of Constantinople by western crusading forces in 1204. Byzantine rule was restored in 1261, and the empire survived in a weakened condition for another 190 years until the Ottoman Turks finally conquered it in 1453.

In the fourteenth century, Europe, too, sustained a series of crises and reversals after flourishing during the three centuries of the High Middle Ages. Unlike the Byzantine Empire, however, European civilization rebounded in the fifteenth century, experiencing an artistic and intellectual revival in the Renaissance as well as a renewal of monarchical authority among the western European states. Europe was poised to begin its dramatic entry into world affairs.

### From Eastern Roman to Byzantine Empire

**FOCUS QUESTIONS:** How did the Byzantine Empire that had emerged by the eighth century differ from the empire of Justinian and from the Germanic kingdoms in the west? How were they alike?

As noted earlier, the western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire began to drift apart in the fourth century. As the Germanic peoples moved into the western part of the empire and established various kingdoms over the course of the fifth century, the Late Roman Empire in the east solidified and prospered. Constantinople, the imperial capital, viewed itself not only as the center of a world empire but also as a special Christian city. The inhabitants believed that the city was under the protection of God and the Virgin Mary. One thirteenth-century Byzantine said: “About our city you shall know: until the end she will fear no nation whatsoever, for no one will entrap or capture her, nor by any means, for she has been given to the Mother of God and no one will snatch her out of Her hands. Many nations will break their horns against her walls and withdraw with shame.”

The Byzantines saw their state as a Christian empire.

### The Reign of Justinian (527–565)

In the sixth century, the empire in the east came under the control of one of its most remarkable rulers, the emperor Justinian (juh-STIN-e-un). As the nephew and heir of the previous emperor, Justinian had been well trained in imperial administration. He was determined to reestablish the Roman Empire in the entire Mediterranean world and began his attempt to reconquer the west in 533.

Justinian’s army under Belisarius (bell-uh-SAH-ree-uh), probably the best general of the late Roman world, presented a formidable force. Belisarius sailed to North Africa and quickly defeated the Vandals in two major battles. From North Africa, he led his forces onto the Italian peninsula after occupying Sicily in 535. But it was not until 552 that the Ostrogoths were finally defeated. The struggle devastated Italy, which suffered more from Justinian’s reconquest than from all of the previous barbarian invasions.

Justinian has long been criticized for overextending his resources and bankrupting the empire. Historians now think, however, that a devastating plague in 542 and long-term economic factors were far more damaging to the Eastern Roman Empire than Justinian’s conquests. Before he died, Justinian appeared to have achieved his goals. He had restored the imperial Mediterranean world; his empire included Italy, part of Spain, North Africa, Asia Minor, Palestine, and Syria (see Map 13.1). But the conquest of the western empire proved fleeting. Only three years after Justinian’s death, another Germanic people, the Lombards, entered Italy. Although the eastern empire maintained the fiction of Italy as a province, its forces were limited to small pockets here and there.

### The Codification of Roman Law

Though his conquests proved short-lived, Justinian made a lasting contribution to Western civilization through his codification of Roman law. The eastern empire was heir to a vast quantity of materials connected to the development of Roman law. These included laws passed by the senate and assemblies, legal commentaries of jurists, decisions of praetors, and the edicts of emperors. Justinian had been well trained in imperial government and was thoroughly acquainted with Roman law. He wished to codify and simplify this mass of materials.

To accomplish his goal, Justinian authorized the jurist Trebonian to make a systematic compilation of imperial edicts. The result was the Code of Law, the first part of the Corpus Iuris Civilis (KOR-pus YOOR-iss SIV-ee-leez) (Body of Civil Law), completed in 529. Four years later, two other parts of the Corpus appeared: the Digest, a compendium of writings of Roman jurists, and the Institutes, a brief summary of the chief principles of Roman law that could be used as a textbook. The fourth part of the Corpus was the Novels, a compilation of the most important new edicts issued during Justinian’s reign.

Justinian’s codification of Roman law became the basis of imperial law in the Byzantine Empire until its end in 1453. More important, however, since it was written in Latin (it was, in fact, the last product of eastern Roman culture to be written in Latin, which was soon replaced by Greek), it was also eventually used in the West and in fact became the basis of the legal system of all of continental Europe.

### The Empress Theodora

Theodora (thee-u-DOR-uh) was the daughter of the “keeper of bears” for the games at
The Emperor Justinian and His Court. As the seat of late Roman power in Italy, the town of Ravenna was adorned with examples of late Roman art. The Church of San Vitale at Ravenna contains some of the finest examples of sixth-century mosaics. Small pieces of colored glass were set in mortar on the wall to form these figures and their surroundings. The emperor is seen as both head of state (he wears a jeweled crown and a purple robe) and head of the church (he carries a gold bowl symbolizing the body of Jesus).

MAP 13.1 The Eastern Roman Empire in the Time of Justinian. The Eastern Roman emperor Justinian briefly restored much of the Mediterranean portion of the old Roman Empire. His general, Belisarius, conquered the Vandals in North Africa quite easily but wrested Italy from the Ostrogoths only after a long and devastating struggle.

Look back at Map 5.3. What former Roman territories lay outside Justinian’s control?
Constantinople, who died when she was a child. Theodora followed in her mother’s footsteps by becoming an actress, which at that time was considered a lower-class activity. Often actresses also worked as prostitutes, and Theodora was no exception. At the age of twenty-five, she met Justinian, who was forty. His uncle, the emperor Justin, had to change the law to allow an aristocratic senator to marry a woman who had been an actress. After his uncle died in 527, Justinian became emperor and Theodora empress, a remarkable achievement for a woman from the lower classes.

Justinian and Theodora were close and loving companions. She also influenced her husband in both church and state affairs. A strong-willed and intelligent woman, she proved especially valuable in 532, when her steely resolve during the Nika Revolt convinced Justinian to fight and crush the protesters rather than to flee. Theodora also helped establish a number of churches and monasteries, including a convent for former prostitutes.

THE EMPEROR’S BUILDING PROGRAM

After the riots destroyed much of Constantinople, Justinian rebuilt the city and gave it the appearance it would keep for almost a thousand years (see Map 13.2). Earlier, Emperor Theodosius (thee-uh-DOH-shuss) II (408–450) had

Theodora and Attendants. This mosaic, located on the south wall of the apse of the Church of San Vitale (Justinian is on the north wall), depicts Theodora and her attendants. Her presence on the wall of this church indicates the important role she played in the late Roman state. At the bottom of her robe is a scene of the Three Wise Men, an indication that Theodora was special enough to have belonged in the company of the three kings who visited the newborn Jesus.

MAP 13.2 Constantinople. In the Middle Ages, Constantinople was the largest European city and a nexus of trade between east and west. Emperor Justinian oversaw a massive building program that produced important architectural monuments such as Hagia Sophia.

Q What natural and human-built aspects of the city helped protect it from invasion?
constructed an enormous defensive wall to protect the capital on its land side. The city was dominated by an immense palace complex, a huge arena known as the Hippodrome, and hundreds of churches. No residential district was particularly fashionable; palaces, tenements, and slums ranged alongside one another. Justinian added many new buildings. His public works projects included roads, bridges, walls, public baths, law courts, and colossal underground reservoirs to hold the city’s water supply. He also built hospitals, schools, monasteries, and churches. Churches were his special passion, and in Constantinople he built or rebuilt thirty-four of them. His greatest achievement was the famous Hagia Sophia (HAG-ee-uh soh-FEE-uh), the Church of the Holy Wisdom.

Completed in 537, Hagia Sophia was designed by two Greek scientists who departed radically from the simple, flat-roofed basilica of western architecture. The center of Hagia Sophia consisted of four huge piers crowned by an enormous dome, which seemed to be floating in space. This effect was emphasized by Procopius (pruh-KOH-pee-uss), the court historian, who at Justinian’s request wrote a treatise on the emperor’s building projects: “From the lightness of the building, it does not appear to rest upon a solid foundation, but to cover the place beneath as though it were suspended from heaven by the fabled golden chain.” In part, this impression was created by putting forty-two windows around the base of the dome, which allowed an incredible play of light within the cathedral. Light served to remind the worshipers of God; as Procopius commented:

Whoever enters there to worship perceives at once that it is not by any human strength or skill, but by the favor of God that this work has been perfected; his mind rises sublime to commune with God, feeling that He cannot be far off, but must especially love to dwell in the place which He has chosen; and this takes place not only when a man sees it for the first time, but it always makes the same impression upon him, as though he had never beheld it before.³

As darkness is illuminated by invisible light, so too, it was believed, the world is illuminated by invisible spirit.

The royal palace complex, Hagia Sophia, and the Hippodrome were the three greatest buildings in Constantinople. This last was a huge amphitheater, constructed of brick covered by marble, holding as many as 60,000 spectators. Although gladiator fights were held there, the main events were the chariot races; twenty-four would usually be presented in one day. The citizens of Constantinople were passionate fans of chariot racing. Successful charioteers were acclaimed as heroes and honored with public statues. Crowds in the Hippodrome also took on political significance. Being a member of the two chief factions of charioteers—the Blues or the Greens—was the only real outlet for political expression. Even emperors had to be aware of their demands and attitudes: the loss of a race in the Hippodrome frequently resulted in bloody riots that could threaten the emperor’s power.

A New Kind of Empire

Justinian’s accomplishments had been spectacular, but when he died, he left the Eastern Roman Empire with serious problems: too much distant territory to protect, an empty treasury, a smaller population after a devastating plague, and renewed threats to the frontiers. The seventh century proved to be an important turning point in the history of the empire.

PROBLEMS OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY  In the first half of the century, during the reign of Heraclius (he-ruh-KLY-uss or huh-RAK-lee-uss) (610–641), the empire faced attacks...
from the Persians to the east and the Slavs to the north. A
new system of defense was put in place, using a new and
larger administrative unit, the theme, which combined civil-
ian and military offices in the hands of the same person.
Thus, the civil governor was also the military leader of the
area. Although this innovation helped the empire survive, it
also fostered an increased militarization of the empire. By
the mid-seventh century, it had become apparent that a
restored Mediterranean empire was simply beyond the
resources of the eastern empire, which now increasingly
turned its back on the Latin west. A renewed series of exter-
nations as well. By the eighth cen-
tury, the Eastern Roman
Empire had been transformed
from a Mediterranean to an Asian
empire. The most serious challenge to the empire was the rise
of Islam, which unified the Arab tribes and created a
powerful new force that swept through the region (see
Chapter 7). The defeat of an eastern Roman army near the
Yarmuk River in 636 meant the loss of the provinces of
Syria and Palestine. The Arabs also moved into the old
Persian Empire and conquered it. An Arab attempt to
besiege Constantinople that began in 674 failed, in large
part due to the use of Greek fire against the Arab fleets.
Greek fire was a petroleum-based compound containing
quicklime and sulfur. Because it would burn under water,
the Byzantines created the equivalent of modern flame-
throwers by using tubes to blow Greek fire onto wooden
ships, with frightening effect. Arabs and eastern Roman
forces now faced each other along a frontier in southern
Asia Minor.
Problems also arose along the northern frontier, especially in
the Balkans, where an Asiatic people known as the
Bulgars had arrived earlier in the sixth century. In 679,
the Bulgars defeated the eastern Roman forces and took
possession of the lower Danube valley, setting up a strong
Bulgarian kingdom.
By the beginning of the eighth century, the Eastern
Roman Empire was greatly diminished in size, consisting
only of a portion of the Balkans and Asia Minor. It was now an
eastern Mediterranean state. These external challenges had
important internal repercussions as well. By the eighth
century, the Eastern Roman Empire had been transformed
into what historians call the Byzantine Empire, a civilization
with its own unique character that would last until 1453
(Constantinople was built on the site of an older city named
Byzantium—hence the name Byzantine).

