

# Chapter 13 - Reading Notes

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Note: This note file is done in my **old style**, which means that it is not accompanied by mind maps or objectives in the margins. If that doesn't matter to you, or if you feel like you can read and think about objectives yourself, proceed. If you do not, then abandon all hope, ye who enter here.

## The Early Byzantine Empire

- **Byzantium**, a modest market town and fishing village
  - Located on a defensible peninsula with really good waters for fishing/trading, crossroads for trade to Anatolia, southwestern Asia, and southeastern Europe.
  - Constantine chose it for its amazing location and built **Constantinople**
  - Built a new capital because Eastern Roman Empire was more economically productive and also to watch the Sasanid and Germanic people for threats.
  - Imperial government moved in in 330, became the de facto commercial and political center of the eastern Mediterranean basin.
- Historians refer to the realm governed from Constantinople as the **Byzantine Empire (330-1453)**

## The Later Roman Empire and Byzantium

- Byzantine Empire originated as the eastern half of the classical Roman empire.
- Eastern Roman Empire survived the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 5th century.
- Byzantines ruled over Greece, the Balkan region, Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and northeast Africa.
- Land ownership very transient - sometimes they expanded, sometimes neighbors took them.
- Remained a major power in eastern Mediterranean Basin until 1200s.

## The Later Roman Empire

- Byzantine Empire inherited Eastern Roman roads, communications, lines of authority, functioning imperial institutions.
- Faced different challenges and built a significantly different state.
  - Consolidation of the dynamic Sasanid dynasty (224-641) and invasions from migratory peoples in north and east.
    - Sasanids wanted to rebuild Achaemenid empire, they had to fortify the border.
    - Migratory peoples not a threat after walls built around cities such as Constantinople.

## Early Byzantine State

- Have secured their realm against Sasanids and invaders.
- Tightly centralized rule that concentrated power in highly exalted emperor.
- Constantinople filled with libraries, museums, marble palaces, churches, baths, and public buildings.

## Caesaropapism

- Constantine did not claim direct divine status but claimed he was the chosen emperor. (China?)
- Emperor is joint leader of both secular and religious affairs.

## Byzantine Court

- Emperors were adorned in very, very expensive clothing.
- High grandeur
  - Officials saw themselves as slaves (not subjects) to the emperor and had to physically glorify him before talking to him.
  - Mechanical devices added some bedazzling to it.

## Justinian and His Legacy

### Justinian and Theodora

- Reigned from 527 to 565.
- "the sleepless emperor" - energetic and tireless worker with an ambitious wife.
- Both peasants in previous lives.

- Justinian rose to power due to his intelligence and charisma.
- Crushed a riot against high taxes, and rebuilt the city with magnificent buildings.
  - Hagia Sophia - incredible work of Christian architecture.

#### Justinian's Code

- Codified Roman law.
- Most thorough review that ever occurred, resulting in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* (*Body of the Civil Law*), the definitive codification of Roman law.
- Influenced law codes across western Europe.

#### Belisarius and Byzantine Conquests

- Made an effort to reconquer the Western Roman Empire from Germanic people to restore Roman authority throughout the Mediterranean basin.
- Began in 533.
- His brilliant general Belisarius led campaigns that returned Italy, Sicily, northwestern Africa, and southern Spain to Byzantium.
- When Justinian died in 565, he had conquered a lot of the classical Roman empire.
- After Justinian's death, they could not sustain these lands. His dream of restoring Rome to these lands faded.
- This proved that restoring classical Roman empire was impossible - they had already begun to follow different historical trajectories.

#### Islamic Conquests and Byzantine Revival

- After 7th century, Islamic people conquered Sasanid empire and large portions of the Byzantine empire.
- Byzantine *Greek fire* fended off Muslim invaders.
  - It burned on water and was very hard to put out.
  - A very effective deterrent.
- Byzantines still held onto Anatolia, Greece, and the Balkan region.

