



Flag of the Byzantine Empire

Hi guys!

I have created this pdf as an attempt to make getting to the sources easier.

I have three sources for you to check out before Friday's class.

They are all included in this pdf file in order. Don't worry about bringing copies to class if you don't want to waste the paper\ink.

I realize everyone is really busy at this point in the semester, and I am getting these sources to you a little late so I intentionally made them short. You should spend no more than 15 minutes going over this content. I have also abridged the two written sources from their original in an attempt to save you some time. Good luck and see you Friday!

Source One: Selections from Procopius' *Secret History*

Source Two: Selections from the Washington State University page about the Byzantine Empire

Source Three: Image of *Mosaic of Justinian and Retinue* at Apse Entry, San Vitale, Ravenna, c. 546 CE

Source One: Selections from Procopius' *Secret History*

[Full original text: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/procop-anec1.html>]

Procopius [c.490/510-c.560s] is the most important source for information about the reign of the emperor Justinian. He wrote a number of official histories, including the Buildings and On the Wars. He also left a "Secret History" [Anecdota] which was a massive attack on the character of Justinian and his wife Theodora. Parts are so vitriolic, not to say pornographic, that for some time translations from Greek were only available into Latin ["the decent obscurity of an ancient tongue"].

Now such was Justinian in appearance; but his character was something I could not fully describe. For he was at once villainous and amenable; as people say colloquially, a moron. He was never truthful with anyone, but always guileful in what he said and did, yet easily hoodwinked by any who wanted to deceive him. His nature was an unnatural mixture of folly and wickedness. What in olden times a peripatetic philosopher said was also true of him, that opposite qualities combine in a man as in the mixing of colors. I will try to portray him, however, insofar as I can fathom his complexity.

This Emperor, then, was deceitful, devious, false, hypocritical, two-faced, cruel, skilled in dissembling his thought, never moved to tears by either joy or pain, though he could summon them artfully at will when the occasion demanded, a liar always, not only offhand, but in writing, and when he swore sacred oaths to his subjects in their very hearing. Then he would immediately break his agreements and pledges, like the vilest of slaves, whom indeed only the fear of torture drives to confess their perjury. A faithless friend, he was a treacherous enemy, insane for murder and plunder, quarrelsome and revolutionary, easily led to anything, but never willing to listen to good counsel, quick to plan mischief and carry it out, but finding even the hearing of anything good distasteful to his ears.

As soon as Justinian came into power he turned everything upside down. Whatever had before been forbidden by law he now introduced into the government, while he revoked all established customs: as if he had been given the robes of an Emperor on the condition he would turn everything topsy-turvy. Existing offices he abolished, and invented new ones for the management of public affairs. He did the same thing to the laws and to the regulations of the army; and his reason was not any improvement of justice or any advantage, but simply that everything might be new and named after himself. And whatever was beyond his power to abolish, he renamed after himself anyway.

Of the plundering of property or the murder of men, no weariness ever overtook him. As soon as he had looted all the houses of the wealthy, he looked around for others; meanwhile throwing away the spoils of his previous robberies in subsidies to barbarians or senseless building extravagances. And when he had ruined perhaps myriads in this mad looting, he immediately sat down to plan how he could do likewise to others in even greater number.

END OF SOURCE ONE

Source Two: Selections from the Washington State University concerning the Byzantine Empire

[Full original text: <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MA/BYZ.HTM>]

It is not possible to effectually distinguish between the later empire in Rome and the Byzantine empire centered around Constantinople. For the Byzantines were the Roman Empire, not simply a continuation of it in the East. The capital city, Constantinople, had been founded as the capital of Rome by the Emperor Constantine, but a uniquely Greek or Byzantine character to the Roman Empire can be distinguished as early as Diocletian. When Rome was seized by Goths, this was a great blow to the Roman Empire, but it didn't effectively end it. Although Rome was under the control of foreigners who themselves claimed to be continuing the empire, the Byzantine empire continued as before, believing themselves to be the Roman Empire.

Over the centuries, however, Byzantium evolved into a very different civilization. The eastern Empire had always had a predominately Greek character, but the Byzantines through the course of the first millenium AD had to deal with cultural influences and political threats from European cultures, Asian cultures and, primarily, Islam after the seventh century.

Through the later Middle Ages, however, Byzantium both gradually declined politically and became more isolated from the rest of Europe. While the last centuries of the European Middle Ages saw the consolidation of the idea of Europe and the incorporation of European cultures into a larger, overarching European monoculture, Byzantium was left out of this new European concept. By the beginning of the modern period, when "Europe" had become a solid, cultural idea, Byzantine had come to an end with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.

Most historians consider the reign of Justinian (527-565) as marking a significant break with the Roman past. This is difficult to support—Justinian not only considered himself the emperor of all of Rome, including the territories occupied by the Goths, but also spoke Latin as his primary language.

After the fall of Rome, the Byzantine emperors never gave over the idea of reconquering Rome. They did, however, take a lesson from the fall of Rome and all throughout the fifth century, the Byzantine emperors wrought a series of administrative and financial reforms. They produced the single most extensive corpus of Roman law in 425 and reformed taxation dramatically. Most importantly, however, they did not entrust their military to German generals—this had been the downfall of the Latin portion of the empire. They could not,

however, maintain a powerful military—the loss of territory in the west had dramatically shrunk their financial resources.

Justinian was perhaps the last emperor that seriously entertained notions of reconquering the west—the institution of the western emperor fell permanently vacant in 476 and the Byzantine emperors claimed as theirs. His expeditions against Italy, however, failed. Although he conquered North Africa and retook Italy from the Ostrogoths, this Gothic War drained the Byzantine Empire of much-needed resources. Most importantly, the Gothic War devastated Italy economically. The economic destruction of Italy was so total that it destroyed Italian urban culture for centuries. The great cities of Rome and her allies would be abandoned as Italy would fall into a long period of backwardness. The impoverishment of Italy and the drain on Byzantium made it impossible for the Byzantines to hold Italy—only three years after the death of Justinian, the Italian territories fell into the hands of another Germanic tribe, the "Long Beards," or Langobardi (Lombards).

Justinian, however, is most famous for the body of laws that he promulgated—the *Corpus iuris civilis*. This was not only a great legal achievement in codifying Roman law, it was also the first systematic attempt to synthesize Roman law and jurisprudence with Christianity. Although Byzantium would eventually fade in influence, from the eleventh century onwards, Justinian's *Corpus iuris civilis* became the foundation of all European law and legal practice (except for England).

Justinian is also credited for founding Byzantine architecture with his building of the Santa Sophia in Constantinople and the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy. The Santa Sophia continued the Roman tradition of building domes, the architecture of the Roman basilica, but it was carried out on a scale unheard of in earlier centuries. In fact, it would remain the largest dome ever built until Sinan built the Selimye Mosque in the sixteenth century. Both Santa Sophia and San Vitale are decorated inside with a uniquely Byzantine mosaic style, a style that was to characterize Byzantine architecture for nearly another millenium. It is a style that fuses both Roman mosaic realism and an otherworldly, almost abstract use of simple forms and dramatic colors.

END OF SOURCE TWO

Source Three: Image of *Mosaic of Justinian and Retinue at Apse Entry, San Vitale, Ravenna, c. 546 CE*



I will be talking about this famous mosaic in class. Point out one or two things about the mosaic you may have a question about.

That's all folks! Thanks for reading!

Jimmy