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY  The Byz-
antine Empire was a Greek state. Justinian’s Corpus Iuris Civi-
lis had been the last official work published in Latin.
Increasingly, Latin fell into disuse as Greek became not only
the common language of the Byzantine Empire but its official
language as well.
The Byzantine Empire was also a Christian state, built
on a faith in Jesus that was shared in a profound way by
almost all its citizens. An enormous amount of artistic tal-
ent was poured into the construction of churches, church
ceremonies, and church decoration. Spiritual principles
deeply permeated Byzantine art. The importance of reli-
gion to the Byzantines explains why theological disputes
took on an exaggerated form. The most famous of these
disputes, the so-called iconoclastic controversy, threatened
the stability of the empire in the first half of the eighth
century.
Beginning in the sixth century, the use of religious images,
especially in the form of icons or pictures of sacred figures,
became so widespread that charges of idolatry, the worship
of images, began to be heard. The use of images or icons
had been justified by the argument that icons were not wor-
shiped but were simply used to help illiterate people under-
stand their religion. This argument failed to stop the
iconoclasts, as the opponents of icons were called.

Iconoclasm was not unique to the Byzantine Empire. In
the neighboring Islamic empire, religious art did not include
any physical representations of Muhammad (see the compara-
tive illustration on p. 364). Iconoclasm would also play a role
among some of the new religious groups that emerged in
the Protestant Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe (see
Chapter 15).
Beginning in 730, the Byzant-
tine emperor Leo III (717–741)
outlawed the use of icons.
Strong resistance ensued, especially from monks. Leo also
used the iconoclastic controversy to add to the prestige of
the patriarch of Constantinople, the highest church official
in the east and second in dignity only to the bishop of
Rome. The Roman popes were opposed to the iconoclastic
edicts, and their opposition created considerable dissension

CHRONOLOGY  The Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire to 750

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justinian codifies Roman law</td>
<td>529–533</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reconquest of Italy by Justinian</td>
<td>535–552</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completion of Hagia Sophia</td>
<td>537</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attacks on the empire in the reign of Heraclius</td>
<td>610–641</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arab defeat of the Byzantines at Yarmuk</td>
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<td>Defeat by the Bulgars; losses in the Balkans</td>
<td>679</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leo III and iconoclasm</td>
<td>717–741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Religious Imagery in the Medieval World. The Middle Ages was a golden age of religious art, reflecting the important role of religion itself in medieval society. These three illustrations show different aspects of medieval religious imagery. In Europe, much Christian art appeared in illuminated manuscripts. The illustration at the top left shows a page depicting the figure of Jesus from The Book of Kells, a richly decorated manuscript of the Christian gospels produced by the monks of Iona in the British Isles. Byzantine art was also deeply religious, as was especially evident in icons. At the top right is an icon of the Virgin and Child (Mary and Jesus) from the monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai in Egypt dating to around the year 600. Painted on wood, this icon shows the enthroned Virgin and Child between Saints Theodore and George with two angels behind them looking upward to a beam of light containing the hand of God. The figures are not realistic; the goal of the icon was to bridge the gap between the divine and the outer material world. Artists in the Muslim world faced a different challenge—Muslims warned against imitating God by creating pictures of living beings, thus effectively prohibiting the representation of humans, especially Muhammad. Islamic religious artists therefore used decorative motifs based on geometric patterns and the Arabic script. The scriptural panel in the lower illustration is an artistic presentation of a verse from the Qur'an, thus blending the spiritual and artistic spheres.

How is the importance of religious imagery in the Middle Ages evident in these three illustrations?
between the popes and the Byzantine emperors. Late in the eighth century, the Byzantine rulers reversed their stand on the use of images, but not before considerable damage had been done to the unity of the Christian church. Although the final separation between Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy (as the Christian church in the Byzantine Empire was called) did not occur until 1054, the iconoclastic controversy was important in moving both sides in that direction.

THE BYZANTINE EMPEROR The emperor occupied a crucial position in the Byzantine state. Portrayed as chosen by God, the Byzantine emperor was crowned in elaborate sacred ceremonies, and his subjects were expected to prostrate themselves in his presence. The wives of the emperors also played significant roles in the court rituals that upheld imperial authority.

The importance of court ritual is apparent in the Book of Ceremonies, a tenth-century compendium of imperial ceremonies and court rituals. Court ritual could be very complicated and included a variety of activities. Everyday rituals included the daily opening of the imperial palace: imperial officials, all arranged in order of rank, waited until the palace doors were officially opened; then they marched into the palace in a procession. A similar ceremony was held for the opening of the palace in the afternoon. In addition to these regular daily ceremonies, special ceremonies involving specific rituals were held on many occasions, including the emperor's birthday, the promotion of officials, imperial marriages, and commemorations of important military battles. The emperor was also required to participate in the ceremonies held regularly in the churches on important saints' days and during church festivals.

The power of the Byzantine emperor was considered absolute and was limited in practice only by assassination. Emperors were assisted by a rather unusual ruling class. Civil servants and high churchmen essentially stemmed from the same ranks of the urban society of Constantinople. They received the same education and often followed the same careers in civil service until they went their separate ways into church and government offices. A strong bureaucracy was one of the most basic features of the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Empire was characterized by what might be called a permanent war economy. Byzantine emperors maintained the late Roman policy of state regulation of economic affairs. Of course, this practice was easy to justify: the survival of the empire depended on careful shepherding of economic resources and the maintenance of the army. Thus, the state encouraged agricultural production, regulated the guilds or corporations responsible for industrial production and the various stages of manufacturing, and controlled commerce by making trade in grain and silk, the two most valuable products, government monopolies.

In addition, because of their many foreign enemies, Byzantine emperors spent considerable energy on war and preparation for war. Manuals on war, providing instruction in the ways of fighting, were a common type of Byzantine literature (see the box on p. 366). Byzantine armies, often led by the emperors, were well trained and equipped with the latest weapons. The Byzantines, however, often preferred to secure their goals through diplomacy rather than fighting. Our word *byzantine*—often defined as “extremely complicated” or “carried on by underhanded methods”—stems from the complex and crafty instructions that Byzantine rulers sent to their envoys.

Because the emperor appointed the patriarch, he also exercised control over both church and state. The Byzantines believed that God had commanded their state to preserve the true faith, Orthodox Christianity. Emperor, clergy, and civic officials were all bound together in service to this ideal. It can be said that spiritual values truly held the Byzantine state together.

By 750, it was apparent that two of Rome's heirs, the Germanic kingdoms and the Byzantine Empire, were moving in different directions. Nevertheless, Byzantine influence on the Western world was significant. The images of a Roman imperial state that continued to haunt the west lived on in Byzantium. As noted, the legal system of the west came to owe much to Justinian's codification of Roman law. In addition, the Byzantine Empire served in part as a buffer state, protecting the west for a long time from incursions from the east.

INTELLECTUAL LIFE The intellectual life of the Byzantine Empire was greatly influenced by the traditions of Classical civilization. Scholars actively strove to preserve the works of the ancient Greeks and based a great deal of their literature on Classical models. Although the Byzantines produced a substantial body of literature, much of it was of a very practical nature, focusing on legal, military, and administrative matters. The most outstanding literary achievements of the empire's early centuries, however, were historical and religious works. Many of the latter were theological treatises, often of an extremely combative nature because of the intense theological controversies. More popular were biographies of saints, which traced the adventures of religious figures who after many struggles achieved a life of virtue.

The empire's best-known historian was Procopius (c. 500–c. 562), court historian during the reign of Justinian. Procopius served as secretary to the great general Belisarius and accompanied him on his wars on behalf of Justinian. Procopius's best historical work, the *Wars*, is a firsthand account of Justinian's wars of reconquest in the western Mediterranean and his wars against the Persians in the east. Deliberately modeled after the work of his hero, the Greek historian Thucydides (see Chapter 4), Procopius's narrative features vivid descriptions of battle scenes, clear judgment, and noteworthy objectivity.

LIFE IN CONSTANTINOPLE: THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADE With a population in the hundreds of thousands, Constantinople was the largest city in Europe during the Middle Ages.
A Byzantine Emperor Gives Military Advice

To an empire surrounded by enemies on all sides, military prowess was an absolute necessity. Both Byzantine emperors and the ruling elite, however, also realized that military forces alone would not suffice and consequently fostered the art of diplomacy and military intelligence. This document is from an early-seventh-century work known as the Strategikon (stra-TEE-jih-kahn), a manual of strategy written by the emperor Maurice (582–602), himself a strong military leader who led his troops into battle. The work is based on the assumption that a detailed knowledge of the habits and fighting skills of their enemies would give the Byzantines an advantage if they had to fight them.

**Maurice, Strategikon**

The light-haired races [Germanic peoples] place great value on freedom. They are bold and undaunted in battle. Daring and impetuous as they are, they consider any timidity and even a short retreat as a disgrace. They calmly despise death as they fight violently in hand-to-hand combat either on horseback or on foot. If they are hard pressed in cavalry actions, they dismount at a single prearranged sign and line up on foot. Although only a few against many horsemen, they do not shrink from the fight. They are armed with shields, lances, and short swords slung from their shoulders. They prefer fighting on foot and rapid charges.

Whether on foot or on horseback, they draw up for battle, not in any fixed measure and formation, or in regiments or divisions, but according to tribes, their kinship with one another, and common interest. Often, as a result, when things are not going well and their friends have been killed, they will risk their lives fighting to avenge them. In combat they make the front of their battle line even and dense. Either on horseback or on foot they are impetuous and undisciplined in charging, as if they were the only people in the world who come to it from every country by sea or land, and there is none like it in the world except Baghdad, the great city of Islam.4

Highly desired in Europe were the products of the east: silk from China, spices from Southeast Asia and India, jewelry and ivory from India (used by artisans for church items), 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. Despite the Germanic incursions, trade with Europe did not entirely end.

Moreover, imported raw materials were used in Constantinople for local industries. During Justinian’s reign, two

Until the twelfth century, Constantinople was also Europe’s greatest commercial center. The city was the chief entrepôt for the exchange of products between west and east, and trade formed the basis for its fabulous prosperity. This trade, however, was largely carried on by foreign merchants. As one contemporary said:

All sorts of merchants come here from the land of Babylon, from . . . Persia, Media, and all the sovereignty of the land of Egypt, from the lands of Canaan, and from the empire of Russia, from Hungary, Khazaria [the Caspian region], and the land of Lombardy and Sepharad [Spain]. It is a busy city, and merchants

**Q** What did Maurice identify as the strengths and weaknesses of the Germanic peoples? Based on his analysis of their traits, what did he advise his military forces to do if they faced the Germans in battle?
Christian monks smuggled silkworms from China to begin a silk industry. The state had a monopoly on the production of silk cloth, and the workshops themselves were housed in Constantinople’s royal palace complex. European demand for silk cloth made it the city’s most lucrative product. It is interesting to note that the upper classes, including emperors and empresses, were not discouraged from making money through trade and manufacturing. Indeed, one empress even manufactured perfumes in her bedroom.

