TELESCOPING THE TIMES Byzantines, Russians, and Turks Interact, 500–1500

CHAPTER OVERVIEW The eastern part of the old Roman Empire maintained a brilliant civilization centered in Constantinople. With a separate Christian church, it developed a culture different from that of western Europe. Slavs and Vikings joined to create a new culture in Russia, which was influenced by the Eastern Church. Turks entered the area, converted to Islam, and made their own empire.

1 Byzantium Becomes the New Rome

KEY IDEA Constantinople ruled an eastern empire that survived for over a thousand years.

In the A.D. 300s, the Roman emperor Constantine was worried about the growing power of German tribes. He moved the Roman Empire's capital to the east, where he could better meet that threat. The location also put him closer to the eastern provinces of the empire, which were richer than those in the west. He built a great new capital city, Constantinople, on the site of the old port city of Byzantium. Constantinople became the center of an empire in the eastern area of the Mediterranean Sea that lasted for hundreds of years. It was called the Byzantine Empire.

The Roman Empire was officially divided in 395. The western area was overrun by German tribes. It ceased to exist after 476. However, the Byzantine eastern part remained strong. In 527, Justinian became the Byzantine emperor. He sent an army to try to regain control of Italy and restore the Roman Empire once again. His army managed to win almost all of Italy and much of Spain from the Germans. By around 550, Justinian ruled over almost all of the old Roman Empire's territory.

Under the direction of Justinian, legal experts created a complete code of laws based on the laws of ancient Rome. This body of civil law—the Justinian Code—served the empire for 800 years.

Justinian also worked at making Constantinople a strong and beautiful capital. He built high, strong walls to protect the city from attack by either land or sea. He built a huge palace, public baths, courts, schools, hospitals, and many churches. The main street of the city ran from the emperor's palace past public buildings and to the city walls. It was lined with shops and open-air markets, where people bought and sold goods from Asia, Africa, and Europe. Another huge building was used to stage chariot races and circus acts.

In 532, the city erupted in riots against the emperor. Justinian thought about leaving the city, but his wife, the empress Theodora, convinced him to use the army to fight back. The troops regained control of the city, killing thousands of rioters. A church called Hagia Sophia ("Holy Wisdom" in Greek) had been destroyed by the mobs. Justinian rebuilt it to become the most beautiful church in the Christian world.

The empire faced further dangers. A terrible illness, probably caused by rats, broke out in 542. It killed thousands of people and returned every 8 to 12 years until about 700. The many deaths that this illness caused weakened the Byzantine Empire.

Many enemies attacked the empire time and time again over the centuries. German tribes, the Sassanid Persians, and later Muslim armies all tried to gain control of Byzantine land. Constantinople remained safe at this time despite many attacks. Eventually, though, the empire itself shrank. By 1350, the empire included only the capital city and lands in the Balkans—a part of southeastern Europe.

Although it was based on the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire had developed a culture all its own. Few people in the Byzantine Empire spoke the Latin of the old Roman Empire. They spoke Greek and belonged to the Eastern Orthodox Church, not the Catholic Church that was centered in Rome. The Eastern Church was led by an official named the patriarch, the leading bishop. However, even he had to obey the emperor. Slowly the Eastern and Roman churches grew further apart. In 1054, the split became permanent. Services in the Eastern Church were conducted in Greek, not in Latin as in the Roman Church. The Eastern Church also allowed priests to marry and let its members have divorces.

Some missionaries traveled from the Byzantine Empire to the north. They met the Slavic peoples who lived in Russia and converted them to the
eastern form of Christianity. In this way, the influence of the Byzantine Empire entered Russia as that nation began to form.

**Russians Adapt Byzantine Culture**

**KEY IDEA** Russia grew out of a blending of Slavic and Byzantine cultures with Eastern Orthodox traditions.

The Slavs lived in what is today eastern Russia. The area stretched from the Ural Mountains to the Black Sea on the south and the Baltic Sea in the north. The southern regions are hilly grasslands. The northern area is flat and covered with trees or swamps. Slow-moving rivers in the region have moved people and goods for centuries.

The Slavs lived in the forest areas, working as farmers and traders. In the 800s, some Vikings called the Rus came from the north. They built forts along the rivers and blended with the Slavs. They founded the cities of Novgorod and Kiev and became the rulers of the land. They began to trade in Constantinople, bringing furs, timber, and the Slavs who were their subjects. They sold these people as slaves—in fact, the word slave comes from Slav.

