PERIOD 3: REGIONAL AND INTERREGIONAL INTERACTIONS, 600 – 1450

# Two Worlds of Christendom

1. Introduction – The Quest for Political Order
	1. The eastern half of the Roman Empire was invaded by Germanic Peoples, but unlike its western counterpart, did not collapse. Successors of the Roman Emperors worked to restore order throughout the Mediterranean, and although they lost territories to the conquest of Muslim forces, they largely succeeded in establishing a long-lasting European Empire in the Middle Ages.
2. The Early Byzantine Empire
	1. *The City of Constantine* – Constantinople, the glorious capital of the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire, was first rebuilt by the Emperor Constantine. His predecessor Diocletian had divided the Empire in two in order to make centralized administration of the enormous territories accrued more possible. Constantine then decided to make this formerly Greek city the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, and had the city rebuilt in his name.
	2. *Infrastructure Projects of Constantine* – Constantine had great networks of roads built in and around Constantinople to match the city of Rome. There are several important features that guaranteed the success of Constantinople after Constantine’s reconstruction of the city:
		1. Defenses: Elaborate land and sea walls built to better defend the city from invasion.
		2. Trade: The geographical location of the city at both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea linking Asia with Europe made it one of Europe’s busiest marketplaces. Its location on the Golden Horn gave Byzantion the potential to control the Bosporus – the strait of water from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles.
	3. *Caesaropapism –* As a Christian, Constantine could not rule with divine status like prior Roman emperors. He supported the position of caesaropapism, whereby the emperor ruled as secular lord but also played an important role in ecclesiastical affairs. Byzantine Emperors dressed in rich purple, and were approached by high officials who prostrated themselves three times before ceremoniaously kissing the imperial hands and feet.
3. Justinian & Theodora
	1. *Justinian and Theodora* – Justinian ruled from 527-565 and was one of the most important Byzantine emperors. He ruled with the aid of his wife, Theodora, who was the daughter of a circus bear-keeper, her mother was a dancer and actress. and she herself had to become an actress after the death of her father at the age of 4.
	2. *Infrastructure and Building Projects* – Riots and fires devastated Constantinople in 532 C.E., and the Emperor Justinian undertook a reconstruction program soon thereafter. Justinian had city rebuilt with romanesque architecture and by improving on prior Roman architecture Like Constantine before him, Justinian poured money into his capital city, his most notable construction project being the church of Hagia Sophia.
	3. *Justinian’s Code –* was a code of law established by the Emperor Justinian who set up a commission to collect, revise, and organize all the laws of Ancient Rome. This collection of laws includes laws passed by Roman Assemblies or Roman Emperor. Written law was fundamental to Byzantium, where courts settled disputes over inheritance, property, and family problems. The first Code of Law was established by Theodosius II, who had all of the imperial laws issued since Constantine I codified in a single volume known as the Codex Theodosianus. It was the emperor Justinian who reformed the code of law with a

commission of ten experienced lawyers who eventually issued the *Codex Constitutionum* in 529, which exists today only as it was summarized in the Corpus Iuris Civilis (Corpus of Civil Law) or Justinian’s Code – a code that became the foundation of European Law up until the present day. The Code had four parts:

* + 1. The old constitutions in a revised edition in twelve books identified as the Codex Justinianus
		2. The Digest
		3. The Institutes
		4. The New Laws called Novels to distinguish them from the old laws
	1. *Military Might and Expansion –* The Byzantine Empire built a powerful military that rivaled

that of the Ancient Roman Empire, and it was Justinian’s ambition to re-conquer territories lost with the fall of Rome. Only by emptying the treasury was Justinian able to reconquer all of the regions around the Mediterranean with the exception of Gaul, which was controlled by the Franks. The conquests of Justinian were short-lived, because Byzantium could not finance a sustained occupation of all of these conquests.

* 1. *Notion of a Just War* – The Byzantines had developed a notion of a “just war” through their emphasis on written law, which included wars of reconquest and defensive wars to protect an empire against losses.1
	2. *Threats from Muslims* – After the death of Muhammad in the 7th century C.E., Arab warriors conquered the Sassanid empire in Persia and posed challenges to the Byzantine Empire. By approximately 650 C.E., Muslims controlled Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and north Africa – all territories of the Byzantines. The Byzantines were only able to cling to Constantinople because of advanced military technology (Greek fire in particular). The Byzantines were only able to maintain their grasp on Anatolia, Greece, and the Balkans, and largely through military technology. They employed something known as “Greek Fire,” which was basically sulphur, lime, and petroleum that was launched at fleets of invaders and burned the floating vessels in the water.