The Zenith of Byzantine Civilization (750–1025)

FOCUS QUESTION: What were the chief developments in the Byzantine Empire between 750 and 1025?

In the seventh and eighth centuries, the Byzantine Empire lost much of its territory to Slavs, Bulgars, and Muslims. By 750, the empire consisted only of Asia Minor, some lands in the Balkans, and the southern coast of Italy. Although Byzantium was beset with internal dissension and invasions in the ninth century, it was able to deal with them and not only endured but even expanded, reaching its high point in the tenth century, which some historians have called the golden age of Byzantine civilization.

The Beginning of a Revival

During the reign of Michael III (842–867), the Byzantine Empire began to experience a revival. Iconoclasm was finally abolished in 843, and reforms were made in education, church life, the military, and the peasant economy. There was a noticeable intellectual renewal. But the empire was still plagued by persistent problems. The Bulgars mounted new attacks, and the Arabs continued to harass the periphery. Moreover, a new religious dispute with political repercussions erupted over differences between the pope as leader of the western Christian church and the patriarch of Constantinople as leader of the eastern Christian church. Patriarch Photius (FOH-shuss) condemned the pope as a heretic for accepting a revised form of the Nicene Creed stating that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son instead of from the Father alone. A council of eastern bishops followed Photius’s wishes and excommunicated the pope, creating the so-called Photian schism. Although the differences were later papered over, this controversy inserted a greater wedge between the eastern and western Christian churches.

The Macedonian Dynasty

The problems that arose during Michael’s reign were effectively dealt with by a new dynasty of Byzantine emperors known as the Macedonians (867–1056). The dynasty was founded by Basil I (867–886), a Macedonian of uncertain background who came to Constantinople to improve his lot in life. After impressing Emperor Michael III with his wrestling skills, he married the emperor’s mistress and was made co-emperor. One year later, he arranged the murder of Michael and then became sole ruler, establishing a dynasty that would last almost two hundred years.

The Macedonian dynasty managed to hold off Byzantium’s external enemies and reestablish domestic order. Supported by the church, the emperors thought of the Byzantine Empire as a continuation of the Christian Roman Empire of late antiquity. Although for diplomatic reasons they occasionally recognized the imperial titles of earlier western emperors, such as Charlemagne and Otto I, they still regarded them as little more than barbarian parvenus.

ECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS POLICIES The Macedonian emperors could boast of a remarkable number of achievements in the late ninth and tenth centuries. They worked to strengthen the position of the free farmers, who felt threatened by the attempts of landed aristocrats to expand their estates at the farmers’ expense. The emperors were well aware that the free farmers made up the rank and file of the Byzantine cavalry and provided the military strength of the empire. Nevertheless, despite their efforts, the Macedonian emperors found that it was not easy to control the power of the landed nobles, and many free farmers continued to lose their lands to the nobles.

The Macedonian emperors also fostered a burst of economic prosperity by expanding trade relations with western Europe, especially by selling silks and metalwork, and the city of Constantinople flourished. Foreign visitors continued to be astonished by its size, wealth, and physical surroundings. To western Europeans, it was the stuff of legends and fables (see the box on p. 368).

In this period of prosperity, Byzantine cultural influence expanded due to the active missionary efforts of eastern Byzantine Christians. Eastern Orthodox Christianity was spread to eastern European peoples, such as the Bulgars and Serbs. Perhaps the greatest missionary success occurred when the prince of Kiev in Russia converted to Christianity in 987. From the end of the tenth century on, Byzantine Christianity became the model for Russian religious life, just as Byzantine imperial ideals came to influence the outward forms of Russian political life.

POLITICAL AND MILITARY ACHIEVEMENTS Under the Macedonian rulers, Byzantium enjoyed a strong civil service, talented emperors, and military advances. The Byzantine civil service was staffed by well-educated, competent aristocrats from Constantinople who oversaw the collection of taxes, domestic administration, and foreign policy. At the same time, the Macedonian dynasty produced some truly outstanding emperors skilled in administration and law, including Leo VI and Constantine VII. Leo VI (886–912), known as Leo the Wise, was an accomplished scholar who composed works on politics and theology, systematized rules for regulating both trade and court officials, and arranged for a new codification of all Byzantine law.

The Zenith of Byzantine Civilization (750–1025)

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A Western View of the Byzantine Empire

Bishop Liudprand of Cremona undertook diplomatic missions to Constantinople on behalf of two western kings, Berengar of Italy and Otto I of Germany. This selection is taken from his description of his mission to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII in 949 as an envoy for Berengar, king of Italy from 950 until his overthrow by Otto I of Germany in 964. Liudprand had mixed feelings about Byzantium: admiration, yet also envy and hostility because of its superior wealth.

Liudprand of Cremona, Antapodosis

Next to the imperial residence at Constantinople there is a palace of remarkable size and beauty which the Greeks call Magnavra . . . the name being equivalent to “Fresh breeze.” In order to receive some Spanish envoys, who had recently arrived, as well as myself . . ., Constantine gave orders that this palace should be got ready, . . .

Before the emperor’s seat stood a tree, made of bronze gilded over, whose branches were filled with birds, also made of gilded bronze, which uttered different cries, each according to its varying species. The throne itself was so marvelously fashioned that at one moment it seemed a low structure, and at another it rose high into the air. It was of immense size and was guarded by lions, made either of bronze or of wood covered over with gold, who beat the ground with their tails and gave a dreadful roar with open mouth and quivering tongue. Leaning upon the shoulders of two eunuchs I was brought into the emperor’s presence. At my approach the lions began to roar and the birds to cry out, each according to its kind; but I was neither terrified nor surprised, for I had previously made enquiry about all these things from people who were well acquainted with them. So after I had three times made obeisance to the emperor with my face upon the ground, I lifted my head, and behold! The man whom just before I had seen sitting on a moderately elevated seat had now changed his raiment and was sitting on the level of the ceiling. How it was done I could not imagine, unless perhaps he was lifted up by some such sort of device as we use for raising the timbers of a wine press. On that occasion he did not address me personally, . . . but by the intermediary of a secretary he enquired about Berengar’s doings and asked after his health. I made a fitting reply and then, at a nod from the interpreter, left his presence and retired to my lodging.

It would give me some pleasure also to record here what I did then for Berengar. . . . The Spanish envoys . . . had brought handsome gifts from their masters to the emperor Constantine. I for my part had brought nothing from Berengar except a letter and that was full of lies. I was very greatly disturbed and shamed at this and began to consider anxiously what I had better do. In my doubt and perplexity it finally occurred to me that I might offer the gifts, which on my account I had brought for the emperor, as coming from Berengar, and trick out my humble present with fine words. I therefore presented him with nine excellent cuirasses, seven excellent shields with gilded bosses, two silver gilt cauldrons, some swords, spears, and spits, and what was more precious to the emperor than anything, four carzimasia; that being the Greek name for young eunuchs who have had both their testicles and their penis removed. This operation is performed by traders at Verdun, who take the boys into Spain and make a huge profit.

What impressions of the Byzantine court do you get from Liudprand’s account? What is the modern meaning of the word Byzantine? How does this account help explain the modern meaning of the word Byzantine?

Constantine VII (945–959) wrote a detailed treatise on foreign policy to instruct his officials, as well as his son, on running the empire wisely. Constantine also worked to reduce the tax burden on the peasants.

In the tenth century, competent emperors combined with a number of talented generals to mobilize the empire’s military resources and take the offensive. Especially important was Basil II (976–1025), who campaigned regularly against the Bulgars. Although his first campaign was a failure, he continued his efforts until he defeated the Bulgars and annexed Bulgaria to the empire (see the box on p. 369). After his final victory over the Bulgars in 1014, Basil blinded 14,000 Bulgar captives before allowing them to return to their homes. The Byzantines went on to add the islands of Crete and Cyprus to the empire and to defeat the Muslim forces in Syria, expanding the empire to the upper Euphrates. By the end of Basil’s reign in 1025, the Byzantine Empire was the largest it had been since the beginning of the seventh century.
Basil II came to power at the age of eighteen and during his long reign greatly enlarged the Byzantine Empire. During his reign, an alliance with the Russian prince Vladimir was instrumental in bringing Orthodox Christianity to the Russians. We know a great deal about Basil II from an account by Michael Psellus (1018–c.1081), one of the foremost Byzantine historians. He wrote the Chronographia, a series of biographies of the Byzantine emperors from 976 to 1078, much of it based on his own observations. In this selection, Psellus discusses the qualities of Basil as a leader.

Michael Psellus, Chronographia

In his dealings with his subjects, Basil behaved with extraordinary circumspection. It is perfectly true that the great reputation he built up as a ruler was founded rather on terror than on loyalty. As he grew older and became more experienced he relied less on the judgment of men wiser than himself. He alone introduced new measures, he alone disposed his military forces. As for the civil administration, he governed, not in accordance with the written laws, but following the unwritten dictates of his own intuition, which was most excellently equipped by nature for the purpose. . . .

Having purged the empire of the barbarians [Bulgars] he dealt with his own subjects and completely subjugated them too—I think “subjugate” is the right word to describe it. He decided to abandon his former policy, and after the great families had been humiliated and put on an equal footing with the rest, Basil found himself playing the game of power-politics with considerable success. He surrounded himself with favorites who were neither remarkable for brilliance of intellect, nor of noble lineage, nor too learned. To them were entrusted the imperial rescripts [official announcements], and with them he was accustomed to share the secrets of state. . . .

By humbling the pride or jealousy of his people, Basil made his own road to power an easy one. He was careful, moreover, to close the exit-doors on the monies contributed to the treasury. So a huge sum of money was built up, partly by the exercise of strict economy, partly by fresh additions from abroad. . . . He himself took no pleasure in any of it: quite the reverse indeed, for the majority of the precious stones, both the white ones (which we call pearls) and the colored brilliants, far from being inlaid in diadems or collars, were hidden away in his underground vaults. . . .

On his expedition against the barbarians, Basil did not follow the customary procedure of other emperors, setting out at the middle of spring and returning home at the end of summer. For him the time to return was when the task in hand was accomplished. He endured the rigors of winter and the heat of summer with equal indifference. He disciplined himself against thirst. In fact, all his natural desires were kept under stern control, and the man was as hard as steel. . . . He professed to conduct his wars and draw up the troops in line of battle, himself planning each campaign, but he preferred not to engage in combat personally. A sudden retreat might otherwise prove embarrassing. . . .

