

- William Butler Yeats was an Irish poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. Inspired by the legend of Constantinople as an almost magical, highly spiritual and artistic city, he wrote "Sailing to Byzantium" in 1926. Read "Sailing to Byzantium" with students and discuss its subject, tone, and meaning. As a follow-up, students may write essays describing their overall impressions of the poem and relating its theme to what they've learned about the Byzantine Empire. The full text of Yeats' poem may be found at this web site: [www.uky.edu/Classes/A-H/322/yeatssailing.htm](http://www.uky.edu/Classes/A-H/322/yeatssailing.htm)
- Saladin was a Kurdish warrior born in Iraq and founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, which ruled Egypt, Syria and Northern Iraq in the 12th and 13th centuries. Saladin is noted as the leader of frequent battles against European Crusaders. Ask students to research the decisive Battle of Hattin and role-play historical members of the media, developing stories that attempt to relate the results of this confrontation. Students should try to develop accounts from the perspective of both Muslims and Crusaders. Stories may take the form of live reports-from-the-battlefield, or written newspaper accounts of the battle.
- Research the history of Byzantium before it was chosen by Constantine to become the second capital of Rome and discuss whether Constantinople was a good site for a second capital. As an extension, ask students to assume the roles of travelers and to describe their impressions of Constantinople and the imperial government of the Byzantine emperor. Students may develop travel journals that capture the essence of this historic city. Similar research and projects may be done on the Abbasid imperial government and its capital city, Baghdad.
- The Crusades were a series of battles launched by Pope Urban II in 1095, whose ultimate goal was to retake Jerusalem from the Muslims. These holy wars were initially successful, but Muslim leaders responded by unifying and organizing their forces to successfully repel the invaders. Most of the European Crusaders were nobles and many of their letters about their military exploits survived. Using these letters, break students into small groups and have each group research their author's background and identify the Crusade in which he was a participant. Students may then analyze their letter's tone and meaning in a group summary for the class. The full text of several Crusader letters may be found at this web site: [www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/cde-letters.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/cde-letters.html)
- Ask students to research and construct a map showing the expansion of Orthodox Christianity in Eastern Europe and Russia and the spread of Greek Orthodox Christianity into areas such as the Balkans and Russia between the 9th and 11th centuries.

### Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at [www.LibraryVideo.com](http://www.LibraryVideo.com)

- [www.metmuseum.org/explore/Byzantium/byzhome.html](http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/Byzantium/byzhome.html)  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art's "The Glory of Byzantium" explores the history, art and culture of the Byzantine Empire.
- [www.fordham.edu/halsall/byzantium/](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/byzantium/)  
Fordham University's "Byzantium" offers a wealth of links for teachers to research in preparing lessons on the Byzantine Empire.
- [www.ou.edu/class/ahi4263/frameset.html](http://www.ou.edu/class/ahi4263/frameset.html)  
The University of Oklahoma presents numerous examples of art from the Byzantine Era.

### Suggested Print Resources

- Cartledge, Chereese. *The Crusades: Failed Holy Wars*. Lucent Books, San Diego, CA; 2002.
- Marston, Elsa. *Byzantine Empire*. Benchmark Books, New York, NY; 2003.
- Norwich, John Julius. *A Short History of Byzantium*. Knopf, New York, NY; 1998.

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#### TEACHER'S GUIDE

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#### TITLES IN THIS SERIES

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- THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE
- THE EGYPTIAN EMPIRE
- THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE
- THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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## THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Grades 9–12

In the coastal areas along the Mediterranean Sea emerged the cultures and great powers of the ancient world. Understanding the rise and fall of these early civilizations and empires provides us with unique and valuable historical insight, and is the basis for an understanding of civilization today. In *The Fall of Great Empires*, students will learn about the clash of ideas, the legendary struggles for imperial power and the insatiable drive for great wealth that characterized the ancient world. Students will discover how these vast and influential societies declined and left a deep and lasting imprint on the history of Western civilization.



## Program Summary

In 330, as the focus of the Roman Empire moved to the East, the Roman emperor Constantine ordered the development of a new capital city called Constantinople. The new Rome — or the Byzantine Empire, as it was later called — in effect became the next major empire. Constantinople had the same physical characteristics as ancient Rome, with arenas, monumental statues and grandiose works of art, but it evolved into a very different cultural realm.

While the study of the classics diminished in the western part of the Roman Empire after it fell, the Byzantine Empire maintained a Greek character, and continued the intellectual traditions of Plato and Aristotle. In 1054, a developing split in European Christianity culminated in the development of Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic schools of thought. This spiritual division, also known as the Great Schism, continues to divide Europe.

