

The Two Worlds of Christendom

chapter 16

AP KEY CONCEPTS

2.2.III: Unique social and economic dimensions developed in imperial societies in Afro-Eurasia and the Americas.

3.1.II: The movement of peoples caused environmental and linguistic effects.

3.1.IV: There was continued diffusion of crops and pathogens, including epidemic diseases like the bubonic plague, throughout the Eastern Hemisphere along the trade routes.

AP HISTORICAL THINKING

Analyzing Evidence Using the documents in this chapter (maps, illustrations, written sources) compare the political, economic, and cultural accomplishments of the Byzantines and the western Europeans in this period.

Causation Analyze the causes of the decline of cities in western Europe in this time period.

Comparison Compare the parts of the classical Roman empire that remained important in western Europe to those which remained important in the Byzantine empire.

Contextualization Evaluate the role the Vikings played in the economic development of western Europe and the Byzantine empire.

Comparison Analyze the similarities and differences in the historical concept of Christendom and *dar al-Islam*.

AP CHAPTER FOCUS

This chapter looks at the heirs of the classical Roman empire. Invasions and internal problems caused the collapse of the western Roman empire in ca. 476. The eastern Roman empire's government, however, was able to defend itself much better and did not succumb to collapse. This presented an

unusual situation: only half of an empire collapsed, while the other half continued. The line of demarcation went through the Adriatic Sea, splitting both the Eurasian and north African parts of the classical Roman empire. When we talk about western and eastern Europe today, we use this line as the boundary. As you will see, the two former halves of the Roman empire developed very different political, economic, and religious cultures.

From 500 to 1000 C.E.—the early medieval period—western Europe dissolved into small kingdoms that had little contact with other regions. You need to know the features that changed there after Rome's imperial structures were gone, as well as the continuities that endured from the Roman empire. Track what caused the decline of cities and the reasons for their slow recovery ca. 1000. You also need to understand why economic productivity declined precipitously and rebounded slowly. New crises in early medieval Europe led to labor adaptation, and serfdom was a significant change.

In contrast, the eastern Roman empire continued on for another 1,000 years. Historians didn't see the sense of calling this empire "Roman" if it didn't contain the city of Rome; instead, they call it the Byzantine empire from Constantinople's earlier Greek name—Byzantium. Unlike Rome in this period, Constantinople became one of the great cosmopolitan cities of the world, and is known today as Istanbul.

The Byzantine empire was a spectacular postclassical empire. Enormously important comparisons can be made between the two former halves of the Roman empire in this period. There are also many ways to compare Byzantine to postclassical China, particularly regarding interregional trade and economic productivity.

Give the Vikings your attention, too. They are both problems and new players in the west and the Byzantine empire. They founded the new trading city of Novgorod, and they traveled, traded, conquered, and looted from North America to Constantinople. They were nomads of the sea.

The Quest for Political Order

The Early Byzantine Empire

Muslim Conquests and Byzantine Revival

The Rise of the Franks

The End of the Carolingian Empire

The Age of the Vikings

Economy and Society in Early Medieval Europe

The Two Economies of Early Medieval Europe

Social Development in the Two Worlds
of Christendom

The Evolution of Christian Societies in Byzantium and Western Europe

Popes and Patriarchs

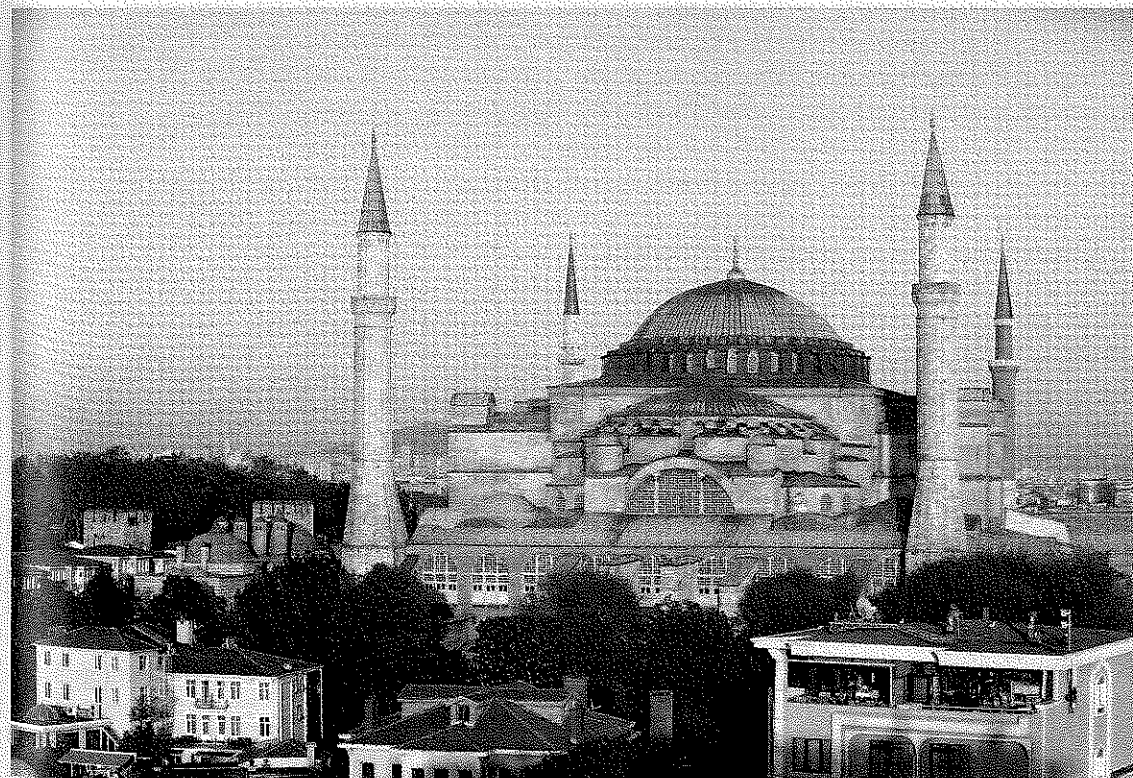
Monks and Missionaries

Two Churches

EYEWITNESS:

Emperor Charlemagne and His Elephant

In the year 802 C.E., an unusual traveler arrived at Aachen (in modern Germany), capital of the western European empire ruled by Charlemagne. The traveler was a rare albino elephant, a diplomatic gift to Charlemagne from the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid. The elephant—whom Harun named Abu al-Abbas, in honor of the Abbasid dynasty's founder—was born in India and went to Baghdad with his trainer in about 798. From Baghdad, the animal accompanied an embassy overland through Syria and Egypt to a port on the Tunisian coast, then sailed across the Mediterranean to Portovenere (near Genoa in northern Italy), and finally trekked across the Alps and overland to Charlemagne's court. Abu al-Abbas must have shivered



The church of Hagia Sophia ("Holy Wisdom") rises above the modern city of Istanbul. Originally a Christian church, the building then became an Islamic mosque, and finally a museum.

through the cold, damp winters of Europe. Yet he enjoyed swimming in the Rhine River and, until his death in 810, he amazed and delighted all who beheld him.

Charlemagne was not a friend of Islam. At the battle of Tours (732 C.E.), his grandfather, Charles Martel, had defeated a Muslim army that ventured into Frankish territory after Muslim forces had conquered most of the Iberian peninsula. Charlemagne himself fought Muslims in an unsuccessful effort to restore Christian rule in northern Spain. Nevertheless, in spite of his personal religious preferences, Charlemagne found it both necessary and convenient to have diplomatic dealings with Harun al-Rashid.

Charlemagne dispatched at least three embassies to Baghdad and received three in return. The embassies dealt with several issues: the safety of Christian pilgrims and merchants traveling in Abbasid-controlled Syria and Palestine, Charlemagne's relations with Muslim neighbors, and policy toward the Byzantine empire, which stood between western Europe and the Abbasid caliphate. Charlemagne's realm was weak and poor compared with the Abbasid empire, but for about half a century, it seemed that Charlemagne and his successors might be able to reestablish a centralized imperial state in western Europe. His dealings with Harun al-Rashid—and the unusual odyssey of the elephant Abu al-Abbas—reflected a general recognition that Charlemagne had the potential to establish a western European empire similar to the Byzantine and Abbasid realms.

Some historians refer to the period from about 500 to 1500 C.E. as the medieval period of European history. During the early medieval period, from about 500 to 1000 C.E., European peoples recovered from the many problems that plagued the later Roman empire—epidemic disease, declining population, economic contraction, political turmoil, social unrest, and invasions by Germanic peoples. In doing so, they laid the foundations of European Christendom—a region that never experienced political unity, but that adopted Christianity as the dominant source of cultural authority.

The two very different halves of medieval Christendom were the Byzantine empire (a direct continuation of the Roman empire) in the eastern half of the Mediterranean basin and the Germanic states that succeeded the western Roman empire after its collapse in the fifth century C.E.

Both the Byzantine empire and the European states to the west inherited Christianity from the Roman empire, and rulers in both regions promoted Christianity as a cultural and moral foundation for their rule. After the eighth century C.E., however, political and religious tensions increasingly complicated relations between the two halves of the former Roman empire. Byzantine rulers bristled at the claims to empire made by Charlemagne and other western Christian rulers, and theologians in the two regions developed differing views on religious doctrine and practice. By the mid-eleventh century, the Byzantine and Roman churches had publicly and formally condemned each other. Byzantine missionaries promoted their brand of Christianity in Russia and other Slavic lands, while western Christians following the leadership of the popes in Rome spread their own views from the British Isles to Scandinavia and eastern Europe. Just as Abbasid leaders helped consolidate Islam as the principal cultural influence in the Muslim world, Byzantine and western Christians expanded the religious and moral authority of Christianity throughout Europe. In doing so, they created two worlds of Christendom.

THE QUEST FOR POLITICAL ORDER

The eastern half of the Roman empire suffered from invasions by Germanic peoples, but it did not collapse. The political challenge for rulers in this region—direct successors of the Roman emperors—was to restore order following the invasions.

In the sixth century Byzantine rulers even tried to reestablish Roman authority throughout the Mediterranean basin. Their efforts fell short of that goal, and they soon lost considerable territories to expansive Muslim forces, but they nevertheless presided over a powerful society in the eastern Mediterranean region.

Political challenges were greater in lands to the west. Germanic invaders mostly passed through the eastern Roman empire, but they mostly settled in western regions. Throughout

Roman Europe and north Africa, Germanic invaders disrupted Roman authority, deposed Roman officials, and imposed new states of their own making. After two centuries of fighting, it looked as though one group of Germanic invaders, the Franks, might reestablish imperial authority in much of Roman Europe. If they had succeeded, they might have played a role similar to that of the Sui and Tang dynasties in China by reviving centralized imperial rule after a hiatus of several centuries. By the late ninth century, however, the Frankish empire had fallen victim to internal power struggles and a fresh series of devastating invasions. Political authority in western Europe then devolved to local and regional jurisdictions, whose leaders fashioned a decentralized political order.

The Early Byzantine Empire

The Byzantine empire takes its name from Byzantium—a modest market town and fishing village that occupied a site of enormous strategic significance. Situated on a defensible peninsula and blessed with a magnificent natural harbor known as the Golden Horn,

Byzantium had the potential to control the Bosphorus, the strait of water leading from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara and beyond to the Dardanelles, the Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean. Apart from its maritime significance, Byzantium offered convenient access to the rich lands of Anatolia, southwestern Asia, and southeastern Europe. Sea lanes linked the city to ports throughout the Mediterranean basin.

