

Module 6: The Byzantine Empire and Eastern Europe

Topic 1 Content: Rulers, Accomplishments, & Legacy of the Byzantine Empire

Introduction



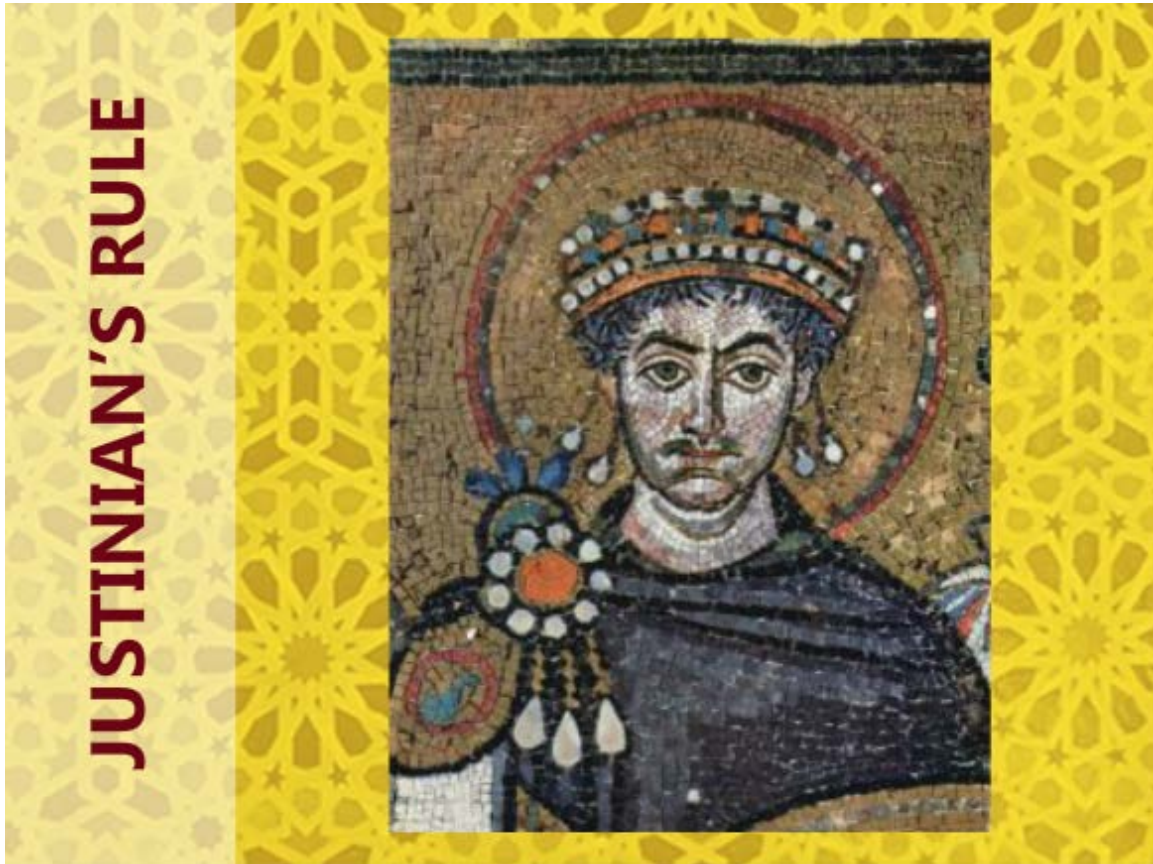
Rulers, Accomplishments, and Legacy of the Byzantine Empire

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Justinian's Rule



In 527 A.D. (C.E.), Justinian I became emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire. During this time, the Byzantine Empire prospered and expanded to include most of the land encompassing the Mediterranean Sea, including former Russian territories. Along with this expansion in territory came an expansion in trade. Under Justinian's rule, trade and the public works of Constantinople prospered, and Justinian invested in public works projects like schools, churches, and courts. He also provided public entertainment like gladiator battles and chariot races.

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The Body of Civil Law



Perhaps Justinian's most important contribution to the Byzantine Empire, and to the world, was the codification of Roman law into what became popularly known as Justinian's Code. For the past several hundred years, Roman law had been the foundation for much of western society, but it was not uniform or well-organized, and many of the laws had become outdated. Upon taking office, Justinian sought to condense and simplify all of these laws into one resource. This important publication became the foundation for much of the legal system in Europe.

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Byzantine Art



Art and architecture were valued in the Byzantine Empire, and were supported by imperial patronage. Since Greek Orthodox Christianity was the major religion of the Byzantine Empire, and the Empire was a financial supporter of many artists, most art of the time focused on religious or imperial subjects. Icons, which are works of art with religious images and themes, were painted throughout the empire. Important civic buildings, like the emperor's palace and churches, were adorned with mosaics, or images created by assembling small pieces of tile, glass, or stone.

Click on the markers to learn more details about the Byzantine artwork.

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Hagia Sophia



In 532 A.D. (C.E.), after the destruction of two earlier buildings, Justinian ordered the rebuilding of the Byzantine church, Hagia Sophia, or Church of the Holy Wisdom. A major architectural accomplishment of the time period, Hagia Sophia was composed of several different types of stone from across the empire, and featured a large dome and intricate mosaics. Not only was this church a place for religious worship, it was also used for civic events and coronations. When Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque, or place of worship for Muslims. The four minarets (pillars) were added for ventilation and to broadcast prayers to worshippers. Between World War I and World War II, the structure was converted into a museum, and it remains one today.

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Survival of Greek and Roman Influences



The Byzantine Empire was instrumental in preserving the culture and traditions of the Greeks and Romans that might have been lost with the fall of these civilizations. While the Byzantines spoke Greek, for example, they considered themselves culturally Roman, and they studied Latin, Roman history, and Roman literature. The many libraries that were built under the Byzantine Empire were also important in helping protect the survival of the many Greco-Roman accomplishments.