Name: _____ Date: _____

SG #25 The Byzantine Empire

The Byzantine Empire. The Roman Empire had been divided into two parts—the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire—since the reign of Diocletian. Though the western half declined, the eastern half prospered and developed into the Byzantine Empire. It was a vibrant, long-lasting empire, with its capital at Constantinople.

Many of the Byzantine emperors hoped to reunite the old Roman Empire, but near-constant invasions eventually forced them to give up this dream. Justinian, for example, battled the Germanic tribes to gain territory. To pay for the expensive effort, he raised taxes, which generated poverty and eventually instability. Over time, the Byzantine Empire lost the western regions it had gained.

During the reign of Heraclius, the Byzantines managed to subdue the invaders who threatened the empire. Heraclius established buffer states in the Balkans to protect the Byzantines and also spread Christianity to win over invaders. Under Heraclius, the Byzantine Empire seemed strong, but it once again lost territory to invaders.

Leo the Isaurian led the Byzantines in pushing back invaders. He also established the **theme system** to strengthen the empire. Under the theme system, the Byzantine Empire was divided into provinces, with individual military governors holding control. The theme system gave the Byzantines a ready military force, but it also transferred power away from the central government.

Byzantine State, Society, and Culture. Byzantine society viewed the emperor as a priest-king. In accordance with this belief, the emperor had full responsibility for upholding justice and order. The Byzantine legal system drew heavily on Roman law. Justinian gathered old Roman constitutions into the Justinianic Code and had other law books written as well. Together, these formed the ***Corpus juris civilis***, or "body of civil law."

Later European societies turned to Byzantine law to create their own legal systems.Religion played an essential role in Byzantine society and culture. The Byzantines constructed elaborate churches, some with religious **mosaics**—pictures or designs made with small pieces of stone.

Byzantine Christianity. The Byzantine church was led by the bishops of five important cities. This group was known as the **pentarchy**. The patriarch of Constantinople was the ultimate authority of the Orthodox Church, the official Christian church of the empire.

In the 700s A.D., a major religious controversy arose. Some people in the Byzantine Empire disliked the worship of religious icons, or holy images. These people believed that the practice was unholy, and started the **iconoclast**

movement to discourage icon worship. Leo III, for example, destroyed an image of Christ. Leo's action infuriated many people, including some church leaders who used icons to teach religious stories and morals.

The debate over icon worship went on for many years. Finally, in 843, a church meeting accepted the use of icons. The religious conflict had revealed many divisions between the old Western Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire—among them language and culture. In 1054 the church broke apart in a great **schism**, or split. The West turned to the Roman Catholic Church; the East turned to the Orthodox Church. Over the long term, the schism meant that the Byzantine Empire could never again rely on the West for help against invaders.

The Macedonian Era. The Macedonian dynasty ruled the empire from 867 to 1065. In many ways the Macedonian Era was a positive, productive period. The Macedonian emperors improved conditions for peasants, won new territory, and established a law school. Yet over time, the Byzantine Empire declined. Ineffective leaders mismanaged resources, and invaders attacked. The military and the aristocracy gained political power, and the government grew weak. In 1071, Turkish invaders won an important battle and the Byzantines never regained their power in Central Asia.

Answer the questions below in your own words and in complete sentence. Highlight your evidence.

1. What factor prevented the reunification of the Roman world?

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2. How did Byzantine actions ensure that Roman law had a long life and powerful influence?

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3. What role did the emperor play in Byzantine society?

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4. How did the controversy over icons affect the Byzantine Empire in both the short term and the long term?

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5. Why did the Byzantine Empire eventually decline?

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