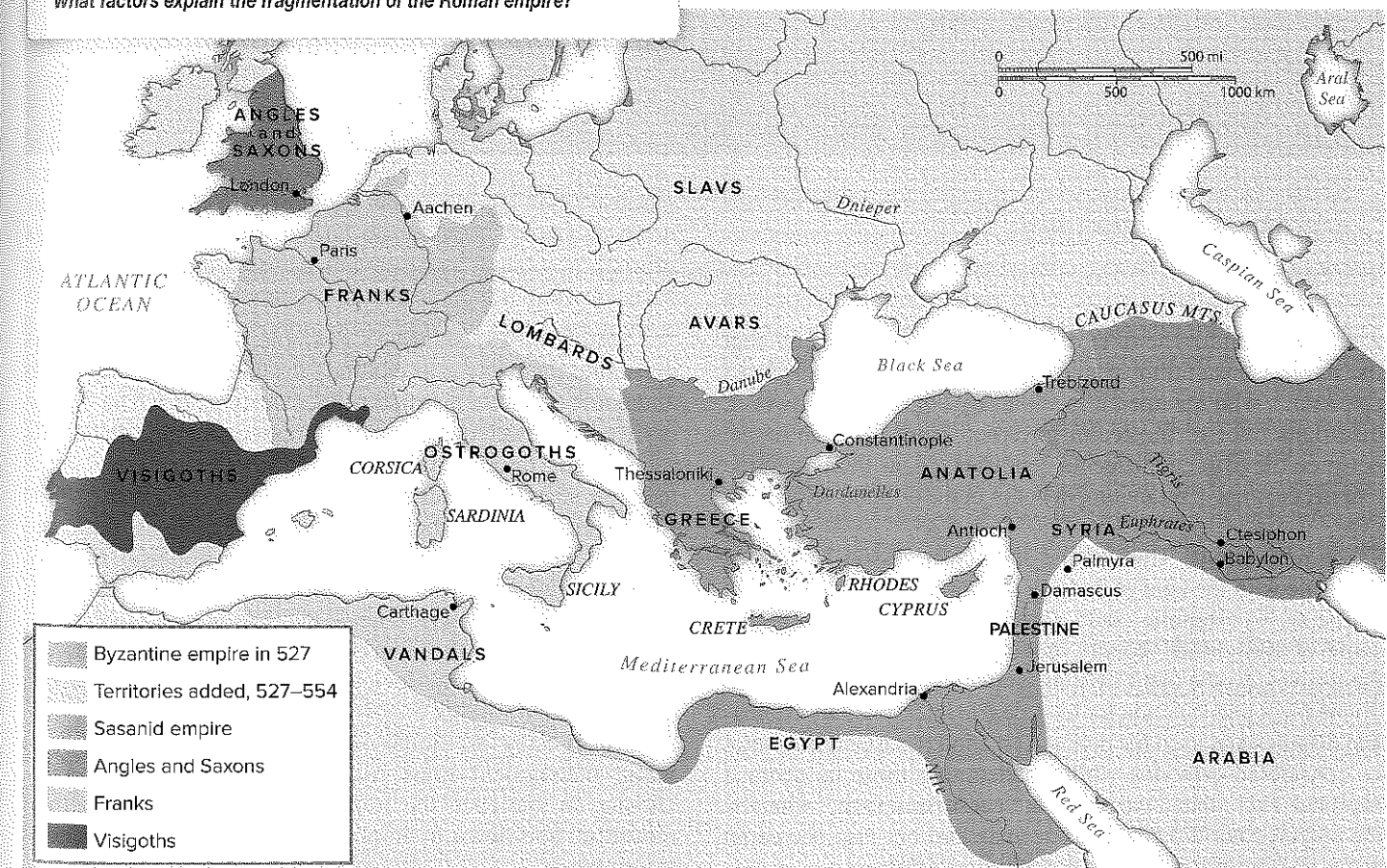
The City of Constantine Recognizing its strategic value, the Roman emperor Constantine designated Byzantium the site of a new imperial capital, which he named **Constantinople** (“city of Constantine”). He built the new capital partly because the eastern Mediterranean was the wealthiest and most productive region of the Roman empire and partly because relocation enabled him to maintain close watch over both the Sasanid empire in Persia and the Germanic peoples who lived along the lower stretches of the Danube River. The imperial government moved to Constantinople after 330 C.E., and the new capital rapidly reached metropolitan dimensions. Constantine filled the city with libraries, museums, and artistic treasures, and he constructed magnificent marble palaces, churches, baths, and public buildings—all in an effort to create

MAP 16.1

Successor states to the Roman empire, ca. 600 C.E.

Compare this map with Map 11.2 showing the Roman empire at its height.

What factors explain the fragmentation of the Roman empire?



Aegean (ih-JEE-uhn)

Byzantine (BIHZ-uhn-teen)



Byzantine emperor Justinian wears imperial purple robes in this mosaic, from the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, which depicts him in the company of ecclesiastical, military, and court officials.

a new Rome fit for the ruler of a mighty empire. The city kept the name Constantinople until it fell to the Ottoman Turks (1453 C.E.), who renamed it Istanbul. By convention, however, historians refer to the realm governed from Constantinople between the fifth and fifteenth centuries C.E. as the Byzantine empire, or simply Byzantium, in honor of the original settlement.

Caesaropapism Constantine and his successors reinforced their rule with the aura of divinity and awesome splendor. As a Christian, Constantine could not claim the divine status that some of the earlier Roman emperors had appropriated for themselves. As the first Christian emperor, however, he claimed divine favor and sanction for his rule. He intervened in theological disputes and used his political position to support the views he considered orthodox while condemning those he deemed heretical. He initiated the policy of “**caesaropapism**,” whereby the emperor not only ruled as secular lord but also played an active and prominent role in ecclesiastical affairs.

