Byzantine Empire Lecture notes

Emperor Diocletian divided the Roman empire into two administrative areas

Emperor Constantine selected Byzantium for his capital because it was

1. In the wealthier side of the empire
2. He could keep watch over the growing Sassanid Empire

In 476 the Western part of the Roman Empire fell to Germanic tribes, leaving  
the eastern half intact.

Constantine

Created a powerful centralized government  
with an administrative bureaucracy.

Lifted the ban on the practice of Christianity  
Christianity will later be the official religion  
of the Empire.

CAESAROPAPISM—the union of political  
and religious authority  
 (**Council of Nicaea, 325 C.E**.)

Justinian

Sought to reconquer lands of western  
Roman Empire

Built the Hagia Sophia

Codified Roman law  
The Code of Justinian

First Major Crisis of Byzantine Empire:

The advance of Islam on its eastern border

Muslims quickly overran the weakening Sasanid Empire

Muslims took much land from eastern portion of Byzantine Empire

Result of this crisis

Imperial Organization was transformed

The Theme system introduced

--The emperor divided land into imperial provinces  
--Each province placed under jurisdiction of a military  
general chosen by the emperor  
--Imperial government closely supervised each general

--Each general recruited armies from local peasants  
--the peasants were given land in exchange for military  
service  
--the peasants could increase their family’s fortunes by  
working hard in increasing agricultural yield.   
(Free Peasantry)

Result: greater security and increased agricultural production

Byzantine Culture and Economics

* Adopted Greek as official language

--it is the original language of the New Testament  
--it is the language of Greek philosophers

Culturally, became Hellenistic

--officials in Byzantine bureaucracy were educated in Greek thought

--Grew culturally distinct from Latin civilization of Western Europe

Economics and Trade

--its location made it important for trade routes linking Europe and   
 Asia; customs and duties brought enormous wealth  
 --stole silk technology from China

Religious Controversies

Division between elite religion and popular religion

Religion of upper classes was educated, linked to Hellenism

Religion of the common man often tended toward asceticism

Monasticism and the use of icons were part of popular religious piety

**Iconoclasm**: for a brief time, the empire   
tried to end the use of religious images.  
The results of this effort were not   
permanent.

Tension between eastern and western Christianity

The pope tried to get involved in the iconoclasm issue

Byzantines rejected celibacy of priests, requirements that priests shave beards

The pope gave political authority to the Franks; the Byzantines believed only  
they had that authority

Byzantine Patriarchs wanted autonomy for all major Christian areas; the Pope  
claimed he was the supreme leader of all of Christendom.

Byzantine and Catholic officials disputed which kind of bread to use   
in communion

In 1054 the Pope excommunicated the Byzantine patriarch. The Byzantine  
patriarch returned the favor. Christendom is divided between Eastern  
Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians.

Byzantine Art

The Split between eastern and western Christianity produced different styles of art in both areas

Art in both areas was predominately religious, but they emphasized

different aspects of Christ

Decline of Byzantine Civilization

--Theme system declined  
 generals married into aristocratic classes, created elite military   
 class

New class placed heavy tax burdens on free peasantry

Elite military class challenged central authority of emperor

--Western kingdoms grew stronger, wanted more access to trade revenues

--Crusades weaken the Empire

--Constantinople falls to Muslim Turks in 1453