Chapter 13

The Commonwealth of Byzantium
The Early Byzantine Empire

- Capital: Byzantium
- On the Bosporus
- Commercial, strategic value of location
- Constantine names capital after himself (Constantinople), moves capital there 340 CE
- 1453 falls to Turks, renamed Istanbul
The Later Roman Empire and Byzantium

- Byzantine Empire inherits Roman Empire after fall of Rome in 5th c. CE
- Eastern territories remain major power until 13th c. CE
The Later Roman Empire

- Roman infrastructure in place
  - Roads, institutional hierarchies
- Challenges from strong Persian empire (Sassanid dynasty, 226-641 CE)
- Invasions of Germanic peoples
Caesaropapism

- Power centralized in figure of Emperor
- Christian leader cannot claim divinity, rather divine authority
- Political rule
- Involved in Religious rule as well
- Authority absolute
The Byzantine Court

- Etiquette reinforces authority of Emperor
  - Royal purple
  - Prostration
  - Mechanical devices designed to inspire awe
Justinian (527-565 CE)

- The “sleepless emperor”
- Wife Theodora as advisor
  - Background: circus performer
- Uses army to contain tax riots, ambitious construction program
  - Hagia Sophia
- Law Code definitive for centuries
Byzantine Conquests

- General Belisarius recaptures much of western Roman Empire under Justinian
- Unable to consolidate control of territories
- Withdrew to defend empire from Sassanids, Slavs
The Byzantine empire and its neighbors
527-554 C.E.
Islamic Conquests and Byzantine Revival

- 7th century Arab Muslim expansion
- Besieged Byzantium 674-678, 717-718
- Defense made possible through use of “greek fire”
Imperial Organization

- **Themes** (provinces) under control of generals
- Military administration
- Control from central imperial government
- Soldiers from peasant class, rewarded with land grants
Tensions with Western Europe

- Church
  - Byzantine: Greek; Roman: Latin
  - Conflicts over hierarchical control
- Fealty of Germanic peoples
  - Roman pope crowns Charlemagne in 800, a challenge to Byzantine authority
Byzantine Economy and Society

- Constantinople largest city in Europe, 5th-13th c.
- Dependent on small landholders, free peasants
- Earlier large landholdings destroyed by invasions in 6th-7th centuries
- *Theme* system rewards soldiers with land grants
Decline of the Free Peasantry

- Large landholdings on the increase
- Reduces tax revenues, recruits to military
- Last three centuries indicate steady decline of economy
Manufacturing and Trade

- Trade routes bring key technologies, e.g. silk industry
- Advantage of location causes crafts and industry to expand after 6th century
- Tax revenues from silk route
- Banking services develop
Urban Life

- Aristocrats: palaces; artisans: apartments; working poor: communal living spaces
- Hippodrome
  - Chariot races, “greens vs. blues”
  - Politically inspired rioting
Orthodox Christianity

- Legacy of Classical Greece
  - Greek replaces Latin after 6th c. CE; language of New Testament
- Byzantine education sponsors development of large literate class for state bureaucracy
  - Training in classical canon
The Byzantine Church

- Church and state closely aligned
- Council of Nicea (325) bans Arian movement
  - Human/divine nature of Jesus
  - Constantine favors Arians, but supports Nicean condemnation
- Byzantine Emperors appoint Patriarchs
- Caesaropapism creates dissent in church
Iconoclasm

- Emperor Leo III (r. 717-741 CE)
- Destruction of icons after 726
- Popular protest, rioting
- Policy abandoned 843
Greek Philosophy and Byzantine Theology

- Attempt to reconcile Greek philosophy with Judeo-Christianity
- Constantine establishes school to apply philosophical methods to religious questions
Ascetism

- Hermit-like existence
- Celibacy
- Fasting
- Prayer
- St. Simeon Stylite
  - Lived atop pillar for years
Byzantine Monasticism and St. Basil (329-379 CE)

- Patriarch of Constantinople reforms monasteries
  - Communal living
  - Hierarchical structure
- Mt. Athos
  - No women, female animals allowed
Tensions between Eastern and Western Christianity

- Ritual disputes
  - Beards on clergy
  - Leavened bread for Mass
- Theological disputes
  - Iconoclasm
  - Nature of the Trinity
Schism

- Arguments over hierarchy, jurisdiction
- Autonomy of Patriarchs, or Primacy of Rome?
- 1054 Patriarch of Constantinople and Pope of Rome excommunicate each other
  - East: Orthodox Church
  - West: Roman Catholic
Social Problems in the Byzantine Empire

- Generals of *themes* become allied with local aristocrats
  - Intermarry, create class of elite
- Occasional rebellions vs. Imperial Rule
Challenges from the West

- Western European economic development
- Normans from Scandinavia press on Byzantine territories
- Crusades of 12th-13th centuries rampage through Byzantine territory
  - Constantinople sacked, 1204
Challenges from the East

- Muslim Saljuqs invade Anatolia
  - Threatens grain supply
- Defeat Byzantine army in 1071, creates civil conflict
- Period of steady decline until Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople in 1453
  - Renamed Istanbul
The Byzantine empire and its neighbors about 1100 C.E.
Influence on Slavic Cultures

- Relations from 6th c. CE
- Bulgaria influenced culturally, politically
- Saints Cyril and Methodius
  - Create Cyrillic alphabet
- Slavic lands develop orientation to Byzantium
Kievan Rus’

- Conversion of Prince Vladimir, 989
- Byzantine culture influences development of Slavic cultures
- Distinctively Slavic Orthodox church develops
- Eventual heir to Byzantium