Following Constantine’s example, Byzantine emperors presented themselves as exalted, absolute rulers. Even dress and court etiquette testified to their lofty status. The emperors wore bejeweled crowns and dressed in magnificent silk robes dyed a dark, rich purple—a color reserved for imperial use and strictly forbidden to those not associated with the ruling house. High officials presented themselves to the emperor as slaves. When approaching the imperial majesty, they prostrated themselves three times and then ceremoniously kissed the imperial hands and feet before raising matters of business. By the tenth century, engineers had contrived a series of mechanical devices that worked dazzling effects and impressed foreign envoys at the Byzantine court: imitation birds sang as ambassadors approached the emperor while mechanical lions roared and swished their tails. During an audience the imperial throne itself sometimes moved up and down to emphasize the awesome splendor of the emperor.



The interior of the church of Hagia Sophia (“Holy Wisdom”), built by Justinian and transformed into a mosque in the fifteenth century. The dome rises almost 60 meters (197 feet) above the floor, and its windows allow abundant light to enter the massive structure.

Justinian and Theodora The most important of the early Byzantine emperors was **Justinian** (reigned 527–565 C.E.), an energetic worker known to his subjects as “the sleepless emperor,” who ruled with the aid of his ambitious wife, **Theodora**. The couple came from obscure origins: Justinian was born into a Macedonian peasant family, and Theodora, the daughter of a bear keeper in the circus, worked as a striptease artist before meeting the future emperor. Yet both Justinian and Theodora were smart, strong-willed, and disciplined. Thanks to those qualities, Justinian received an education, found a position in the imperial bureaucracy, and mastered the intricacies of Byzantine finance. Theodora proved to be a sagacious advisor and a determined supporter of her emperor husband.

Like Constantine, Justinian lavished resources on the imperial capital. His most notable construction project was the church of **Hagia Sophia** (“Holy Wisdom”), a magnificent domed structure—later turned into a mosque by Ottoman conquerors—that ranks as one of the world’s most important examples of Christian architecture. Visitors marveled at the church’s enormous dome, which they likened to the heavens encircling the earth, and at the gold, silver, gems, and thousands of lamps that decorated and illuminated Hagia Sophia.

Justinian’s Code Justinian’s most significant political contribution was his codification of Roman law. The origins of Roman law went back to the times of the kings of Rome, and even though earlier scholars worked to codify the law, it had become a confusing mass of sometimes conflicting injunctions. Justinian ordered a systematic review of Roman law and

issued the *Corpus iuris civilis* (*Body of the Civil Law*), which immediately won recognition as the definitive codification of Roman law. Updated by later emperors, Justinian’s code has influenced civil law codes in most of Europe, in Japan, and in the state of Louisiana in the United States.

Byzantine Conquests Justinian’s most ambitious venture was his effort to reconquer the western Roman empire from Germanic peoples and reestablish Roman authority throughout the Mediterranean basin. Between 533 and 565, Byzantine forces gained control over Italy, Sicily, much of northwestern Africa, and southern Spain. Yet Byzantium did not possess the resources to sustain a long-term occupation and consolidate those conquests. Shortly after Justinian’s death, Byzantine forces abandoned Rome, leaving the city of Ravenna on Italy’s Adriatic coast as the headquarters of Byzantine authority in the western Mediterranean. As a result, Ravenna possesses magnificent examples of Byzantine art and architecture, but Justinian’s dream of reconstituting the old Roman empire soon faded into oblivion.

Muslim Conquests and Byzantine Revival

Justinian’s efforts showed that the classical Roman empire was beyond recovery. While the emperor devoted his efforts to the western Mediterranean, the Sasanids threatened

Hagia Sofia (HAH-yah soh-FEE-uh)

Corpus iuris civilis (KOR-pooos EW-rees sih-VEE-lees)

Byzantium from the east and Slavic peoples approached from the north. Later Byzantine emperors had no choice but to redeploy their resources to meet other threats.

Muslim Conquests After the seventh century C.E., the expansion of Islam (discussed in chapter 14) posed even more serious challenges to Byzantium. Shortly after Muhammad's death, Arab warriors conquered the Sasanid empire in Persia and overran large portions of the Byzantine empire as well. By the mid-seventh century, Byzantine Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and north Africa had fallen under Muslim rule. Muslim forces later subjected Constantinople itself to two prolonged sieges (in 674–678 and again in 717–718). Byzantium resisted this northward thrust of Islam partly because of advanced military technology. Byzantine forces used a weapon known as “Greek fire”—a highly effective incendiary weapon whose ingredients were a state secret that has since been lost—which they launched at both the fleets and the ground forces of the invaders. Greek fire burned even when floating on water and thus created a hazard when deployed around wooden ships. On land it caused panic among enemy forces, since it was extremely difficult to extinguish and often burned troops to death. As a result of this defensive effort, the Byzantine empire retained its hold on Anatolia, Greece, and the Balkan region.

The Theme System Though diminished by Muslim conquests, the Byzantine empire was more manageable after the eighth century than was the far-flung realm of Justinian. Byzantine rulers responded to the threat of Islam with political and social adjustments that strengthened their reduced empire. Their most important innovation was the reorganization of Byzantine society under the *theme system*. They placed an imperial province called a *theme* under the authority of a general, who assumed responsibility for both its military defense and its civil administration. Generals received their appointments from the emperor, who closely monitored their activities

to prevent decentralization of power and authority. Generals recruited armies from the ranks of free peasants, who received allotments of land for their military service.