#### Imperial Organization

- More compact and manageable in the 8th century due to Islamic conquests.
- **Theme system** - reorganized society
  - Generals oversaw imperial provinces (**themes**), who oversaw military defense and civil administration. Appointed by imperial government, closely supervised to avoid decentralization.
  - Generals recruited armies from ranks of free peasants - received allotments of land to cultivate in exchange for military service.
- Strengthened by this system, Byzantium vastly expanded influence between late 9th and late 11th centuries.
- Reconquered Syria from Arab Muslims.
- Under Basil II (976-1025), known as "Basil the Bulgar-Slayer," Byzantine armies turned west and crushed the Bulgars of the Balkans (1014).
- By 1050, Byzantium encompassed lands from Syria and Armenia in the east to southern Italy in the west, and from Danube River in the north to Cyprus and Crete in the south.

#### Byzantium and Western Europe

##### Tensions between Byzantium and Western European States

- The West separated government officials from religion and conducted ceremonies in Latin; Byzantines (the East) did it in Greek and followed the will of caesaropapist emperors.
- Byzantines thought Roman Christians were poorly educated, while Roman Church leaders found Byzantines to be too subtle.
- Western states threatened imperial authority of the Byzantine emperor.
  - **Charlemagne** - Crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire by the pope in 800.
  - **Otto of Saxony** - Claimed the western lands of the former Roman Empire and even attacked Byzantine-controlled southern Italy.

#### Liudprand of Cremona

- Ambassador sent by Otto to Constantinople in 968.
- Described the Byzantines as dirty, uncultured pigs, and insulted the emperor in writing.
- Testament to the strained Byzantine relations with the west until the fall of the Byzantine empire.

## Byzantine Economy and Society

- Much of Byzantium's domination is due to its strong economy.
- It owned territories that were very economically productive; that is, lands that produced abundant agricultural surpluses, supported large numbers of skilled workers, and traded with lands all over the Mediterranean region.

## Rural Economy and Society

- Egypt was a major source of grain for Byzantium.
- After Egypt was conquered, Anatolia and the lower Danube region became the breadbasket - lots of wheaaaattt.
- Between 600-1400, Constantinople had a population of around a million people, due to its reliable flow of food.

## The Peasantry

- Empire supported a large class of free peasants who owned small plots of land.
- Served as the backbone of the Byzantine military system.
- Cultivated their land intensively to grow their family's wealth.
- However, wealthy people (lords) wanted more land, so they bought large estates and made peasants dependent on them (land = wealth).
  - Peasants were not slaves nor entirely free.
  - Sometimes were bound to the land and not allowed to leave without permission.
  - Other times they were sharecroppers - they shared produce with their lords.
- Invasions in 700s and 800s broke up large land ownership so peasants could regain small holdings.
- **Theme system** - made land available to peasants who gave military service.
- 700s, 900s, and 1100s: Byzantine authorities limited land accumulation to make it more fair for peasants.
- However, wealthy landowners continued to make larger estates, transforming peasants into a very dependent social class so that there were very few free peasants by the 1400s.

## Decline of the Free Peasantry

- Large estates had military and financial implications.
- Financially, they did not contribute as much to the empire's taxes as small peasants did due to the wealthy owners' influence.
- Declining free peasantry made it harder to find military recruits.
  - Large landowners did raise militaries but they did not deploy them for imperial use.
- All of this combined to create a lot of political, military, and economic difficulties for the Byzantines during the last three centuries of existence.

## Industry and Trade

- Byzantium remained wealthy despite economic and social problems.
- This is due to its productive capacity and Constantinople's importance to trade.

## Manufacturing Enterprises

- Constantinople became a very important manufacturing center, home to many artisans and crafts workers, as well as tons of politicians.
  - Enjoyed a reputation for glassware, linen and woolen textiles, gems, jewelry, and gold and silver pieces.
- **Silkworms** made their way to the empire in the 700s, and was so valuable to the economy that it was very closely regulated to avoid monopolies.

## Trade

- Constantinople was in control of trade in the western part of Eurasia.
- Traded a lot with Muslim lands.
- The **bezant**, the Byzantine gold coin, was the standard currency for the Mediterranean basin from

700s through 1300s.

