

**GLOBAL HISTORY I
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS
DUE FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 2009**

I. What to Do About the Christians?

The Roman empire was generally tolerant of minority religions, but as you read in this chapter, this did not extend to the new religion of Christianity. As governor of the Roman province of Bithynia (modern Turkey), the writer Pliny the Younger (Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus) had to deal with the problem of punishing Christians. Pliny, well known for his letter writing, asked advice from his boss—the emperor Trajan. ♦ *As you read their letters, written about A.D. 110, consider what they show about official Roman policy at the time. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

What to Do About the Christians?

Pliny to Trajan

... I have never been present when Christians have been put on trial. So I do not know how they are usually punished. I am also not sure what efforts I have to make to go out and find them ...

This is what I have done with those who were named to me as Christians. I had them brought in and asked them face-to-face if they were Christians. If they said "Yes," I asked them a second time. If they still said "Yes," I asked them a third time. And this time I threatened them with punishment. If they still said "Yes," I ordered them to be beheaded. ...

... There are some people who say that they are not Christians. They also say they have never been Christians. When I get these in court they repeat after me Roman prayers to Roman gods and to your statue. I have your statue brought in with the statues of the gods. They then burn incense and offer wine to the gods. ... There are some people who say they were once Christian.

I have put off any more trials and I have run to you for help. I must have your advice because there are so many people who are at risk. ...

Trajan to Pliny

You did the right thing, my Secundus, in "shaking out" the cases of those who were named to you as Christians. There is no one rule which will cover everything. The matter is so complex. But the Christians must not be hunted out. If they are named and proved Christians, they must be punished. If someone says he is not a Christian and shows it by praying to our Roman gods, then grant him a pardon. He has repented and that will do. Do this even to those who may be suspected of having been Christians in the past.

Do not take any notice of lists of names that have no significance. They must not be used as evidence in a court of law. That sort of thing is a very poor example to others. It is not the sort of thing I want to be remembered for as Emperor.

Source: *Pliny, A selection of his letters*, trans. Clarence Greig (Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Questions to Think About

1. What punishment did Pliny impose on those who insisted they were Christians? Was he thinking about being more or less severe toward them?
2. What test did Trajan approve for giving accused Christians a pardon?
3. **Identify Assumptions** (a) What can you tell from these two letters about the attitudes of Roman officials toward Christianity? Do you think they opposed its beliefs or simply found it a threat to the unity of the empire? (b) Why was Trajan opposed to actively "hunting out" Christians?

II. Reading - The Rise of Christianity and the Fall of Rome

THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY

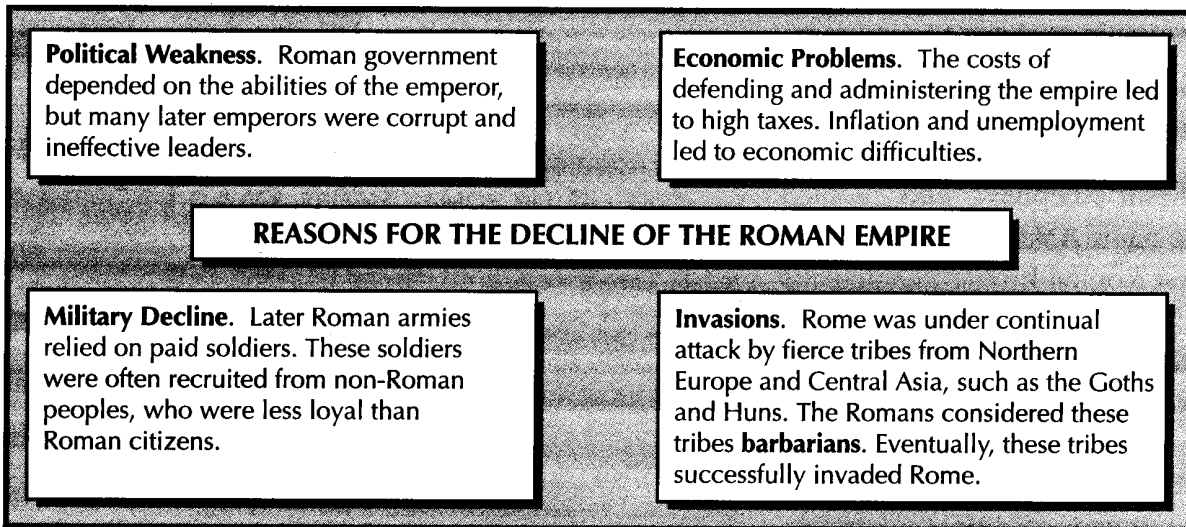
The Romans permitted the existence of many religions throughout their empire. However, they expected conquered peoples to worship their emperor as divine (*godlike*). Jews and Christians refused, despite facing persecution and death. The Romans destroyed the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and drove many Jews out of Palestine (*Israel*). Many Jews fled to Europe, Persia, and North Africa. Despite attempts by the Roman government to eliminate Christianity, this new religion slowly began to spread. In the 4th century, Emperor **Constantine** became a Christian. Not long afterwards, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire.



The Colosseum, the largest amphitheater of the ancient world, where the slaughter of early Christians provided entertainment for the Roman masses.

THE DECLINE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Starting in the third century, the Roman empire began to weaken. Historians offer several explanations for this decline.

