

# Civilization in Eastern Europe: Byzantium and Orthodox Europe

## The Byzantine Empire

- Constantine built **Constantinople** as his capital in the 4th century, and the city became the capital of the Byzantine Empire when the Roman Empire split. Complex administration around a remote emperor, who was surrounded by elaborate ceremonies, increasingly defined the empire's political style. Eventually Greek became the empire's official language.
- **Justinian's** positive contributions to the Byzantine Empire lay in rebuilding Constantinople, including the remarkable **Hagia Sophia**, and **systematizing the Roman legal code**. His 6th-century military gains (made with the help of his general, **Belisarius**) were accomplished at great cost.
- Justinian's successors were able to hold off **Arab invaders** from the east ("Greek fire" was instrumental in this process), but **the empire's size and strength was greatly reduced**. The empire also successfully defeated challenges from **Bulgaria**.
- The Byzantine political system had remarkable similarities to the earlier patterns in China. The emperor was held to be **ordained by God, head of church as well as state**. Women could (and did) serve as emperor. An **elaborate bureaucracy** organized the empire militarily, socially, and economically, while cultural life blended Hellenism and Orthodox Christianity.
- In 1054 longstanding disagreements came to a head, and **the church split into two traditions**: one Western (or Roman Catholic), and one Eastern (or Orthodox).
- The Byzantine Empire entered **a long period of decline** following the church schism. It was able to survive by careful diplomacy until **Turks overran Constantinople in 1453**.

## The Spread of Civilization in Eastern Europe

- Christian missionaries like **Cyril** and **Methodius** helped bring Orthodoxy northward into Russia and the Balkans, and created a new alphabet, **Cyrillic**.
- Roman Catholicism also competed for converts in eastern Europe. **Jews**, who valued education and literacy, migrated into the region in large numbers, gaining strength in local commerce.

- **Kievan Rus'**, which began along the trade route between Scandinavia and Constantinople, gained influence and power after **Vladimir** converted to Orthodox Christianity around 1000. The state soon developed its own **Russian Orthodox Church**, and **Yaroslav** issued a unifying code of laws.
- Russian culture **borrowed much from Byzantium**, though the bureaucracy and education system were not as developed. **Boyars**, the Russian nobility, were less powerful than their western counterparts.
- Mongol invasions (the **Tartars**), aided by rival princes and the fall of the Byzantine Empire, ended this period of Russian history.
- This cut the region off from western contacts, stifling economic, political, and cultural sophistication.

### *Multiple-Choice Questions*

1. Unlike the Romans in the western part of the empire, the eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire
  - (A) was never invaded or threatened by pastoral nomads.
  - (B) recognized the political influence of the Pope and Catholic Church.
  - (C) continued to use Latin as its chief language until its fall.
  - (D) became Muslim.
  - (E) did not succumb to Germanic invasions in the 5th century.
2. As had Hammurabi's Code (Mesopotamia), Justinian's Code (Byzantine)
  - (A) dealt primarily with church law and religious issues.
  - (B) became the basic law code for his state, and influenced future law codes.
  - (C) led to internal disruptions and faced harsh opposition.
  - (D) greatly influenced the laws of Islam.
  - (E) deviated sharply from previous legal traditions when it sought to create a new tradition.
3. Under the emperors after Justinian, the chief concern of the Byzantine state was
  - (A) religious heresy and controversy.
  - (B) the overtaxation of the peasants and frequent peasant rebellions.
  - (C) the defense against Slavs, Russians, and Arab invaders.
  - (D) the conversion of the Slavs to Christianity.
  - (E) the support of the arts, including new building projects such as the Hagia Sophia.
4. Although Byzantine society was patriarchal,
  - (A) Greek traditions accorded women great freedom and influence.
  - (B) Roman traditions granted women extensive legal rights.
  - (C) contacts with Islam led the Byzantines to protect women's rights.
  - (D) women could inherit the imperial throne.
  - (E) wars kept men and husbands away from their traditional societal functions.
5. The schism between the Catholic and Orthodox churches was due to all of these issues EXCEPT:
  - (A) papal interference in Byzantine political and religious affairs.
  - (B) clerical celibacy; Catholic priests could not marry but the Orthodox could.
  - (C) dispute over the type of bread to be used in religious ceremonies.
  - (D) the Byzantine state controlled the church in the eastern lands.
  - (E) Muslim influence on the Orthodox branch of Christianity.