- Served as a western anchor to revive the classical Silk Road.
- Byzantine imports:
  - China: Silk and porcelain
  - India/southeast Asia: spices and gems
  - Persia: Carpets
  - Woolen textiles: Western Europe
  - Russia and Scandinavia: timber, furs, honey, amber, and slaves
- Byzantines redistributed most foreign merchandise, often adding to its value with further processing in the process (i.e. fashioned jewelry out of Indian gems, dying cloth from western Europe).

### Organization of Trade

- Banks and business partnerships fueled Byzantine trade.
- Banks gave loans to budding businesses to allow merchants to trade without large amounts of wealth.
- Merchants also made partnerships to pool resources and limit risks.
- Dynamic commercial economy.

### Urban Life

- Constantinople was so grand that it was just referred to as "*the City*" in Byzantium.
- Grand imperial palace, sculptures, wine-spouting golden fountains.

### Housing in Constantinople

- Aristocrats had huge palaces with courtyards, reception halls, libraries, chapels, rooms, and servants + slaves.
  - 4,388 mansions by 600s.
- **Women** did not participate in social gatherings due to fears about female honor (especially when alcohol was involved... woooo weeee).
- Less privileged classes:
  - Artisans/crafts workers lived in rooms above their shops.
  - Clerks and government officials lived in multistory apartments.
  - Workers/poor people had rickety and dangerous tenements and shared kitchens and bathrooms.

### Attractions of Constantinople

- Baths - centers of relaxation, exercise, and hygienic bathing.
- Taverns and restaurants - Places for social gatherings, and checkers, chess, and dice games.
- Mass entertainment - the **Hippodrome**, a large stadium where people watched athletic matches, wild animal contests, and circuses with clowns, jugglers, acrobats, and dwarfs.

### Greens and Blues

- Most popular pastime: Chariot races that occurred in the Hippodrome.
- Problem! Two factions, the Greens and Blues, bet against each other creating huge rivalries.
  - Often fought in the streets, and influenced imperial officials over a group. These became political factions.
  - In 532, they seized control of the Hippodrome and declared a new emperor!!!
  - Belisarius shut it down after killing thousands and this destroyed the city, so Justinian rebuilt it to greater glory.
- By the late 800s, the rivalry faded.

## Classical Heritage and Orthodox Christianity

### The Legacy of Classical Greece

- Official language of the empire switched from Latin to Greek in the 500s.
- Philosophy and literature of Greece and New Testament, both Greek works, influenced Byzantine Empire.

### Byzantine Education

- Government needed large amounts of intelligent, literate people.
- State-organized school system offered primary education in reading, writing, and grammar.
- Supplemented by studies of classical Greek literature, philosophy, and science.
- Peasants did not get education but were widely literate.

### Byzantine Scholarship

- Scholars concentrated on the humanities - literature, history, philosophy - instead of natural sciences and medicine.
- Preserved and transmitted classical legacy of Greece.
- Almost all surviving Greek literature and philosophy is due to the Byzantines.

### The Byzantine Church

- Paganism was still rampant until Justinian forced all to move to Christianity.
- Teaching of classical Greek religion was banned.

### Church and State

- Byzantine church controlled church teachings and policies.
- Caesaropapist emperors participated in religious and theological matters.
- Council of Nicaea - organized by Constantine to validate beliefs.
  - Proclaimed Arian Christianity to be heresy under Constantine's influence.
  - Constantine's preferred view was that Jesus was both mortal and manifested God himself, and he made the Council support this.
- Church was a department of the state.
  - Emperors appointed individuals became patriarchs (pope of Byzantine church).
  - Priests and bishops gave sermons to encourage loyalty to imperial authorities.

### Iconoclasm

- Byzantines produced icons - paintings of Jesus and other religious figures.
- Emperor Leo III - Did not like this and destroyed them.
- Triggered debates for a century until 843, when iconoclasts decided to back off.
  - Demonstrated Byzantine emperor's involvement in religion.

### Greek Philosophy and Byzantine Theology

- Byzantines reconciled Christianity with classical Greek philosophy.
- Illustrates the continuing influence of Greek philosophy.
- Byzantium built cultural and religious tradition on a solid classical basis.

### Monasticism and Popular Piety

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