Armies raised under the *theme* system were effective fighting forces, and they enabled Byzantium to expand its influence between the ninth and the twelfth centuries. During the tenth century Byzantine forces reconquered Syria and pushed their authority west into the Balkan region. By the mid-eleventh century, the Byzantine empire encompassed lands from Syria and Armenia in the east to southern Italy in the west, from the Danube River in the north to the islands of Cyprus and Crete in the south. Once again, Byzantium dominated the eastern Mediterranean region.

The Rise of the Franks

In the year 476 C.E., the Germanic general **Odoacer** deposed the last of the western Roman emperors. He did not claim the imperial title for himself, however, nor did he appoint anyone else as a replacement. The emperor's post simply remained vacant. Roman administrators and armies continued to function, temporarily, but urban populations declined as continuing invasions and power struggles disrupted trade and manufacturing. Deprived of legitimacy and resources supplied from Rome and other major cities, imperial institutions progressively weakened.

Germanic Kingdoms Gradually, a series of Germanic kingdoms emerged as successor states to the Roman empire. Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Lombards, Franks, and other Germanic peoples occupied imperial provinces, displacing Roman authorities and institutions. As they built successor states, Germanic peoples absorbed a great deal of Roman influence. Many of them converted to Christianity, for example, and others adapted Roman law to the needs of their own societies.



A manuscript illustration depicts Byzantine naval forces turning Greek fire on their Arab enemies.

The Franks Most successful and most influential of the Germanic peoples were the **Franks**. By the early sixth century, the Franks had conquered most of Roman Gaul and emerged as the preeminent military and political power in western Europe. They also gained popular support when they abandoned their inherited polytheistic religion and converted to Christianity—a move that brought them the allegiance of the Christian population of the former Roman empire as well as support from the pope and the western Christian church.

In the eighth century the aristocratic clan of the Carolingians dramatically extended Frankish power. The **Carolingian dynasty** takes its name from its founder, Charles (*Carolus* in Latin)—known as Charles Martel (“Charles the Hammer”) because of his military prowess. In 732 at the battle of Tours (in central France), he turned back a Muslim army that had ventured north from recently conquered Spain. His victory helped persuade Muslim rulers of Spain that it was not worthwhile for them to seek further conquests in western Europe.

Charlemagne The Frankish realm reached its high point under Charles Martel's grandson **Charlemagne** (“Charles the Great”), who reigned from 768 to 814. Like King Harsha in India, Charlemagne temporarily reestablished centralized imperial rule in a society disrupted by invasion and contests for power between ambitious local rulers. Like Harsha again, Charlemagne possessed enormous energy, and the building of the Carolingian empire was in large measure his personal accomplishment. Although barely literate, Charlemagne was intelligent. He spoke Latin, understood some Greek, and regularly conversed with learned men. He maintained diplomatic relations with the Byzantine empire and the Abbasid caliphate. The gift of the albino elephant Abu al-Abbas symbolized relations between the Carolingian and Abbasid empires, and until its death in 810, the animal accompanied Charlemagne on many of his travels.

When Charlemagne inherited the Frankish throne, his realm included most of modern France as well as the lands that now form Belgium, the Netherlands, and southwestern Germany. By the time of his death in 814, Charlemagne had extended his authority to northeastern Spain, Bavaria, and Italy as far south as Rome. He campaigned for thirty-two years to impose his rule on the Saxons of northern Germany and to repress their rebellions. Beyond the Carolingian empire proper, rulers in eastern Europe and southern Italy paid tribute to Charlemagne as imperial overlord.

Charlemagne's Administration Charlemagne built a court and capital at Aachen (in modern Germany), but like Harsha in India, he spent most of his reign on horseback, traveling throughout his realm to maintain authority. Constant travel was necessary because Charlemagne did not have the financial resources to maintain an elaborate bureaucracy or an administrative apparatus that could enforce his policies. Instead, he relied on aristocratic deputies, known as counts,



A marble statue inside the Vatican in Rome dramatically depicts an equestrian Charlemagne.

who held political, military, and legal authority in local jurisdictions. In an effort to keep the counts under control, Charlemagne instituted a group of imperial officials called the *missi dominici* (“envoys of the lord ruler”), who traveled annually to all jurisdictions and reviewed the accounts of local authorities.

Thus Charlemagne built the Frankish kingdom into an empire on the basis of military expeditions, and he began to outfit it with some centralized institutions. Yet he hesitated to call himself emperor because an imperial claim would constitute a direct challenge to the authority of the Byzantine emperors, who regarded themselves as the only legitimate successors of the Roman emperors.

missi dominici (MISS-ee doh-MIN-ih-chee)



MAP 16.2

The Carolingian empire, 814 C.E.

Notice the location of Charlemagne's capital at Aachen and also the extent of his empire.

What geographic and political challenges did he face in his efforts to hold his empire together?

Charlemagne as Emperor Only in the year 800 did Charlemagne accept the title of emperor. While campaigning in Italy, Charlemagne attended religious services conducted by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day. During the services, the pope proclaimed Charlemagne emperor and placed an imperial crown on his head. It is not certain, but it is possible that Charlemagne did not know of the pope's plan and that Leo surprised him with an impromptu coronation. Charlemagne had no desire for strained relations with the Byzantine emperors, who deeply resented his imperial title as a pretentious affront to their own dignity. In any case, Charlemagne had already built an imperial state, and his coronation constituted public recognition of his accomplishments.

The End of the Carolingian Empire

If Charlemagne's empire had endured, Carolingian rulers might well have built a bureaucracy, used the *missi dominici* to enhance the authority of the central government, and reestablished

imperial rule in western Europe. As it happened, however, internal disunity and external invasions brought the Carolingian empire to an early end.