1 Herrin, Judith. Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) 79.

1. Iconoclasm and the Iconoclast Controversy
	1. Byzantine society was deeply attached to icons of holy persons such as images of Christ on coins, the Virgin Mary, etc.
	2. Iconoclasm – the “breaking” of icons – began first in 730 when Leo III ordered church leaders to remove icons, launching a period of iconoclasm to last until the Empress Irene of Athens reversed the policy in 780 after the death of her husband Leo IV.
	3. A second wave of iconoclasm was begun by Emperor Leo V in 815 and it was only reversed by empress regnant Theodora, who assumed imperial power in place of her young son Michael III and restored icon veneration by 843.
	4. Judith Herrin argues that we can best “understand this century of iconoclast debate [730-

843] by setting it in its broadest context.” It is apparent that Byzantines turned to iconoclasm whenever the empire faced an existential crisis, and the breaking of these holy images through the remarkably abrupt reassertion of long-overlooked laws from the Book of Deuteronomy does in fact coincide closely with challenges of Islamic conquest. The argument comes to full fruition when doused in the light of the strict Islamic observance of iconoclasm.

1. The Byzantine Economy
	1. While the upper echelons of Byzantine society – much like the Romans before them – disdained commerce as an activity not worthy of free men, the Byzantines controlled lucrative markets at which foreign merchants were regular visitors.
	2. Revenue from taxes on land made up the main source of revenue for the Byzantine state. In the eighth century, the Byzantines adopted a *theme* system, allotting land to soldiers after they were discharged from the army.
	3. Free peasants like former soldiers cultivated land intensely, and the Byzantine economy flourished with huge agricultural surpluses.
	4. The city-state of Venice later developed a different attitude towards commerce
2. The state of Western Europe…
	1. *The Decline of Western Rome* – After Odoacer deposed of the last Roman emperor, he did not claim the imperial title, nor appoint anyone as a replacement. With continued invasions and power struggles, Roman administrators and armies slowly ceased to function, but slowly vacated.
	2. *Rise of Germanic Kingdoms* – A series of Germanic kingdoms merged to replace the Roman empire. Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Lombards, Franks, and other Roman authorities and institutions. Christianity gained an increasingly strong position. Christianity won recognition in the Roman Empire through Constantine, who promulgated the Edict of Milan in 313 decreeing that Christians may openly profess and practice their faith.
	3. *Political Disunity –* Between ca. 400 and 700 C.E., the Germanic peoples carved Europe up into small kingdoms.
	4. *Clovis Converts to Christianity* – Clovis I became King of the Franks in 481. He belonged to the Merovingian dynasty – a lineage that would rule central Europe until the Carolingian dynasty famously established by Charlemagne. Like his father, Clovis diplomatically respected the property rights of Catholic Bishops in Gaul, who saw themselves as natural advisors to the king. He would convert to Christianity at the Cathedral in Reims. Much of what historians

know of Clovis comes from Gregory of Tours’ *Histories* (also called *History of the Franks*), who

became for him a kind of “new Constantine.”2He allegedly experienced vision of a cross on the day of battle and won battle, similar to Constantine.

* 1. *Charles Martel and the Rise of Islam –* The religion of Islam began its rise in the 600s and began spreading from Palestine to Northern Africa and eventually to Spain, alarming Christian rulers of Central Europe. When a Muslim army crossed into modern day France, King Charles Martel defeated them at the Battle of Tours in 732.
	2. *Charlemagne* – In 768, Charles Martel's grandson became King of the Franks. Like other Germanic kings, he ruled from horseback, even though he had established a capital city at Aachen. Unable to maintain a large bureaucracy, Charlemagne had missi dominici (“envoys of the lord ruler”) travel once annually to all areas that he ruled to review the accounts of local aristocratic deputies.Charlemagne fought battles on several fronts:
		1. Muslims in Spain
		2. Saxons in Northern Europe
		3. Avars and Slavs in the East
		4. Lombards in Italy
	3. *New Roman Emperors –* In 799 C.E., Pope Leo III asked Charlemagne for help with rebellious nobles in Rome. Charlemagne obliged, and received a crown from the Pope in gratitude. This symbolizes the birth of the Holy Roman Empire. The Byzantines saw this as a pretentious affront, and Charlemagne did not aim to worsen his relationship with the powerful empire to the east.
	4. *Christianity and a Unified Europe* – Charlemagne worked with the Church to bring Christianity to conquered Slavs and Saxons. Implication: Europe unified culture through Greco-Roman and Christian influence
	5. *Charlemagne’s Administration –* The needs of a growing empire encouraged a revival of education. Charlemagne encouraged the establishment of local schools and Latin learning.
	6. *The Treaty of Verdun* – After Charlemagne's death in 814, his son Louis I ruled. Eventually, his sons drew up a treaty that divided the Empire Charlemagne had built into three regions. The implication here is that a strong, central empire in Europe was dissolved, leaving room for disunity and fragmentation to reign in Europe.
	7. *Central European Invasions after Charlemagne –* Three groups of people raided Europe in the eighth century: Muslims from the south, Magyars from the east, and Vikings from the north. The Carolingians had no navy, no means to protect vulnerable sites, and predict the movements of Viking raiders. The
		1. Vikings began leaving their home region of Scandinavia in the late 700s and moved into Central Europe. Viking invasions were part of an expansion of Nordic peoples throughout Scandinavia, who depended on remarkable shipbuilding and seafaring by expert mariners. Often, these mariners were seeking
		2. Around 900, a nomadic peoples called the Magyars settled in present-day Hungary. From there, they overran Eastern Europe and plundered Germany, Italy, and parts of France.
		3. Muslim invaders reached Europe by way of the Mediterranean sea, traveling across Spain, Gaul, and Italy to reach central Europe.
1. Economy and Society in Medieval Europe