Over the centuries, the Byzantine Empire faced political threats and dealt with the encroaching influences of both European and Islamic cultures. The looting of Constantinople by fellow Christians during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 was a disaster from which the Byzantine Empire could not recover. In the ensuing years, Byzantine culture continued to flourish, but with its emperors greatly weakened politically and the region mostly isolated from the rest of Europe, the city of Constantinople fell to Ottoman conquest in 1453.

## Time Line

**330** — Roman emperor Constantine I dedicates a new capital in the empire — Constantinople.

**527** — Justinian begins his reign as Byzantine Emperor, marking the end of the Roman Empire.

**726** — Emperor Leo III begins the Iconoclast Movement.

**800** — Charlemagne is crowned Emperor of the West; the Holy Roman Empire is founded.

**1054** — The Eastern Orthodox Church becomes independent of the Roman Church.

**1071** — Seljuk Turks defeat the Byzantine army and take most of Asia Minor.

**1096** — The First Crusade is undertaken, following a proclamation by Pope Urban II.

**1187** — Saladin defeats crusaders at the Horn of Hittin and captures Jerusalem.

**1189** — The Third Crusade begins.

**1348** — The Black Death begins to ravage Europe.

**1453** — The city of Constantinople falls to the Ottoman invasion.

## Vocabulary

**Crusaders** — Europeans who participated in a series of offensive campaigns which took place between the 11th and 13th centuries, called Crusades. These battles, originally attempts to capture Jerusalem from the Muslims, became wars over territory.

**Byzantine Empire** — The eastern half of the Roman Empire, it broke from the Roman Catholic Church in 1054 and fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

**Constantinople** — The capital of the Byzantine Empire, also known as the Eastern Roman Empire. The city was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in the 15th century.

**Bosphorus** — A strait important to Constantinople; it divides Turkey between Europe and Asia.

**Hagia Sophia** — A major example of Byzantine architecture, built during the reign of Justinian. The church became a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in 1453 and is now a museum.

**Czar** — A term used to describe the Byzantine emperor in the Middle Ages; later used to refer to a supreme leader in Russia after the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottoman Empire.

**Roman Empire** — An ancient empire founded in 31 BCE, centered in the city of Rome. It included most of Western Europe, North Africa and the Near East until it fell to German invaders in 476.

**steppes** — Temperate, flat grasslands of Eurasia; also applied to such land masses as the prairies in North America and the pampas in South America.

**Huns** — A nomadic, warrior people who invaded Europe around 370 CE.

**Goths** — Germanic peoples whose two groups, the Ostrogoths and Visigoths, fought the Roman Empire for centuries.

**Longobards** — Also known as Lombards, a Germanic tribe that filtered down into Italy by the 6th century. The name Longobards refers to their long beards.

**pagan** — One who is not a believer of a monotheistic religion, especially someone who has a polytheistic faith.

**Bubonic Plague** — An infectious disease caused by a bacterium carried by rat fleas. A widespread outbreak, known as the Black Death, killed millions in Europe during the 14th century.

**Charlemagne** — The founder of the Holy Roman Empire in Western Europe around 800 CE, which led to the development of modern Europe. Also known as Charles the Great.

**excommunicate** — To deprive a person of church membership, by order of a religious authority.

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**Ottoman Empire** — A former Turkish Empire, centered in Asia Minor with its capital in Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), dissolved by treaty after World War One.

**humanism** — An intellectual movement begun in Italy in the 1300s, which was characterized by renewed interest in ancient Greek and Roman literature, history and art.

## Pre-viewing Discussion

- Ask students what is meant by the term “Holy Land.” Where is the Holy Land and what significance does it have to some of the world’s largest religions?
- What were the Crusades? Who were the main players and what were the central disputes in this cultural clash?
- What was the Black Death? How was it spread and what was its effect on Europe in the 14th century?

## Follow-up Discussion

- How did Emperor Constantine achieve power in the Roman Empire? What was the significance of his reign?
- Compare and contrast the development of architecture and culture of the eastern capital of Constantinople with that of the western capital of Rome.
- Why is the year 1054 so significant in the history of European Christianity? Describe the differences between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

## Follow-up Activities

- In 527, Emperor Justinian I dedicated the lavishly decorated Hagia Sophia, the cathedral of Constantinople and seat of the Byzantine patriarch. Ask students to research the development of this former church and mosque and write an essay analyzing the building from a structural and an art-historical perspective. Some experts fear that the Hagia Sophia may be endangered because it resides in an earthquake-prone area. As a long-term project, students may analyze the topography and other buildings of ancient Constantinople (now Istanbul) and write a report analyzing these structures’ potential for collapse.
- Students may write letters as citizens of the Byzantine state expressing their concerns and support to a Byzantine emperor, such as Heraclius or Alexius Comnenius, about efforts to protect their empire against foreign attack. Students may also discuss what role public support plays in maintaining a government’s effectiveness in times of crisis.

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