Basil’s character was two-fold, for he readily adapted himself no less to the crises of war than to the calm of peace. Really, if the truth be told, he was more of a villain in wartime, more of an emperor in time of peace. Outbursts of wrath he controlled and like the proverbial “fire under the ashes,” kept anger hid in his heart, but if his orders were disobeyed in war, on his return to the palace he would kindle his wrath and reveal it. Terrible then was the vengeance he took on the miscreant. Generally, he persisted in his opinions, but there were occasions when he did change his mind. In many cases, too, he traced crimes back to their original causes, and the final links in the chain were exonerated. So most defaulters obtained forgiveness, either through his sympathetic understanding or because he showed some other interest in their affairs. He was slow to adopt any course of action, but never would he willingly alter the decision, once it was [made]. Consequently, his attitude to friends was unvaried, unless perchance he was compelled by necessity to revise his opinion of them. Similarly, where he had burst out in anger against someone, he did not quickly moderate his wrath. Whatever estimate he formed, indeed, was to him an irrevocable and divinely inspired judgment.

Q Based on this account, what were the personal qualities that made Basil II successful, and how would you characterize the nature of the Byzantine government? Compare the achievements of Basil II with those of Charlemagne as described by Einhard on p. 332. How were the two rulers alike? How were they different? How do you explain the differences?
The Decline and Fall of the Byzantine Empire (1025–1453)

FOCUS QUESTIONS: What impact did the Crusades have on the Byzantine Empire? How and why did Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire fall?

The Macedonian dynasty of the tenth and eleventh centuries had restored much of the power of the Byzantine Empire; its incompetent successors, however, reversed most of the gains.

New Challenges and New Responses

After the Macedonian dynasty was extinguished in 1056, the empire was beset by internal struggles for power between ambitious military leaders and aristocratic families who bought the support of the great landowners of Anatolia by allowing them greater control over their peasants. This policy was self-destructive, however, because the peasant-warrior was an important source of military strength in the Byzantine state. By the middle of the eleventh century, the Byzantine army began to decline; with fewer peasant recruits, military leaders also began to rely more on mercenaries.

A CHRISTIAN SCHISM

The growing division between the Roman Catholic Church of the west and the Eastern Orthodox Church of the Byzantine Empire also weakened the Byzantine state. The Eastern Orthodox Church was unwilling to accept the pope’s claim that he was the sole head of the Christian church. This dispute reached a climax in 1054 when Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Cerularius (sayr-yuh-LAR-ee-us), head of the Byzantine church, formally excommunicated each other, initiating a schism between the two branches of Christianity that has not been healed to this day.

ISLAM AND THE SELJUK TURKS

The Byzantine Empire faced external threats to its security as well. In the west, the Normans were menacing the remaining Byzantine possessions in Italy. A much greater threat, however, came from the world of Islam. By the mid-tenth century, the Islamic empire led by the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad (see Chapter 7) was disintegrating. An attempt was made around that time to unify the Islamic world under the direction of a Shi’ite dynasty known as the Fatimids. Originating in North Africa, they conquered Egypt and founded the new city of Cairo as their capital. In establishing a Shi’ite caliphate, they became rivals to the Sunni caliphate of Baghdad and divided the Islamic world.

The Fatimid dynasty prospered and soon surpassed the Abbasid caliphate as the dynamic center of Islam. Benefiting from their position in the heart of the Nile delta, the Fatimids played a major role in the regional trade passing from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and beyond. They were tolerant in matters of religion and created a strong army by using nonnative peoples as mercenaries. One of these peoples, the Seljuk Turks, soon posed a threat to the Fatimids themselves.

A nomadic people from Central Asia, the Seljuk Turks had been converted to Islam. As their numbers increased, they moved into the eastern provinces of the Abbasid Empire, and in 1055 they captured Baghdad and occupied the rest of the empire. When they moved into Asia Minor—the heartland of the Byzantine Empire and its main source of food and manpower—the Byzantines were forced to react. Emperor Romanus IV led an army of recruits and mercenaries into Asia Minor in 1071 and met Turkish forces at Manzikert (MANZ-ih-kurt), where the Byzantines were soundly defeated. Seljuk Turks then went on to occupy much of Anatolia, where many peasants, already disgusted by their exploitation at the hands of Byzantine landowners, readily accepted Turkish control (see Map 7.4 on p. 193).
A NEW DYNASTY After the loss at Manzikert, factional fighting erupted over the imperial title until the throne was seized by Alexius Comnenus (kahn-NEE-nuss) (1081–1118), who established a dynasty that breathed new life into the Byzantine Empire. Under Alexius, the Byzantines were victorious on the Greek Adriatic coast against the Normans, defeated their enemies in the Balkans, and stopped the Turks in Anatolia. In the twelfth century, the Byzantine Empire experienced a cultural revival and a period of prosperity, fueled by an expansion of trade. The era was also marked by the increased importance of aristocratic families, especially those from a military background. In fact, Alexius’s power was built on an alliance of the Comnenus family with other aristocratic families. But both the Comneni dynasty and the revival of the twelfth century were ultimately threatened by Byzantium’s encounters with crusaders from the west.

Impact of the Crusades
Lacking the resources to undertake additional campaigns against the Turks, Emperor Alexius turned to the west for military assistance and asked Pope Urban II for help against the Seljuk Turks. Instead of the military aid the emperor had expected, the pope set in motion the First Crusade (see Chapter 12), a decision that created enormous difficulties for the Byzantines. To pursue the goal of liberating Palestine from the Muslims, western crusading armies would have to go through Byzantine lands to reach their objective. Alexius, and especially his daughter, Anna Comnena (who was also the Byzantine Empire’s only female historian), were fearful that “to all appearances they were on pilgrimage; in reality they planned to dethrone Alexius and seize the capital.”

The Byzantines became cautious; Alexius requested that the military leaders of the First Crusade take an oath of loyalty to him and promise that any territory they conquered would be under Byzantine control. The crusaders ignored the emperor’s wishes, and after conquering Antioch, Jerusalem, and additional Palestinian lands, they organized the four crusading states of Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli, and Jerusalem. The Byzantines now had to worry not only about the Turks in Anatolia but also about westerners in the crusading states. The Second and Third Crusades posed similar difficulties for the Byzantine emperors.

With the Crusades, the Byzantine Empire also became better acquainted with westerners and western customs. In the mid-twelfth century, the Byzantine emperor Manuel I (1140–1183) introduced the western practice of knightly jousting to the Byzantine aristocracy. The Byzantine emperors also conferred trading concessions on the Italian city-states of Venice, Pisa, and Genoa, and in the course of the century, probably 60,000 western Europeans came to live in Constantinople. But the presence of westerners and western practices also led to a growing hostility. Byzantine writers began to denounce western attitudes, and westerners often expressed jealousy of Constantinople’s wealth.

In 1171, Emperor Manuel I expelled the Venetians and seized their goods and ships, arousing in Venice a desire for revenge that was no doubt a factor in the disastrous Fourth Crusade in 1204.

THE LATIN EMPIRE OF CONSTANTINOPLE After the death of Saladin in 1193 (see Chapter 7), Pope Innocent III launched the Fourth Crusade. Judging the moment auspicious, Innocent encouraged the nobility of Europe to don the crusader’s mantle. The Venetians agreed to transport the crusaders to the east but diverted them from the Holy Land by persuading them to first capture Zara, a Christian port on the Dalmatian coast. The crusading army thus became enmeshed in Byzantine politics.

At the start of the thirteenth century, the Byzantine Empire was experiencing yet another struggle for the imperial throne. One contender, Alexius, son of the overthrown Emperor Isaac II, appealed to the crusaders in Zara for assistance, offering to pay them 200,000 marks in silver (the Venetians were getting 85,000 as a transport fee) and to reconcile the Eastern Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church. The Crusade leaders now diverted their forces to Constantinople. When the crusading army arrived, the deposed Isaac II was reestablished with his son, Alexius IV, as co-emperor. Unfortunately, the emperors were unable to pay the promised sum. Relations between the crusaders and the Byzantines deteriorated, leading to an attack on Constantinople by the crusaders in the spring of 1204. On April 12, they stormed and sacked the city (see the box on p. 372). Christian crusaders took gold, silver, jewelry, and precious furs, while the Catholic clergy accompanying the crusaders stole as many relics as they could find.

The Byzantine Empire now disintegrated into a series of petty states ruled by crusading barons and Byzantine princes. The chief state was the new Latin Empire of Constantinople led by Count Baldwin of Flanders as emperor. The Venetians seized the island of Crete and assumed control of Constantinople’s trade. Why had the western crusaders succeeded so easily when Persians, Bulgars, and Arabs had failed for centuries to conquer Constantinople? Although the crusaders were no doubt motivated by greed and a lust for conquest, they were also convinced that they were acting in God’s cause. After all, a Catholic patriarch (a Venetian) had now been installed in Constantinople, and the reconciliation of Eastern Orthodoxy with Catholic Christianity had been accomplished. Nor should we overlook the military superiority of the French warriors and the superb organizational skills of the Venetians; together, they formed a powerful and highly effective union.

REVIVAL OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE Although he protested the diversion of the crusade from the Holy Land, Pope Innocent III belatedly accepted as “God’s work” the conversion of Greek Byzantium to Latin Christianity. Some have argued that Innocent did realize, however, that the use of force to reunite the churches virtually guaranteed the failure of any permanent reunion. All too soon, this proved correct. The west was unable to maintain the Latin Empire, for the western rulers of the newly created principalities were soon engrossed in fighting each other. Some parts of the Byzantine Empire had managed to survive under Byzantine princes. In 1259, Michael Paleologus (pay-lee-AWL-uh-guss), a Greek military leader, took control of the kingdom of Nicaea in western Asia Minor, led a Byzantine army to recapture Constantinople two years later, and then established a new Byzantine dynasty, the Paleologi.

The Byzantine Empire had been saved, but it was no longer a Mediterranean power. The restored empire was a badly truncated entity, consisting of the city of Constantinople and
Christian Crusaders Capture Constantinople

Pope Innocent III inaugurated the Fourth Crusade after Saladin’s empire began to disintegrate. Tragically, however, the crusading army of mostly French nobles was diverted to Constantinople to intervene in Byzantine politics. In 1204, the Christian crusaders stormed and sacked one of Christendom’s greatest cities. This description of the conquest of Constantinople is taken from a contemporary account by a participant in the struggle.

Geoffrey de Villehardouin, The Conquest of Constantinople

The moment the knights aboard the transports saw this happen, they landed, and raising their ladders against the wall, climbed to the top, and took four more towers. Then all the rest of the troops started to leap out of warships, galleys, and transports, helter-skelter, each as fast as he could. They broke down about three of the gates and entered the city. The horses were then taken out of the transports; the knights mounted and rode straight towards the place where the Emperor had his camp. He had his battalions drawn up in front of the tents; but as soon as his men saw the knights charging towards them on horseback, they retreated in disorder. The Emperor himself fled through the streets of the city to the castle of Bucoleon.

Then followed a scene of massacre and pillage: on every hand the Greeks [Byzantines] were cut down, their horses, palfreys [saddlehorses], mules, and other possessions snatched as booty. So great was the number of killed and wounded that no man could count them. A great part of the Greek nobles had fled towards the gate of Blachernae; but by this time it was past six o’clock, and our men had grown weary of fighting and slaughtering. The troops began to assemble in a great square inside Constantinople . . . [and] decided to settle down near the walls and towers they had already captured. . . .

