

CHAPTER  
**11**

## CHAPTERS IN BRIEF

# Byzantines, Russians, and Turks Interact, 500–1500

## Summary

**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 The Byzantine Empire

**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 900 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 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 plague 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 a people known as the Slavs 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.

## 2 The Russian Empire

**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 grew 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 deeper 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.

As long as the Russian people did not rebel, the Mongols allowed them to 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 the city of Moscow.

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.

## 3 Turkish Empires Rise in Anatolia

**KEY IDEA** *Turkish people converted to Islam and founded new empires that would renew Muslim civilization.*

The Turks were a nomadic people from the vast grasslands of central Asia. They lived by herding sheep and goats and engaging in raids and trade with the settled peoples of the Abbasid Empire.

Beginning in the 900s, they moved into the lands of that empire and began converting to Islam.

These fierce nomads were highly skilled fighters. The rulers of the empire began to buy them as children to train them for their armies. Turks became an important political factor in the empire. Turkish soldiers many times removed caliphs from the throne in Baghdad and put new rulers in place.

While this Turkish influence was growing, the empire itself was shrinking. Local leaders in several areas split off to establish their own states. In 945, a Persian army seized control of the empire. Members of the Abbasid family continued to hold the position of caliph and act as religious leaders. The new rulers of the government were from outside the dynasty. They were called sultans.

As these changes took place, larger and larger numbers of Turks settled in the empire. They were called Seljuk Turks after the name of the family that led them. In 1055, the Seljuks captured Baghdad and took control of the government. In the next few decades, the Seljuks used their force to take land away from another empire—the Byzantine Empire. They won almost all of Anatolia, the peninsula where modern Turkey now sits. In this position, they stood almost at the gates of Constantinople.

In ruling their empire, the Seljuks relied on the government experience of Persians. They placed their capital in Persian lands and gave Persians important positions in the government. In return, Persians became loyal supporters of Turkish rule.

The Turks also adopted Persian culture. They looked to Persian scholars to teach them the proper way to follow Islam. They began to use the Persian language for art and education. The Turkish rulers even took the Persian word for “king”—*shah*—as their title. One of the greatest Seljuk rulers, Malik Shah, became a patron of the arts. He made the capital city more beautiful by building many mosques, or Muslim houses of worship. Persian became so important that Arabic—the language of the Qur’an—almost died out in Seljuk lands.

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. **Determining Main Ideas** Describe two accomplishments of the emperor Justinian.
  2. **Contrasting** What cultural factors separated the Byzantine Empire from western Europe?
- Analyzing Causes and Recognizing Effects**
3. What cultural influences combined to produce Russian culture?
  4. What effects did Mongol rule have on Russian history?
  5. **Comparing** How was the Turkish adoption of culture similar to the adoption of culture by the Russians?