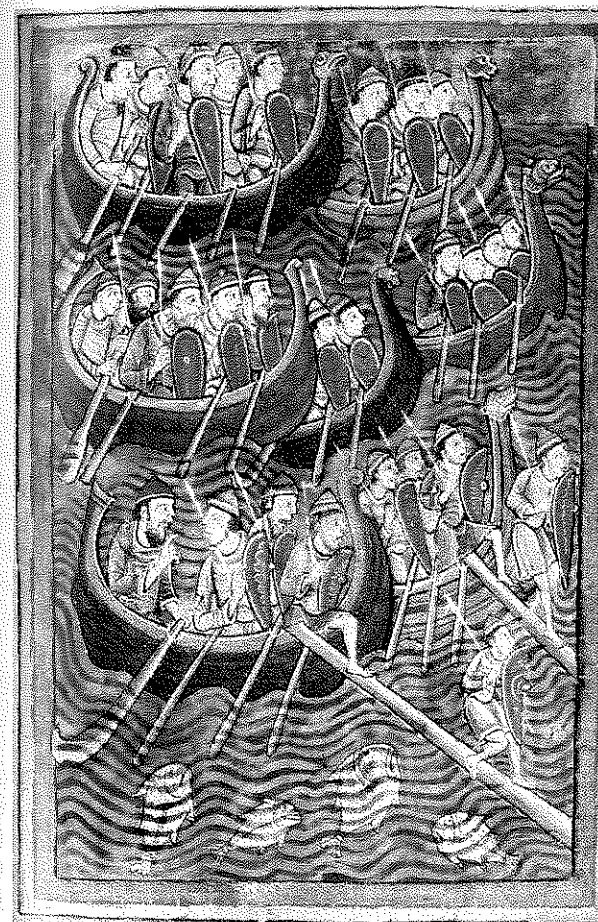
Charlemagne's only surviving son, **Louis the Pious** (reigned 814–840), succeeded his father and held the empire together. Lacking Charlemagne's strong will and military skills, however, Louis lost control of local authorities, who increasingly pursued their own interests. Moreover, Louis's three sons disputed the inheritance of the empire and waged bitter wars against one another. In 843 they divided the empire into three roughly equal portions and ruled as three kings. Thus, less than a century after its creation, the Carolingian empire dissolved.

The Age of the Vikings

Even if internal divisions had not dismembered the Carolingian empire, external pressures might well have brought it down. Beginning in the late eighth century, three groups of invaders

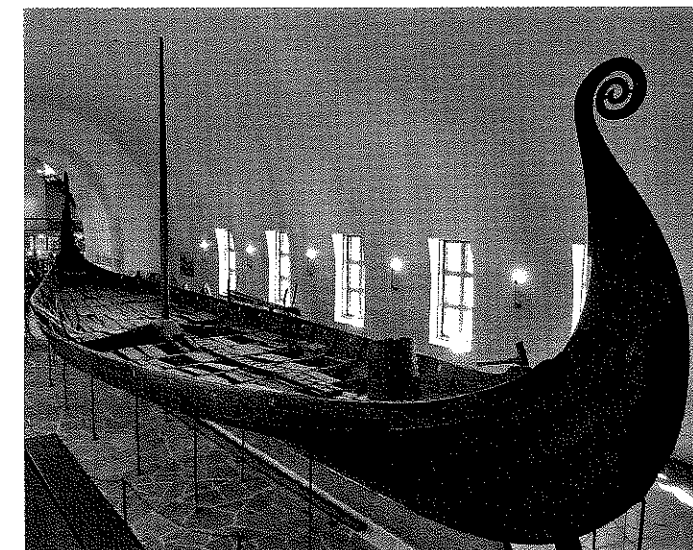
pillaged the Frankish realm in search of wealth stored in towns and monasteries. From the south came Muslims, who raided towns, villages, churches, and monasteries in Mediterranean Europe. Muslim invaders also conquered the island of Sicily and seized territories in southern Italy and southern France. From the east came the **Magyars**, descendants of nomadic peoples who had settled in Hungary. Expert horsemen, the Magyars raided settlements in Germany, Italy, and southern France. From the north came the Vikings, most feared of all the invaders, who began mounting raids in northern France even during Charlemagne's lifetime.

The Viking invasions were part of a much larger process of expansion by the Nordic peoples of Scandinavia. One cause of Norse expansion was probably population growth fueled by increased agricultural production in Scandinavia. The main cause, however, was the quest for wealth through trading and raiding in European lands to the south of Scandinavia.



Danish Vikings prepare to invade England in this manuscript illustration produced at an English monastery about 1130.

Although renowned for their raiding, many Vikings later turned to trade and used their maritime skills to help connect western Europe, the Byzantine empire, and the Islamic caliphate in a vigorous transregional trading network.



The Osenberg ship, the best-preserved Viking vessel from the early middle ages, was built in about 800 C.E. Using ships like these, the Vikings undertook extraordinary voyages across a vast region stretching from North America to central Asia.

Norse expansion depended on a remarkable set of shipbuilding techniques and seafaring skills that Scandinavian mariners developed during the seventh and eighth centuries. They built rugged, shallow-draft boats outfitted both with sails, which enabled them to travel through the open ocean, and with oars, which enabled them to navigate rivers.

Vikings Many Norse seafarers were merchants seeking commercial opportunities or migrants seeking lands to settle and cultivate. Some, however, turned their maritime skills more toward raiding and plundering than trading or raising crops. These were the **Vikings**. The term *Viking* originally referred to a group that raided the British Isles from their home at Vik in southern Norway. Over time, however, the term came to refer more generally to Norse mariners who mounted invasions and plundered settlements from Russia and eastern Europe to Mediterranean lands. With their shallow-draft boats, the Vikings were able to make their way up the many rivers offering access to interior regions of Europe. Vikings coordinated their ships' movements and timed their attacks to take advantage of the tides. Fleets of Viking boats with ferocious dragon heads mounted on their prows could sail up a river, surprise a village or a monastery far from the sea, and spill out crews of warriors who conducted lightning raids on unprepared victims.