2 *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Clovis I", accessed April 25, 2016, [http://www.britannica.com/biography/Clovis-I.](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Clovis-I)

* 1. *The Byzantine Peasantry –* Byzantium adopted the *theme* system in the eighth century, whereby soldiers received allotments of land after leaving the army. This supported a large class of free peasants, who worked hard to produce and flourish.
	2. *Byzantine Manufacturing –* The Byzantines learned the process of making silk from the Chinese, and a silk industy was soon booming in Byzantium. The Byzantine historian Procopius tells an interesting story of two monks stealing silk worm eggs from China and bringing them back to Byzantium… The production became so important that the government supervised every step.
	3. *Byzantine Trad*e – Byzantium drew enormous wealth by levying customs duties on merchandise that passed through its lands. It was the western Anchor of the Eurasian trading network that revived the classical silk roads.
	4. *Trade in Western Christendom* – Trade declined but did not disappear in western Europe after the fall of Rome. Maritime trade flourished along the North and Baltic Sea. Kinsmen of the vikings, Norse seafarers, brought cargoes of fish and furs from Scandanavia between Russia and the Byzantine and Abbasid Empires. THey sailed the rivers to the Black Sea. This linked the Carolingian Empire with the Eastern World.
	5. *Byzantine Urban Society –* Byzantium was home to large, prosperous, cosmopolitan cities like Alexandria, Antioch, and Damascus. Aristocrats enjoyed palaces with courtyards, reception halls, libraries, chapels, and other beautiful mansions and buildings. Artisans and craftsmen lived in rooms above their shops, whereas multistory apartment buildings housed workers and the poor. Constantinople was a city of baths, taverns, and restaurants.
	6. *Western Europe: A Rural Society* – Cities to the west disappeared after Germanic invasions, because agricultural surplus was no longer sufficient to sustain large, urban populations.
	7. *Feudalism* – Feudalism characterized the political and social order of medieval Europe. This is no longer acceptable historical theory, and instead, historians now recognize that society was more complex. Local lords maintained small, private armed retainers,who were rewarded with land or other valuable things. They commandeered food from peasants, which they took in the form of rent.
1. Christianity in Byzantium and Western Europe
	1. *The Papacy –* After the collapse of Rome, the papacy continued to claim spiritual authority over the former ROman world. Cooperating with the Byzantine emperors at first, popes broke with them and strengthened the western Christian Church beginning in the late 6th Century.
	2. *The Patriarchs* – The Patriarchs of Constantinople were powerful, and had been inaugurated by Constantine. Byzantine emperors treated the church as a department of the state, appointing patriarchs and instructing patriarchs, bishops, and priests to deliver sermons to their liking. Caesaropapism.
	3. *Asceticism* – St. Basil of Caesarea and St. Benedict of Nursia set a tradition of living pious, often harsh and austere lives of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Monasteries provided social services, organizing relief efforts and medical attention as well as orphanages and by providing a place to stay for travelers.
	4. *Two Christian Worlds* – Differences on religious and theological issues divided Rome and Constantinople. Charlemagne having accepted the crown of holy Roman really bothered the Byzantines, who saw themselves as the heirs of Rome. Forms of worship and minor

theological differences led to a deep division in the church. The Byzantine Patriarchs and Roman Popes disputed their rights and powers, and eventually, excommunicated each other.

1. The Great Schism of 1054
	1. The mutual excommunications of the Patriarch of Rome Pope Leo IX and Michael Cerularius of Constantinople is a watershed in the history of the Christian church.
	2. The cause of this schism was over esoteric ritual and doctrinal differences, and affected the church down to the present day. Historians still discuss an Eastern Orthodox and a Roman Catholic church.