That night passed, and the next day came. . . . Early that morning all the troops, knights and sergeants alike, armed themselves, and each man went to join his division. They left their quarters thinking to meet with stronger resistance than they had encountered the day before, since they did not know that the Emperor had fled during the night. But they found no one to oppose them.

The Marquis de Montferrat rode straight along the shore to the palace of Bucoleon. As soon as he arrived there the place was surrendered to him, on condition that the lives of all the people in it should be spared. Among these were very many ladies of the highest rank who had taken refuge there. . . . Words fail me when it comes to describing the treasures found in the palace, for there was such a store of precious things that one could not possibly count them. . . .

The rest of the army, scattered throughout the city, also gained much booty; so much, indeed, that no one could estimate its amount or its value. It included gold and silver, table-services and precious stones, satin and silk, mantles of squirrel fur, ermine and miniver, and every choicest thing to be found on this earth. Geoffrey de Villehardouin here declares that, to his knowledge, so much booty had never been gained in any city since the creation of the world.

Everyone took quarters where he pleased, and there was no lack of fine dwellings in that city. So the troops of the Crusaders and the Venetians were duly housed. They all rejoiced and gave thanks to our Lord for the honor and the victory He had granted them, so that those who had been poor now lived in wealth and luxury. Thus, they celebrated Palm Sunday and the Easter Day following, with hearts full of joy for the benefits our Lord and Savior had bestowed on them. And well might they praise Him; since the whole of their army numbered no more than twenty thousand men, and with His help they had conquered four hundred thousand, or more, and that in the greatest, most powerful, and most strongly fortified city in the world.

What does this document reveal about the crusading ideals and practices of the Europeans?

The Ottoman Turks and the Fall of Constantinople

Beginning in northeastern Asia Minor in the thirteenth century, the Ottoman Turks spread rapidly, seizing the lands of the Seljuk Turks and the Byzantine Empire. In 1345, they bypassed Constantinople and pushed into the Balkans. Under Sultan Murad (moo-RAHD), Ottoman forces moved through Bulgaria and into the lands of the Serbs; in 1389, at the Battle of Kosovo (KAWSS-suh-voh), Ottoman forces defeated the Serbs. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Byzantine Empire had been reduced to little more than Constantinople, now surrounded on all sides by the Ottomans. When
Mehmet (meh-MET) II came to the throne in 1451 at the age of only nineteen. He was determined to capture Constantinople and complete the demise of the Byzantine Empire.

The siege began in April when Mehmet moved his army—probably about 80,000 men—within striking distance of the 13-mile-long land walls along the western edge of the city. The pope and the Italian city-states of Venice and Genoa promised aid, but most of it was too little and too late. The city probably had 6,000 to 8,000 soldiers mobilized for its defense. On April 2, Emperor Constantine XI (1449–1453), the last Byzantine emperor, ordered that a floating chain or boom be stretched across the Golden Horn, the inlet that forms the city’s harbor, to prevent a naval attack from the north. Mehmet’s forces, however, took control of the tip of the peninsula north of the Golden Horn and then pulled their ships overland across the peninsula from the Bosporus and placed them into the water behind the chains. The Ottoman fleet in the Horn built a pontoon bridge and set up artillery, forcing the Byzantines to defend the city on all sides.

The Ottomans’ main attack, however, came against the land walls. On April 6, the artillery onslaught began. The Ottoman invaders had a distinct advantage with their cannons. One of them, constructed by a Hungarian engineer, had a 26-foot barrel that fired stone balls weighing 1,200 pounds. It took 60 oxen and 2,000 men to pull the great cannon into position. On May 29, Mehmet decided on a final assault, focused against the areas where the walls had been breached. When Ottoman forces broke into the city, the emperor became one of the first casualties. Irregular Ottoman forces began to loot the city before regular troops were able to stop them. About 4,000 defenders were killed, and thousands of the inhabitants were sold into slavery. Early in the afternoon, Mehmet II rode into the city, exalted the power of Allah from the pulpit in the cathedral of Hagia Sophia, and ordered that it be converted into a mosque.
The Crises of the Fourteenth Century in the West

FOCUS QUESTIONS: What impact did the Black Death have on Europe and Asia in the fourteenth century? What problems did Europeans face during the fourteenth century, and what impact did these crises have on European economic, social, and religious life?

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, changes in global weather patterns ushered in what has been called a “little ice age.” Shortened growing seasons and disastrous weather conditions, including heavy storms and constant rain, led to widespread famine and hunger. Soon an even greater catastrophe struck.

The Black Death: From Asia to Europe

In the mid-fourteenth century, a disaster known as the Black Death struck in Asia, North Africa, and Europe. Bubonic plague was the most common and most important form of plague in the diffusion of the Black Death and was spread by black rats infested with fleas who were host to the deadly bacterium Yersinia pestis (yur-SIN-ee-uh PES-tiss).

ROLE OF THE MONGOLS This great plague originated in Asia. After disappearing from Europe and the Middle East in the Middle Ages, bubonic plague continued to haunt areas of southwestern China. In the early 1300s, rats accompanying Mongol troops spread the plague into central China and by 1331 to northeastern China. In one province near Beijing, it was reported that 90 percent of the population died. Overall, China’s population may have declined from 120 million in the mid-1300s to 80 million by 1400.

In the thirteenth century, the Mongols had brought much of the Eurasian landmass under a single rule, which in turn facilitated long-distance trade, particularly along the Silk Road, now dominated by Muslim merchants from Central Asia (see Chapter 10). The spread of people and goods throughout this Eurasian landmass also facilitated the spread of the plague.

In the 1330s, the plague had spread to Central Asia; by 1339 it had reached Samarkand, a caravan stop on the Silk Road. From Central Asia, trading caravans brought the plague to Caffa, on the Black Sea, in 1346 and to Constantinople by the following year (see the comparative essay “The Role of Disease in History” on p. 375). Its arrival in the Byzantine Empire was noted in a work by Emperor John VI, who lost a son: “Upon arrival in Constantinople she [the empress] found Andronikos, the youngest born, dead from the invading plague, which . . . attacked almost all the sea coasts of the world and killed most of their people.” By 1348, the plague had spread to Egypt and also to Mecca, Damascus, and other parts of the Middle East. The Muslim historian Ibn Khaldun (ib-uhn kahl-DOON), writing in the fourteenth century, commented, “Civilization in the East and West was visited by a destructive plague which devastated nations and caused populations to vanish. It swallowed up many of the good things of civilization and wiped them out.” Egypt was particularly devastated by the plague; it has been estimated that the population of Egypt did not return to its pre-1347 level until the nineteenth century.

THE BLACK DEATH IN EUROPE The Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century was the most devastating natural disaster in European history, ravaging Europe’s population and causing economic, social, political, and cultural upheaval. Contemporary chroniclers lamented that parents attempted to flee, abandoning their children; one related the words of a child left behind: “Oh father, why have you abandoned me? . . . Mother where have you gone?”

The plague reached Europe in October 1347 when Genoese merchants brought it from Caffa to the island of Sicily off the coast of Italy. One contemporary wrote, “As it happened, among those who escaped from Caffa by boat, there were a few sailors who had been infected with the poisonous disease. Some boats were bound for Genoa, others went to Venice and other Christian areas. When the sailors reached these places and mixed with the people there, it was as if they had brought evil spirits with them.” The plague quickly spread to southern Italy and then to southern France by the end of the year (see Map 13.3). Diffusion of the Black Death followed commercial trade routes. In 1348, it spread through Spain, France, and the Low Countries and into Germany. By the end of that year, it had moved to England. By the end of the next, the plague had reached northern Europe and Scandinavia. Eastern Europe and Russia were affected by 1351.

Mortality figures for the Black Death were incredibly high. Especially hard hit were Italy’s crowded cities, where 50 to 60
COMPARATIVE ESSAY

The Role of Disease in History

When Hernán Cortés and his fellow conquistadors arrived in Mesoamerica in 1519, the local inhabitants were frightened of the horses and the firearms that accompanied the Spaniards. What they did not know was that the most dangerous enemies brought by these strange new arrivals were invisible—the disease-bearing microbes that would soon kill them by the millions.

Diseases have been the scourge of animal species since the dawn of prehistory, making the lives of human beings, in the words of the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, “nasty, brutish, and short.” With the increasing sophistication of forensic evidence, archaeologists today are able to determine from recently discovered human remains that our immediate ancestors were plagued by such familiar ailments as anemia, arthritis, tuberculosis, and malaria.

With the explosive growth of the human population brought about by the agricultural revolution, the problems posed by the presence of disease intensified. As people began to congregate in villages and cities, bacteria settled in their piles of refuse and were carried by lice in their clothing. The domestication of animals made humans more vulnerable to diseases carried by their livestock. As population density increased, the danger of widespread epidemics increased with it.

As time went on, succeeding generations gradually developed partial or complete immunity to many of these diseases, which became chronic rather than fatal to their victims, as occurred with malaria in parts of Africa, for example, and chickenpox in the Americas. But when a disease was introduced to a particular society that had not previously been exposed to it, the consequences were often devastating. The most dramatic example was the famous Black Death, the plague that ravaged Europe and China during the fourteenth century, killing one-fourth to one-half of the inhabitants in the affected regions (and even greater numbers in certain areas). Smallpox had the same impact in the Americas after the arrival of Christopher Columbus, and malaria was fatal to many Europeans on their arrival in West Africa.

How were these diseases transmitted? In most instances, they followed the trade routes. Such was the case with the Black Death, which was initially carried by fleas living in the saddlebags of Mongol warriors as they advanced toward Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and thereafter by rats in the holds of cargo ships. Smallpox and other diseases were brought to the Americas by the conquistadors. Epidemics, then, are a price that humans pay for having developed the network of rapid communication that has accompanied the evolution of human society.

**What role has disease played in human history?**

percent of the people died. One citizen of Florence wrote, “A great many breathed their last in the public streets, day and night; a large number perished in their homes, and it was only by the stench of their decaying bodies that they proclaimed their deaths to their neighbors. Everywhere the city was teeming with corpses.” In England and Germany, entire villages simply disappeared. It has been estimated that out of a total European population of 75 million, as many as 38 million people may have died of the plague between 1347 and 1351.

As contemporaries attempted to explain the Black Death and mitigate its harshness, some turned to extreme sorts of behavior. Many believed that the plague either had been sent by God as a punishment for humans’ sins or had been caused by the devil (see the box on p. 377). Some, known as flagellants (FLAJ-uh-lunts), resorted to extreme measures to gain God’s forgiveness. Groups of flagellants, both men and women, wandered from town to town, flogging each other with whips to beg the forgiveness of God whom they
believed had sent the plague to punish humans for their sinful ways. One contemporary chronicler described a flagellant procession:

The penitents went about, coming first out of Germany. They were men who did public penance and scourged themselves with whips of hard knotted leather with little iron spikes. Some made themselves bleed very badly between the shoulder blades and some foolish women had cloths ready to catch the blood and smear it on their eyes, saying it was miraculous blood. While they were doing penance, they sang very mournful songs about the nativity and the passion of Our Lord. The object of this penance was to put a stop to the mortality, for in that time ... at least a third of all the people in the world died.11

The flagellants attracted attention and created mass hysteria wherever they went. The Catholic Church, however, became alarmed when flagellant groups began to kill Jews and attack clergy who opposed them. Pope Clement VI condemned the flagellants in October 1349 and urged the public authorities to crush them. By the end of 1350, most of the flagellant movement had been destroyed.