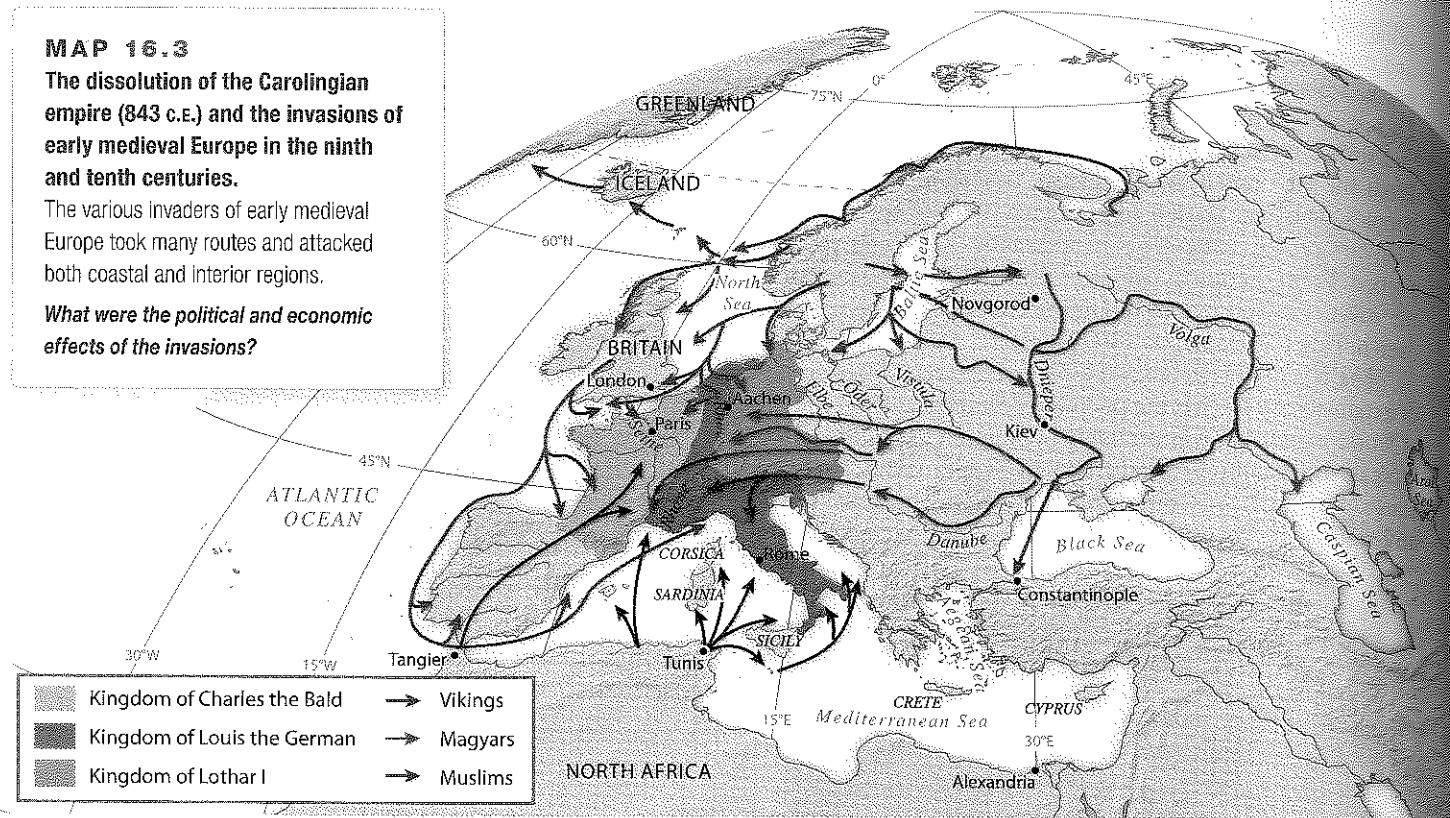
The first Viking invaders began to attack unprotected monasteries in the 790s. Learning from experience, Viking

Magyars (MAH-jahrs)

MAP 16.3**The dissolution of the Carolingian empire (843 c.e.) and the invasions of early medieval Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries.**

The various invaders of early medieval Europe took many routes and attacked both coastal and interior regions.

What were the political and economic effects of the invasions?



Kingdom of Charles the Bald	→ Vikings
Kingdom of Louis the German	→ Magyars
Kingdom of Lothar I	→ Muslims

forces mounted increasingly daring raids. In 844 c.e., more than 150 Viking ships sailed up the Garonne River in southern France, plundering settlements along the way. Sometimes Viking fleets attacked sizable cities: in 845, some 800 vessels appeared without warning before the city of Hamburg in northern Germany; in 885, a Viking force consisting of at least 700 ships sailed up the Seine River and besieged Paris; and in 994, an armada of about 100 ships sprinted up the Thames River and raided London. Some Vikings bypassed relatively close targets and ventured into the Mediterranean, where they plundered sites in the Balearic Islands, Sicily, and southern Italy. By following the Russian rivers to the Black Sea, other Vikings made their way to Constantinople, which they raided at least three times during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Devolution of Political Authority The Carolingians had no navy, no means to protect vulnerable sites, and no way to predict the movements of Viking raiders. Defense against the Magyars and the Muslims as well as the Vikings rested principally with local forces that could respond rapidly to invasions. Because imperial authorities were unable to defend their territories, the Carolingian empire became the chief casualty of the invasions. After the ninth century, political and military initiative in western Europe increasingly devolved to regional and local authorities.

