

SUMMARY

While Western Europe was plunged into chaos after the fall of Rome, a powerful new civilization emerged in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The foundations of the Byzantine Empire were laid when the emperor Constantine built his new capital at Byzantium, a strategically located site on the Bosphorus. In the 6th century, Justinian expanded the empire, regaining much of the lands lost in the West. In the centuries after Justinian's death, the empire experienced periods of strength as well as periods of decline.

In its long history, the Byzantine Empire developed a remarkable civilization that preserved the learning of the classical world, and this learning was eventually passed on to the West. Rivalry between the eastern and western branches of Christianity led to a schism and the emergence of two separate Christian churches. At its height, the Byzantine Empire with its splendid capital at Constantinople was the envy of the Western world. However, the riches of Constantinople and its rivalry with Venice led to its devastation during the Fourth Crusade. Although the empire recovered from that blow, it was not strong enough to withstand the onslaught of the Ottoman Turks, who captured Constantinople in 1453.

QUESTIONS

- 1 How did geography shape the development of Constantinople? Of the Byzantine Empire?
- 2 Describe Justinian's major goals. In what areas did he have the most success? Why? In what areas did he have the least success? Why?
- 3 Why was the Roman Empire in the East able to survive for a thousand years after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West? Explain why this survival was so critical to the future of western Europe.
- 4 What differences developed between the Christian Church in the East and West? What were the causes of the schism? Analyze the immediate and longterm effects of the schism on both the Byzantine Empire and western Europe.
- 5 What evidence of Byzantine influence can you find in both eastern and western Europe?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Which book might discuss Byzantine influence on the West?

HEAD, CONSTANCE. Justinian II of Byzantium. University of Wisconsin Press, 1972. A thoroughly researched biography of a colorful Byzantine emperor who ruled from 685-695, was deposed by a usurper, wandered alone for about 10 years among the barbarian tribes before gathering an army of Bulgarian mercenaries and returning in victory to Constantinople. His career spanned a critical time within the Byzantine Empire.

MANGO, CYRIL. Byzantium, Empire of New Rome. New York: Scribner's, 1980. A study of life in Byzantium from the perspective of its language, society, economy, and religion; based on the point of view of the "average" Byzantine citizen.

RICE, TAMARA TALBOT. Everyday Life in Byzantium. London: B. T. Batsford, 1967. A discussion of the influence of the Byzantine Empire on Europe through its architecture and religion that examines both the way of life of the common people of Byzantium as well as the rituals of the imperial court and the Church.