An outbreak of virulent anti-Semitism also accompanied the Black Death. Jews were accused of causing the plague by poisoning town wells. The worst pogroms (POH-grooms) (massacres) against this minority were carried out in Germany, where more than sixty major Jewish communities had been exterminated by 1351. Many Jews fled eastward to Russia and especially to Poland, where the king offered them protection. Eastern Europe became home to large Jewish communities.

### Economic Dislocation and Social Upheaval

The deaths of so many people in the fourteenth century had severe economic consequences. Trade declined, and some industries suffered greatly. Florence’s woolen industry, one
The Black Death was the most terrifying natural calamity of the Middle Ages and affected wide areas of Europe, North Africa, and Asia. People were often baffled by the plague, especially by its causes, and gave widely different explanations. The first selection is taken from the preface to the Decameron by the fourteenth-century Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio (joh-VAH-nee boh-KAH-choh). The next three selections are from contemporary treatises that offered widely different explanations for the great plague.

**Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron**

In the year of Our Lord 1348 the deadly plague broke out in the great city of Florence, most beautiful of Italian cities. Whether through the operation of the heavenly bodies or because of our own iniquities which the just wrath of God sought to correct, the plague had arisen in the East some years before, causing the death of countless human beings. It spread without stop from one place to another, until, unfortunately, it swept over the West.

**Geoffrey de Meaux on Astrological Causes**

Now that the basics have been discussed, you can consider the reasons for such a great mortality in so many countries, and how the illness came through the influence of the stars. Ptolemy [a second-century C.E. astronomer] in chapter 4 of the second part of the Quaadrupartitum says: the important things are the strengths and powers of the hour, the conjunctions and oppositions, eclipses of the sun and moon, and the places the planets cross at that hour. Wherefore it has been, and is, known by all astrologers that in the year 1345 (taking the year to begin in January) there was a total eclipse of the moon, of long duration, on 18 March. At the longitude of Oxford it began an hour after the moon rose, and at the time the two planets were in conjunction in Aquarius, and Mars was with them in the same sign, within the light of Jupiter. . . .

You should understand, however, that I do not wish to imply that the mortality comes only from Saturn and Jupiter but rather through Mars, which was mixed with them at the time of the eclipse.

**On Earthquakes as the Cause of Plague**

There is a fourth opinion, which I consider more likely than the others, which is that insofar as the mortality arose from natural causes its immediate cause was a corrupt and poisonous earthy exhalation, which infected the air in various parts of the world and, when breathed in by people, suffocated them and suddenly snuffed them out. . . .

It is a matter of scientific fact that earthquakes are caused by the exhalation of fumes enclosed in the bowels of the earth. When the fumes batter against the sides of the earth, and cannot get out, the earth is shaken and moves. I say that it is the vapor and corrupted air which has been vented—or so to speak purged—in the earthquake which occurred on St Paul’s day, 1347, along with the corrupted air vented in other earthquakes and eruptions, which has infected the air above the earth and killed people in various parts of the world; and I can bring various reasons in support of this conclusion.

**Herman Gigas on Well Poisoning**

In 1347 there was such a great pestilence and mortality throughout almost the whole world that in the opinion of well-informed men scarcely a tenth of mankind survived. . . . Some say that it was brought about by the corruption of the air; others that the Jews planned to wipe out all the Christians with poison and had poisoned wells and springs everywhere. And many Jews confessed as much under torture: that they had bred spiders and toads in pots and pans, and had obtained poison from overseas; and that not every Jew knew about this wickedness, only the more powerful ones, so that it would not be betrayed. As evidence of this heinous crime, men say that the bags full of poison were found in many wells and springs, and as a result, in cities, towns and villages throughout Germany, and in fields and woods too, almost all the wells and springs have been blocked up or built over, so that no one can drink from them or use the water for cooking, and men have to use rain or river water instead. God, the lord of vengeance, has not suffered the malice of the Jews to go unpunished. Throughout Germany, in all but a few places, they were burnt. For fear of that punishment many accepted baptism and their lives were spared. This action was taken against the Jews in 1349.

**What were the different explanations for the causes of the Black Death? How do you explain the differences, and what do these explanations tell you about the level of scientific knowledge in the Later Middle Ages? Why do you think Jews became scapegoats?**
of the giants, had produced 70,000 to 80,000 pieces of cloth in 1338; in 1378, it was yielding only 24,000 pieces.

Both peasants and noble landlords were also affected. A shortage of workers caused a dramatic rise in the price of labor, while the decline in the number of people lowered the demand for food, resulting in falling prices. Landlords were now paying more for labor at the same time that their rental income was declining. Concurrently, the decline in the number of peasants after the Black Death made it easier for some to convert their labor services to rent, thus freeing them from serfdom. But there were limits to how much the peasants could advance. They faced the same economic hurdles as the lords, who also attempted to impose wage restrictions and reinstate old forms of labor service. New governmental taxes also hurt. Peasant complaints became widespread and soon gave rise to rural revolts.

The English Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 was the most prominent. The immediate cause of the revolt was the monarchy’s attempt to raise revenues by imposing a poll tax, a flat charge on each adult member of the population. Peasants in eastern England refused to pay the tax and expelled the collectors forcibly from their villages. Rebellion spread as peasants burned down the manor houses of aristocrats, lawyers, and government officials. Soon, however, the young king, Richard II (1377–1399), with the assistance of aristocrats, arrested hundreds of the rebels and ended the revolt. The poll tax was eliminated, however, and in the end most of the rebels were pardoned.

Although the peasant revolts sometimes resulted in short-term gains for the participants, the uprisings were relatively easily crushed and their gains quickly lost. Accustomed to ruling, the established classes easily combined and stifled dissent. Nevertheless, the revolts of the fourteenth century had introduced a new element to European life; henceforth, social unrest would be a characteristic of European history.

Political Instability

Famine, plague, economic turmoil, and social upheaval were not the only problems of the fourteenth century. War and political instability must also be added to the list. And of all the struggles that ensued, the Hundred Years’ War was the most violent.

THE HUNDRED YEARS’ WAR In the thirteenth century, England still held one small possession in France known as the duchy of Gascony. As duke of Gascony, the English king pledged loyalty as a vassal to the French king, but when King Philip VI of France (1328–1350) seized Gascony in 1337, the duke of Gascony—King Edward III of England (1327–1377)—declared war on Philip.

The war began in a burst of knightly enthusiasm. The French army of 1337 still relied largely on heavily armed noble cavalrymen, who looked with contempt on foot soldiers and crossbowmen, whom they regarded as social inferiors. The English, too, used heavily armed cavalry, but they relied even more on large numbers of paid foot soldiers. Armed with pikes, many of these soldiers had also adopted the longbow, invented by the Welsh. The longbow had a longer range and greater speed of fire than the crossbow.

The first major battle of the war occurred in 1346 at Crécy (kray-SEE), just south of Flanders. The larger French army followed no battle plan but simply attacked the English lines in a disorderly fashion. The arrows of the English archers decimated the French cavalry. As the chronicler Froissart (frwah-SAR) described it, “The English [with their longbows] continued to shoot into the thickest part of the crowd, wasting none of their arrows. They impaled or wounded horses and riders, who fell to the ground in great distress, unable to get up again without the help of several men.” It was a stunning victory for the English and the foot soldier.

The Battle of Crécy was not decisive, however. The English simply did not possess the resources to subjugate all of France, but they continued to try. The English king, Henry V (1413–1422), was especially eager to achieve victory. At the Battle of Agincourt (AH-zhen-koor) in 1415, the heavy, armor-plated French knights attempted to attack across a field turned to mud by heavy rain; the result was a disastrous French defeat and the death of 1,500 French nobles. The English had become the masters of northern France.

The Battle of Crécy. This fifteenth-century manuscript illustration depicts the Battle of Crécy, the first of several military disasters suffered by the French in the Hundred Years’ War, and shows why the English preferred the longbow to the crossbow. At the left, the French crossbowmen stop shooting and prime their weapons by cranking the handle, while English archers continue to shoot their longbows (a skilled archer could launch ten arrows a minute).
The seemingly hopeless French cause fell into the hands of the dauphin (DAH-fin or doh-FAN) Charles, the heir to the throne, who governed the southern two-thirds of French lands. Charles’s cause seemed doomed until a French peasant woman quite unexpectedly saved the timid monarch. Born in 1412, the daughter of well-to-do peasants, Joan of Arc was a deeply religious person who came to believe that her favorite saints had commanded her to free France. In February 1429, Joan made her way to the dauphin’s court and persuaded Charles to allow her to accompany a French army to Orléans (or-lay-AHN). Apparently inspired by the faith of the peasant girl known as “the Maid of Orléans,” the French armies found new confidence in themselves and liberated the city. Joan had brought the war to a decisive turning point.

But she did not live to see the war concluded. Captured in 1430, Joan was turned over by the English to the Inquisition, which tried her on charges of witchcraft. In the fifteenth century, spiritual visions were thought to be inspired by either God or the devil. Joan was condemned to death as a heretic and burned at the stake in 1431.

Joan of Arc’s accomplishments proved decisive. Although the war dragged on for another two decades, defeats of English armies in Normandy and Aquitaine led to French victory by 1453. Important to the French success was the use of the cannon, a new weapon made possible by the invention of gunpowder. The Chinese had invented gunpowder in the tenth century and devised a simple cannon by the thirteenth. The Mongols greatly improved this technology, developing more accurate cannons and cannonballs; both spread to the Middle East in the thirteenth century and to Europe by the fourteenth. The use of gunpowder eventually brought drastic changes to European warfare by making castles, city walls, and armored knights obsolete.

**POLITICAL DISINTEGRATION** By the fourteenth century, the feudal order had begun to break down. With money from taxes, kings could now hire professional soldiers, who tended to be more reliable than feudal knights anyway. Fourteenth-century kings had their own problems as well. Many dynasties in Europe were unable to produce male heirs, while the founders of new dynasties had to fight for their positions as factions of nobles, trying to gain advantages for themselves, supported opposing candidates. Rulers encountered financial problems too. Hiring professional soldiers left them always short of cash, adding yet another element of uncertainty and confusion to fourteenth-century politics.

**The Decline of the Church**

The papacy of the Roman Catholic Church reached the height of its power in the thirteenth century. But crises in the fourteenth century led to a serious decline for the church. By that time, the monarchies of Europe were no longer willing to accept papal claims of temporal supremacy, as is evident in the struggle between Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303) and King Philip IV (1285–1314) of France. In his desire to acquire new revenues, Philip claimed the right to tax the clergy of France, but Boniface VIII insisted that the clergy of any state could not pay taxes to their secular ruler without the pope’s consent. In no uncertain terms he argued that popes were supreme over both the church and the state (see the box on p. 380).