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6. All of these peoples and states contributed to the destruction of the Byzantine Empire EXCEPT the:
- (A) Kievan Rus.
  - (B) Seljuk Turks.
  - (C) independent Slavic states in the Balkans such as Bulgaria and Serbia.
  - (D) Western crusaders and the Roman Catholic Church.
  - (E) Italian trading city-states such as Venice and Genoa.
7. Christianity spread to the Balkans and Russia through
- (A) mass migration by Greeks to these regions.
  - (B) forced conversions of the Slavs by the victorious Byzantine armies.
  - (C) military conquest.
  - (D) Christian merchants who intermarried and settled amongst non-Christians.
  - (E) missionary activities.
8. Unlike the Roman Catholic church, Byzantine Orthodox missionaries
- (A) were frequently merchants and traded while they preached.
  - (B) permitted people to use local languages in religious services and literature.
  - (C) were sent out by the religious, not political, authorities.
  - (D) never intermarried into the local populations.
  - (E) rarely established monasteries, hospitals, and convents to further conversions.
9. The first state in Russia arose when
- (A) nomadic pastoralists established a sedentary Jewish state.
  - (B) Byzantine missionaries converted Russian farmers.
  - (C) Scandinavian traders set up a government along their trade route.
  - (D) Arabs who conquered the area established a province of the Muslim empire.
  - (E) Catholic influences from western Europe invaded the region.
10. Byzantine collapse and Tartar control led to
- (A) different sects of Christianity in postclassical Europe.
  - (B) Mongols and Turks ruling eastern and southern Europe peacefully for centuries.
  - (C) Germanic cultural domination in western Europe.
  - (D) a profound disruption of eastern European social structure.
  - (E) a long period of anarchic warfare in the former Byzantine Empire.

### ***Free-Response Question***

*In what ways was Vladimir's conversion to Christianity a key event in eastern European history?*

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## **ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS**

### ***Multiple-Choice Questions***

- **1. (E) is correct.** In fact, the Byzantine Empire survived until 1453.
- **2. (B) is correct.** Updated by later emperors, the code ultimately helped spread Roman legal principles in various parts of Europe.
- **3. (C) is correct.** Each of these groups attacked Byzantine supremacy in the years following Justinian's rule.

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- **4. (D) is correct.** The empresses Theodora and Zoë demonstrate the power that some Byzantine women enjoyed.
  - **5. (E) is correct.** The schism was due to disagreements about Christian doctrine and policy; Islam's influence on Christian leaders was minimal at best.
  - **6. (A) is correct.** Relations between Byzantium and Kievan Rus were generally peaceful and trade-oriented. Both empires practiced Orthodox Christianity.
  - **7. (E) is correct.** Among these missionaries were Cyril and Methodius, who created the Cyrillic alphabet.
  - **8. (B) is correct.** Roman Catholics required Latin to be used in church services, but Orthodox believers could use local languages.
  - **9. (C) is correct.** Norse traders set up Kiev along the trade route between Scandinavia and Constantinople.
  - **10. (D) is correct.** This disruption put eastern Europe at a disadvantage in terms of political, economic, and cultural sophistication, though continuity was not entirely lost.

### ***Free-Response Essay Sample Response***

*In what ways was Vladimir's conversion to Christianity a key event in eastern European history?*

Few events were as seminal as the Russian king Vladimir's conversion to Christianity in the late 10th century. The event increased Byzantine influence on Russian culture, religion, and politics, and helped to unify the relatively new state of Russia. The two states became important trading partners and occasional military allies. Vladimir's conversion also extended the boundaries of Orthodoxy; Roman Catholicism remained a western European phenomenon, while Islam did not advance into the region.