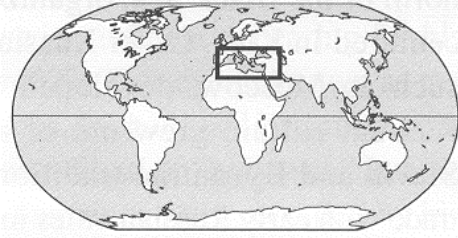


THE COLLAPSE OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE

In 284 A.D., an attempt was made to reverse the empire's decline. To allow it to be governed more efficiently, the empire was divided into two parts: east and west. The Eastern empire was governed from Constantinople (*present-day Istanbul*). In the late 300s, the **Huns** from Central Asia began invading the Western empire. Germanic tribes, in turn, pushed towards Rome. A period of great turmoil followed, as invaders burned estates and seized Roman lands. In 476 A.D., the last Roman emperor was overthrown in the West. However, the Eastern empire, later known as the **Byzantine empire**, survived for another thousand years.

III. Reading – The Byzantine Empire, 330-1453

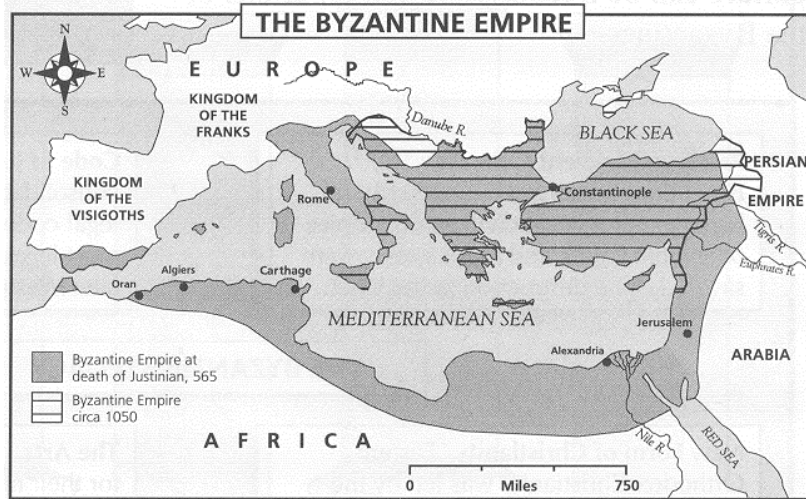
Because of the threats faced by Rome, in 330 A.D. Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Roman empire from Rome to Byzantium — a Greek city in the eastern part of the empire. Constantine renamed the city **Constantinople** after himself.



THE EMERGENCE OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Although the western half of the Roman empire collapsed in the 5th century, the eastern half of the empire, which became known as the **Byzantine empire**, survived for a thousand years beyond the fall of Rome. At the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the empire was a natural center for trade. Silk and spices from the east, furs from Russia, and grains, olives, and wines from the empire itself brought great wealth. The emperor held absolute power.

The Byzantines developed their own form of Christianity. They were greatly influenced by Greek culture, and spoke mainly Greek. The Bishop of Constantinople, known as the **Patriarch**, did not accept the Pope in Rome as his superior. The break between the two churches, became official in 1054 when each leader excommunicated the other.



The eastern branch of the Christian church became known as the **Eastern Orthodox Church**, while the western church continued to be known as the **Roman Catholic Church**.



Emperor Justinian and Attendants
Byzantine tile mosaic
540-547 A.D.

DECLINE OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

In its early centuries, the Byzantine empire ruled over all of the Balkan Peninsula, the Middle East, and parts of Italy. The emperor ruled with a centralized army and bureaucracy (*government officials*). But the Byzantines were almost continuously at war with the Slavs, the Persians, and the Muslims. The empire eventually began to unravel from continuous attack. The final decline of the Byzantine empire began when city-states in northern Italy began to compete with Constantinople for Mediterranean trade. By the 1440s, the great Byzantine empire was reduced to a small area around the capital city itself. In 1453, the city of Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Turks.

THE BYZANTINE INFLUENCE ON RUSSIA

Russia began as an organized state in the 800s. A people known as the Slavs, from the forests north of the Black Sea, organized a kingdom centered in Kiev. Other Russian city-states, such as Moscow, developed to the north. Russian culture grew out of a blending of Slavic and Byzantine traditions. Byzantine trade with early Russian cities influenced Russia in significant ways. Byzantine culture, such as Orthodox Christianity and the Cyrillic alphabet, were introduced into Russia. In addition, the absolute power held by Byzantine emperors became a model for future Russian rulers. The roots of Eastern European culture can be traced to the contributions of the Byzantines.



Preserved Ancient Cultures. The Byzantines preserved the rich cultural heritage of classical civilization: copies of ancient Greek and Roman texts were saved despite destruction in the West.

Code of Justinian. Emperor Justinian consolidated Roman laws into a single legal code which served as a guide on most legal questions. It greatly influenced later Western legal systems.

THE BYZANTINE LEGACY

New Form of Christianity. Eastern Orthodox Christianity was led by the Patriarch and the emperor in Constantinople, rather than the Pope in Rome.

The Arts. The Byzantines were renowned for their mosaics, painted icons, gold jewelry, and silks. Constantinople's cathedral, **Hagia Sophia**, is considered one of the world's most beautiful buildings.