Philip IV refused to accept the pope’s position and sent a small contingent of French forces to capture Boniface and bring him back to France for trial. The pope escaped but soon died from the shock of his experience. To ensure his position and avoid any future papal threat, Philip IV engineered the election of a Frenchman, Clement V (1305–1314), as pope. Using the excuse of turbulence in the city of Rome, the new pope took up residence in Avignon (ah-veen-YOHN) on the east bank of the Rhone River.

From 1305 to 1377, the popes resided in Avignon, leading to an increase in antipapal sentiment. The city of Rome was the traditional capital of the universal church. The pope was the bishop of Rome, and it was unseemly that the head of the Catholic Church should reside in Avignon instead of Rome. Moreover, the splendor in which the pope and cardinals were living in Avignon led to highly vocal criticism of both clergy and papacy. At last, Pope Gregory XI (1370–1378), perceiving the disastrous decline in papal prestige, returned to Rome in 1377.

**THE GREAT SCHISM AND CRIES FOR REFORM** Gregory XI died in Rome the spring after his return. When the college of cardinals met to elect a new pope, the citizens of Rome, fearful that the French majority would choose another Frenchman who would move the papacy back to Avignon, threatened that the cardinals would not leave Rome alive unless they elected a Roman or an Italian as pope. Wisely, the terrified cardinals duly elected the Italian archbishop of Bari as Pope Urban VI (1378–1389). Five months later, a group of dissenting cardinals—the French ones—declared Urban’s election invalid and chose one of their number, a Frenchman, who took the title of Clement VII and promptly returned to Avignon. Because Urban remained in Rome, there were now two popes, beginning a crisis that has been called the Great Schism of the church.

The Great Schism divided Europe. France and its allies supported the pope in Avignon, whereas France’s enemy England and its allies supported the pope in Rome. The Great Schism was also damaging to the faith of Christian believers. The pope was widely believed to be the true leader of Christendom; when both lines of popes denounced the other as the Antichrist, people’s faith in the papacy and the church was undermined.

Meanwhile, the crises in the Catholic Church produced cries for reform. The Great Schism led large numbers of churchmen to take up the theory of **conciliarism**, or the belief that only a general council of the church, and not the pope, could bring reform to the church in its “head and members.” These cries for change finally led to a church council that met at Constance in Switzerland in 1417. After the competing popes resigned or were deposed, a new pope was elected who was acceptable to all parties.
Boniface VIII’s Defense of Papal Supremacy

One of the most remarkable documents of the fourteenth century was the exaggerated statement of papal supremacy issued by Pope Boniface VIII in Unam Sanctam (OO-nahm SAHNK-tahm) in 1302 in the heat of his conflict with the French king Philip IV. Ironically, this strongest statement ever made of papal supremacy was issued at a time when the rising power of the secular monarchies made it increasingly difficult for the premises to be accepted. Not long after issuing it, Boniface was taken prisoner by the French. Although he was freed by his fellow Italians, the humiliation of his defeat led to his death a short time later.

Pope Boniface VIII, Unam Sanctam

We are compelled, our faith urging us, to believe and to hold—and we do firmly believe and simply confess—that there is one holy catholic and apostolic church, outside of which there is neither salvation nor remission of sins. . . . In this church there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. . . . Therefore, of this one and only church there is one body and one head . . . Christ, namely, and the vicar of Christ, St. Peter, and the successor of Peter. For the Lord himself said to Peter, feed my sheep. . . .

We are told by the word of the gospel that in this His fold there are two swords—a spiritual, namely, and a temporal. . . . Both swords, the spiritual and the material, therefore, are in the power of the church; the one, indeed, to be wielded for the church, the other by the church; the one by the hand of the priest, the other by the hand of kings and knights, but at the will and sufferance of the priest. One sword, moreover, ought to be under the other, and the temporal authority to be subjected to the spiritual. . . .

Therefore if the earthly power err it shall be judged by the spiritual power; but if the lesser spiritual power err, by the greater. But if the greatest, it can be judged by God alone, not by man, the apostle bearing witness. A spiritual man judges all things, but he himself is judged by no one. This authority, moreover, even though it is given to man and exercised through man, is not human but rather divine, being given by divine lips to Peter and founded on a rock for him and his successors through Christ himself whom he has confessed; the Lord himself saying to Peter: “Whateover thou shalt bind, etc.” Whoever, therefore, resists this power thus ordained by God, resists the ordination of God. . . .

Indeed, we declare, announce, and define that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff.

What claims did Boniface VIII make in Unam Sanctam? To what extent were these claims a logical continuation of the development of the papacy in the Middle Ages? If you were a monarch, why would you object to these claims?

Although the Council of Constance ended the Great Schism, the council’s efforts to reform the church were less successful. By the mid-fifteenth century, the papacy had reasserted its authority and ended the conciliar movement. At the same time, however, as a result of these crises, the church had lost much of its temporal power. Even worse, the papacy and the church had also lost much of their moral prestige.

Recovery: The Renaissance

FOCUS QUESTION: What were the main features of the Renaissance in Europe, and how did it differ from the Middle Ages?

People who lived in Italy between 1350 and 1550 or so believed that they were witnessing a rebirth of Classical antiquity—the world of the Greeks and Romans. To them, this marked a new age, which historians later called the Renaissance (French for “rebirth”) and viewed as a distinct period of European history, which began in Italy and then spread to the rest of Europe.

Renaissance Italy was largely an urban society. The city-states became the centers of Italian political, economic, and social life. Within this new urban society, a secular spirit emerged as increasing wealth created new possibilities for the enjoyment of worldly things.

The Renaissance was also an age of recovery from the disasters of the fourteenth century, including the Black Death, political disorder, and economic recession. In pursuing that recovery, Italian intellectuals became intensely interested in the glories of their own past, the Greco-Roman culture of antiquity.

A new view of human beings emerged as people in the Italian Renaissance began to emphasize individual ability. The fifteenth-century Florentine architect Leon Battista Alberti (LAY-un buh-TEESS-tuh al-BAYR-tee) expressed
the new philosophy succinctly: “Men can do all things if they will.” This high regard for human worth and for individual potentiality gave rise to a new social ideal of the well-rounded personality or “universal person”—l’uomo universale (LOH-moh OO-nee-ver-SAH-lay)—who was capable of achievements in many areas of life.

The Intellectual Renaissance

The emergence and growth of individualism and secularism as characteristics of the Italian Renaissance are most noticeable in the intellectual and artistic realms. The most important literary movement associated with the Renaissance was humanism.

Renaissance humanism was an intellectual movement based on the study of the classics, the literary works of Greece and Rome. Humanists studied the liberal arts—grammar, rhetoric, poetry, moral philosophy or ethics, and history—all based on the writings of ancient Greek and Roman authors. We call these subjects the humanities.

Petrarch (PEE-trark or PET-trark) (1304–1374), who has often been called the father of Italian Renaissance humanism, did more than any other individual in the fourteenth century to foster its development. Petrarch sought to find forgotten Latin manuscripts and set in motion a ransacking of monastic libraries throughout Europe. He also began the humanist emphasis on the use of pure Classical Latin. Humanists used the works of Cicero as a model for prose and those of Virgil for poetry. As Petrarch said, “Christ is my God; Cicero is the prince of the language.”

In Florence, the humanist movement took a new direction at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Fourteenth-century humanists such as Petrarch had described the intellectual life as one of solitude. They rejected family and a life of action in the community. Now, however, the humanists who worked as secretaries for the city council of Florence took a new interest in civic life. They came to believe that it was the duty of an intellectual to live an active life for one’s state. Humanists came to believe that their study of the humanities should be put to the service of the state. It is no accident that humanists served as secretaries in Italian city-states or at courts of princes or popes.

Also evident in the humanism of the first half of the fifteenth century was a growing interest in Classical Greek civilization. One of the first Italian humanists to gain a thorough knowledge of Greek was Leonardo Bruni (leh-ah-NAHR-doh BROO-nee), who became an enthusiastic pupil of the Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysoloras (man-WEL kriss-uh-LAHHR-uss), who taught in Florence from 1396 to 1400.

Other historians have argued that although conditions remained bleak for most women, some women, especially those in courtly, religious, and intellectual environments, found ways to develop a new sense of themselves as women. This may be especially true of women who were educated in the humanist fashion and went on to establish literary careers.

Isotta Nogarola (ee-ZAHT-uh noh-guh-ROH-Iuh), born to a noble family in Verona, mastered Latin and wrote numerous letters and treatises that brought her praise from male Italian intellectuals. Cassandra Fedele (FAY-duh-lee) of Venice, who learned both Latin and Greek from humanist tutors hired by her family, became prominent in Venice for her public recitations of orations. Laura Cereta (say-REE-tuh) was educated in Latin by her father, a physician from Brescia. Laura defended the ability of women to pursue scholarly pursuits (see the box on p. 382).

The Artistic Renaissance

Renaissance artists sought to imitate nature in their works of art. Their search for naturalism became an end in itself: to persuade onlookers of the reality of the object or event they were portraying. At the same time, the new artistic standards reflected the new attitude of mind in which human beings became the focus of attention, the “center and measure of all things,” as one artist proclaimed.

The frescoes by Masaccio (muh-ZAHOE) (1401–1428) in Florence have long been regarded as the first masterpieces of Early Renaissance art. With his use of monumental figures, a more realistic relationship between figures and landscape, and the visual representation of the laws of perspective, a new realistic style of painting was born. Onlookers became aware of a world of reality that appeared to be a continuation of their own.

This new Renaissance style was absorbed and modified by other Florentine painters in the fifteenth century. Especially important were two major developments. One emphasized the technical side of painting—understanding the laws of perspective and the geometrical organization of outdoor space and light. The second development was the investigation of movement and anatomical structure. The realistic portrayal of the human nude became one of the foremost preoccupations of Italian Renaissance artists.

A new style in architecture also emerged when Filippo Brunelleschi (fee-LEE-poh BROO-uh-LESS-kee) (1377–1446), inspired by Roman models, created an interior in the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence that was very different from that of the great medieval cathedrals. San Lorenzo’s Classical columns, rounded arches, and coffered ceiling created an environment that did not overwhelm the worshipers physically and psychologically, as Gothic cathedrals did, but comforted them as a space created to fit human, not divine, measurements. Like painters and sculptors, Renaissance architects sought to reflect a human-centered world.

By the end of the fifteenth century, Italian artists had mastered the new techniques for scientific observation of the

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A Woman’s Defense of Learning

As a young woman, Laura Cereta was proud of her learning, but she was condemned by a male world that found it unseemly for women to be scholars. One monk said to her father, “She gives herself to things unworthy of her—namely, the classics.” Before being silenced, Laura Cereta wrote a series of letters, including one to a male critic who had argued that her work was so good it could not have been written by a woman.

Laura Cereta, Defense of the Liberal Instruction of Women

Your complaints are hurting my ears, for you say publicly and quite openly that you are not only surprised but pained that I am said to show this extraordinary intellect of the sort one would have thought nature would give to the most learned of men—as if you had reached the conclusion, on the facts of the case, that a similar girl had seldom been seen among the peoples of the world. You are wrong on both counts . . . .