Over time, the Vikings adopted the Slavs' culture. While divisions between Vikings and Slavs disappeared, the society was sharply split between the great mass of peasants and the few nobles.

In the 980s, the ruler of Russia—Vladimir—converted to Byzantine Christianity. He also ordered all of his subjects to adopt this religion. Now more than trade linked Russia to the Byzantine Empire. Russia also looked to Constantinople for religious leadership. Teachers from the empire gave the Russian people instructions in the new religion. The king liked the idea that the ruler of the empire was also the head of the church.

Under the influence of Byzantine culture, Kiev grew to be a large, wealthy, and cultured city. The state grew, as Vladimir took land to the west and to the north. His son, Yaroslav the Wise, proved an able ruler as well. Under him, Kiev even more wealthy through trade and alliances made with western nations.

Then the state centered in Kiev began to have problems. The sons of Yaroslav fought one another for control of the land after his death in 1054. Trade declined, cutting the wealth of Kiev. Then worse troubles appeared. Nomadic fighters from central Asia, the Mongols, began to conquer many different areas. In the middle 1200s, they reached Kiev. They quickly overran the Russian state, killing many people. The Mongols held control of the area for more than 200 years.

While the Mongols had been fierce conquerors, they were not harsh rulers. As long as the Russian people did not rebel against the Mongols, they could keep their customs. The Mongols allowed the Russians to continue following their Eastern Christian religion. The Church helped settle any differences between the Mongol rulers and the Russian people. The Mongols made the Russians pay tribute, a sum of money that was owed every year. They used Russian nobles to collect the tribute. One of those nobles, Alexander Nevsky, grew to power. His heirs became princes of Moscow, which they later used as a base of power.

Control by the Mongols had important effects on Russia. First, it isolated the Russians from western Europe. As a result, Russian society developed in its own way. Second, rule by the Mongols united many different areas of Russia under one central authority. Before then, what is now Russia had been ruled by a number of different princes. Third, Mongol rule led to the rise of Moscow.

That city had a good location near three major rivers: the Dnieper, Don, and Volga. By the 1320s, under Prince Ivan I of Moscow, this position could be used to expand the power of Moscow. Ivan served the Mongols by crushing a local rebellion. In return, the Mongol ruler gave him the right to collect the tribute in all of European Russia. Now the most powerful Russian prince, Ivan I became known as "Ivan Moneybags."

He increased the influence of Moscow by persuading the leader of the Russian church in Kiev to move to Moscow. Over time, Ivan and his successors added to the land that Moscow controlled. In the late 1400s, under Ivan III, Russia grew to be a mighty empire. In 1453, the Byzantine Empire had fallen, defeated by the Turks. In 1472, Ivan married the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, linking himself to that historic throne. From then on, he called himself czar, which was the Russian version of Caesar. In 1480, Ivan finally broke with the Mongols. He refused to pay that year's tribute. Because the Mongols did not respond militarily, Russia had in effect won its independence from Mongol rule.
The Seljuk Empire collapsed quickly, as a series of weak rulers were unable to maintain it. One reason was the growing pressure from western Europe, whose rulers sent armies on the Crusades in the effort to capture the lands of ancient Palestine, which were sacred to Christians. The First Crusade began in 1095, and the Christian armies captured Jerusalem. Not quite 100 years later, the Turks retook the city.

Just when the Crusades became less of a threat to the Muslim world, the Mongols moved in from the east. They overran vast stretches of territory and captured Baghdad in 1258. They killed the last caliph and took control of the government from the Seljuk Turks.

Review
1. Recognizing Main Idea Describe two accomplishments of the emperor Justinian.
2. Recognizing Facts and Details What cultural factors separated the Byzantine Empire from western Europe?
3. What cultural influences combined to produce Russian culture?
4. What effects did Mongol rule have on Russian history?
5. Perceiving Relationships How was the Turkish adoption of culture similar to the adoption of culture by the Russians?
6. Who were the Rus and how did they treat the Slavs?
7. Why is the city of Moscow so important?
8. Who were the Turks?
9. Give some examples of cultural diffusion between the Turks & the Persians.
10. How did the actions of the Seljuk Turks contribute to the start of the Crusades?