I would remain silent, believe me, if you, with your long-standing hostile and envious attitude towards me, had learned to attack me alone . . . . But I am angry and my disgust overflows. Why should the condition of our sex be shamed by your little attacks? Because of this, a mind thirsting for revenge is set afire . . . . My cause itself is worthy: I am impelled to show what great glory that noble lineage which I carry in my own breasts has won for virtue and literature—a lineage that knowledge, the bearer of honors, has exalted in every age . . . .

My point is that your mouth has grown foul because you keep it sealed so that no arguments can come of it that might enable you to admit that nature imparts one freedom to all human beings equally—to learn. But the question of my exceptionality remains. And here choice alone, since it is the arbiter of character, is the distinguishing factor. For some women worry about the styling of their hair, the elegance of their clothes, and the pearls and other jewelry they wear on their fingers. Others love to say cute little things, to hide their feelings behind a mask of tranquility, to indulge in dancing, and lead pet dogs around on a leash. For all I care, other women can long for parties with carefully appointed tables, for the peace of mind of sleep, or they can yearn to deface with paint the pretty face they see reflected in their mirrors. But those women for whom the quest for the good represents a higher value restrain their young spirits and ponder better plans. They harden their bodies with sobriety and toil, they control their tongues, they carefully monitor what they hear, they ready their minds for all-night vigils, and they rouse their minds for the contemplation of probity in the case of harmful literature. For knowledge is not given as a gift but by study. For a mind free, keen, and unyielding in the face of hard work always rises to the good, and the desire for learning grows in depth and breadth.

So be it therefore. May we women, then, not be endowed by God the grantor with any giftedness or rare talent through any sanctity of our own. Nature has granted to all enough of her bounty; she opens to all the gates of choice, and through these gates, reason sends legates to the will, for it is through reason that these legates can transmit their desires . . . .

My goodness towards men isn’t always rewarded, and you may imagine in your disdain for women that I alone marvel at the felicitousness of having talent . . . . Do not think, most despicable of men, that I might believe I have fallen out of favor with Jove. I am a scholar and a pupil who has been lulled to sleep by the meager fire of a mind too humble. I have been too much burned, and my injured mind has accumulated too much passion; for tormenting itself with the defending of our sex, my mind sighs, conscious of its obligation. For all things—those deeply rooted inside us as well as those outside us—are being laid at the door of our sex.

Q: How did Cereta explain her intellectual interests and accomplishments? Why were Renaissance women rarely taken seriously when they sought educational opportunities and recognition for their intellectual talents? Were any of those factors unique to the Renaissance era?

At twenty-five, Raphael was already regarded as one of Italy’s best painters. He was acclaimed for his numerous madonnas, in which he attempted to achieve an ideal of beauty far surpassing human standards. He is well known for his frescoes in the Vatican Palace, which reveal a world of balance, harmony, and order—the underlying principles of the art of Classical Greece and Rome.

Michelangelo, an accomplished painter, sculptor, and architect, was fiercely driven by a desire to create, and he worked with great passion and energy on a remarkable number of projects. Michelangelo was influenced by Neoplatonism, especially evident in his figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. These muscular figures reveal an ideal type of human being with...
perfect proportions. In good Neoplatonic fashion, their beauty is meant to be a reflection of divine beauty; the more beautiful the body, the more God-like the figure. Another manifestation of Michelangelo’s search for ideal beauty was his David, a colossal marble statue commissioned by the government of Florence in 1501 and completed in 1504.

The State in the Renaissance

In the second half of the fifteenth century, attempts were made to reestablish the centralized power of monarchical governments after the political disasters of the fourteenth century. Some historians called these states the “new monarchies,” especially those of France, England, and Spain (see Map 13.4).

THE ITALIAN STATES The Italian states provided the earliest examples of state building in the fifteenth century. During the Middle Ages, Italy had failed to develop a centralized territorial state, and by the fifteenth century, five major powers dominated the Italian peninsula: the duchy of Milan, the republics of Florence and Venice, the Papal States, and the kingdom of Naples.

Milan, Florence, and Venice proved especially adept at building strong, centralized states. Under a series of dukes, Milan became a highly centralized territorial state in which the rulers devised systems of taxation that generated enormous revenues for the government. The maritime republic of Venice remained an extremely stable political entity governed by a small oligarchy of merchant-aristocrats. Its commercial empire brought in vast revenues and gave it the status of an international power. In Florence, Cosimo de’ Medici (KAH-zee-moh duh MED-ih-chee) took control of the merchant oligarchy in 1434. Through lavish patronage and

Brunelleschi, Interior of San Lorenzo. Cosimo de’ Medici contributed massive amounts of money to the rebuilding of the Church of San Lorenzo. As seen in this view of the nave and choir of the church, Brunelleschi’s architectural designs were based on the basilica plan borrowed by early Christians from pagan Rome. San Lorenzo’s simplicity, evident in its rows of slender Corinthian columns, created a human-centered space.

Leonardo da Vinci, The Last Supper. Leonardo da Vinci was the impetus behind the High Renaissance concern for the idealization of nature, moving from a realistic portrayal of the human figure to an idealized form. Evident in Leonardo’s Last Supper is his effort to depict a person’s character and inner nature by the use of gesture and movement. Unfortunately, Leonardo used an experimental technique in this fresco, which soon led to its physical deterioration.
beginning in 1494, Italy became a battlefield for the great power struggle between the French and Spanish monarchies, a conflict that led to Spanish domination of Italy in the sixteenth century.

**Western Europe** The Hundred Years’ War left France prostrate. But it had also engendered a certain degree of French national feeling toward a common enemy that the kings could use to reestablish monarchical power. The development of a French territorial state was greatly advanced by King Louis XI (1461–1483), known as the Spider because of his wily and devious ways. Louis strengthened the use of the taille (TY)—an annual direct tax usually on land or property—as a permanent tax imposed by royal authority, giving him a sound, regular source of income, which created the foundations of a strong French monarchy.

The Hundred Years’ War had also strongly affected the English. The cost of the war in its final years and the losses to the labor force strained the English economy. At the end of the war, England faced even greater turmoil when a civil war, known as the War of the Roses, erupted and aristocratic factions fought over the monarchy until 1485, when Henry Tudor established a new dynasty.

As the first Tudor king, Henry VII (1485–1509) worked to establish a strong monarchical government. Henry ended the petty wars of the nobility by abolishing their private armies. He was also very thrifty. By not overburdening the nobility and the middle class with taxes, Henry won their favor, and they provided him much support.

Spain, too, experienced the growth of a strong national monarchy by the end of the fifteenth century. During the Middle Ages, several independent Christian kingdoms had emerged in the course of the long reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims. Two of the strongest were Aragon and Castile. The marriage of Isabella of Castile (1474–1504) and Ferdinand of Aragon (1479–1516) in 1469 was a major step toward unifying Spain. The two rulers worked to strengthen royal control of government. They filled the royal council, which supervised the administration of the government, with middle-class lawyers. Trained in Roman law, these officials operated on the belief that the monarchy embodied the power of the state. Ferdinand and Isabella also reorganized the military forces of Spain, making the new Spanish army the best in Europe by the sixteenth century.

**Central and Eastern Europe** Unlike France, England, and Spain, the Holy Roman Empire failed to develop a strong monarchical authority. The failure of the German emperors in the thirteenth century ended any chance of centralized authority, and Germany became a land of hundreds of virtually independent states. After 1438, the position of Holy Roman Emperor was held by members of the Habsburg (HAPS-burg) dynasty. Having gradually acquired a number of possessions along the Danube, known collectively as Austria, the house of Habsburg had become one of the wealthiest landholders in the empire and by the mid-fifteenth century had begun to play an important role in European affairs.

In eastern Europe, rulers struggled to achieve the centralization of the territorial states. Religious differences troubled the area as Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and other groups, including the Mongols, confronted each other. In Poland, the nobles gained the upper hand and established the right to elect their kings, a policy that drastically weakened royal authority.

Since the thirteenth century, Russia had been under the domination of the Mongols. Gradually, the princes of Moscow rose to prominence by using their close relationship to the Mongol khans to increase their wealth and expand their possessions. During the reign of the great Prince Ivan III (1462–1505), a new Russian state was born. Ivan annexed other Russian principalities and took advantage of dissension among the Mongols to throw off their yoke by 1480.
MAP 13.4 Europe in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century. By the second half of the fifteenth century, monarchs in western Europe, particularly France, Spain, and England, had begun the process of modern state building. With varying success, they reinvented the power of the church and nobles, increased their ability to levy taxes, and established effective government bureaucracies.

What aspects of Europe's political boundaries help explain why France and the Holy Roman Empire were often at war with each other?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

After the collapse of Roman power in the west, the Late Roman Empire in the east or the Eastern Roman Empire, centered on Constantinople, continued in the eastern Mediterranean and eventually emerged as the Byzantine Empire, which flourished for hundreds of years. While a new Christian civilization arose in western Europe, the Byzantine Empire created its own unique Christian civilization. And while western Europe struggled in the Early Middle Ages, the Byzantine world continued to prosper and flourish. Especially during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, under the Macedonian emperors, the Byzantine Empire expanded and achieved an economic prosperity that was evident to foreign visitors who were awed by the size, wealth, and physical surroundings of Constantinople.

During its heyday, Byzantium was a multicultural and multiethnic empire that ruled a remarkable number of people who spoke different languages. Byzantine cultural and religious forms spread to the Balkans, parts of central Europe, and Russia. Byzantine scholars eventually spread the study of the Greek language to Italy, fostering the Renaissance humanists' interest in Classical Greek civilization. The Byzantine Empire also interacted with the world of Islam to its east and the new European civilization of the west. Both interactions proved
costly and ultimately fatal. Although European civilization and Byzantine civilization shared a common bond in Christianity, it proved incapable of keeping them in harmony politically. Indeed, the west’s Crusades to Palestine, ostensibly for religious motives, led to western control of the Byzantine Empire from 1204 to 1261. Although the empire was restored, it had been significantly weakened and could only limp along until its interaction with its other neighbor—the Muslim world—led to its demise in 1453 when the Ottoman Turks conquered the city of Constantinople and made it the center of their new empire.

While Byzantium was declining in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Europe was achieving new levels of growth and optimism. In the fourteenth century, however, Europe too experienced a time of troubles, as it was devastated by the Black Death, economic dislocation, political chaos, and religious decline. But in the fifteenth century, while Constantinople and the remnants of the Byzantine Empire finally fell to the world of Islam, Europe experienced a dramatic revival. Elements of recovery during the Renaissance made the fifteenth century a period of significant artistic, intellectual, and political change in Europe. By the second half of the fifteenth century, as we shall see in the next chapter, the growth of strong, centralized monarchical states made possible the dramatic expansion of Europe into other parts of the world.

CHAPTER TIMELINE

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CHAPTER REVIEW

Upon Reflection

Q What were Justinian’s major goals, and how did he try to accomplish them? How successful was he in achieving his goals?

Q Why does the chapter use the phrase “zenith of Byzantine civilization” to describe the period from 750 to 1025?

Q What was the relationship between Italian Renaissance humanism and Italian Renaissance art?

Key Terms

iconoclasts (p. 363)
iconoclasm (p. 363)

Suggested Reading


Go to the CourseMate website at [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) for additional study tools and review materials—including audio and video clips—for this chapter.