The devolution of political authority took different forms in different lands. In England and Germany, regional kingdoms emerged and successfully defended territories more compact than the sprawling Carolingian empire. In France, the counts and other Carolingian subordinates usurped royal rights and prerogatives for themselves. The Vikings themselves established settlements in northern France and southern Italy, where they carved out small, independent states. Following a century of internal conflict and external invasion, the emergence of regional kingdoms and local authorities made it increasingly unlikely that imperial rule would return to western Europe. Like postclassical India but unlike postclassical societies in China, southwest Asia, and the eastern Mediterranean region, western Europe became a society of competing regional states. By putting an end to the ninth-century invasions and establishing a stable political order, these states laid a foundation for social, economic, and cultural development in later centuries.

ECONOMY AND SOCIETY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Economic and social development in the two big provinces of Christendom mirrored their different political fortunes in the postclassical era. Byzantium was an economic powerhouse in

the eastern Mediterranean region. The Byzantine countryside produced abundant agricultural surpluses, which supported large urban populations and fueled the work of manufacturers. Byzantine merchants participated in long-distance commercial networks that linked lands throughout the eastern hemisphere. Western Christendom, by contrast, experienced both a decline of agricultural production and a weakening of cities as repeated invasions disrupted economic and social as well as political affairs. By the tenth century, however, a measure of political stability served as a foundation for economic recovery, and western European peoples began to participate more actively in the larger trading world of the eastern hemisphere.

The Two Economies of Early Medieval Europe

The Byzantine Peasantry Byzantium was strongest when its large class of free peasants flourished. After adoption of the *theme* system in the eighth century, soldiers received allotments of land when they mustered out of the army. This arrangement supported a large and prosperous class of free peasants, who cultivated their land intensively in hopes of improving their families' fortunes. The free peasantry entered an era of gradual decline after the eleventh century as wealthy cultivators managed to accumulate large estates. For as long as it flourished, however, the free peasantry provided agricultural surpluses that served as the foundation for general prosperity in the Byzantine empire.

Manufacturing Agricultural surpluses supported manufacturing in Byzantium's cities, especially Constantinople, which was already a manufacturing megalopolis in classical times. The city was home to throngs of artisans and crafts workers, not to mention thousands of imperial officials and bureaucrats. Byzantine crafts workers enjoyed a reputation especially for their glassware, linen and woolen textiles, gems, jewelry, and fine work in gold and silver.

Silk In the sixth century, crafts workers added high-quality silk textiles to the list of products manufactured in the Byzantine empire. The Byzantine historian Procopius reported that two Christian monks from Persia traveled to China, where they observed the techniques of silk production, which at that time were unknown outside China. According to Procopius, the monks hollowed out their walking staffs and filled them with silkworm eggs, which they smuggled out of China, through their native land of Persia, and into the Byzantine empire. It is likely that Procopius simplified a more complex story by focusing attention on the monks, who by themselves could hardly have introduced a full-blown silk industry to Byzantium. The production of fine, Chinese-style silks required more than a few silkworm eggs. It called also for the mastery of sophisticated technologies and elaborate procedures that probably reached Byzantium by several routes.



Peasants—probably sharecroppers—receive seeds and tend to vineyards in this painting from a Byzantine manuscript. What does this illustration suggest about the relationship between the two landowners or overseers (left, in the top register) and the five laborers?

In any case, silk textiles soon made major contributions to the Byzantine economy. By the late sixth century, Byzantine silks matched the quality of Chinese textiles, and Byzantium had become the principal supplier of the fashionable fabric to lands in the Mediterranean basin. The silk industry was so important to the Byzantine economy that the government closely supervised every step in its production and sale. Regulations allowed individuals to participate in only one activity—such as weaving, dyeing, or sales—to prevent the creation of a monopoly by a few wealthy or powerful entrepreneurs.

Byzantine Trade The Byzantine economy also benefited from trade. Sitting astride routes going east and west as well as north and south, Constantinople served as the main clearinghouse for trade in the western part of Eurasia. The merchants of Constantinople maintained commercial links with manufacturers and merchants in central Asia, Russia, Scandinavia, northern Europe, and the lands of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean basin. Even after the early Islamic conquests, Byzantine merchants traded regularly with their Muslim counterparts in Persia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt except during periods of outright war between Byzantium and Muslim states. Indeed, Byzantium was so dominant in trade that the Byzantine gold coin, the *bezant*, served as the standard currency of the Mediterranean basin for more than half a millennium, from the sixth through the twelfth century.

Byzantium drew enormous wealth simply by controlling trade and levying customs duties on merchandise that passed

Sources from the Past

The Wealth and Commerce of Constantinople

The Spanish rabbi Benjamin of Tudela traveled throughout Europe, north Africa, and southwest Asia between 1165 and 1173 c.e. He may have ventured as far as India, and he mentioned both India and China in his travel account. His main purpose was to record the conditions of Jewish communities, but he also described the many lands and about three hundred cities that he visited. His travels took place during an era of political decline for the Byzantine empire, yet he still found Constantinople a flourishing and prosperous city.

The circumference of the city of Constantinople is eighteen miles; half of it is surrounded by the sea, and half by land, and it is situated upon two arms of the sea, one coming from the sea of Russia [the Black Sea], and one from the sea of Sepharad [the Mediterranean].

All sorts of merchants come here from the land of Babylon, from the land of Shinar [Mesopotamia], from Persia, Media [western Iran], and all the sovereignty of the land of Egypt, from the land of Canaan [Palestine], and the empire of Russia, from Hungary, Patzinakia [Ukraine], Khazaria [southern Russia], and the land of Lombardy [northern Italy] and Sepharad [Spain].

Constantinople is a busy city, and merchants come to it from every country by sea or land, and there is none like it in the world except Baghdad, the great city of Islam. In Constantinople is the church of Hagia Sophia, and the seat of the pope of the Greeks, since Greeks do not obey the pope of Rome. There are also as many churches as there are days of the year. . . . And in this church [Hagia Sophia] there are pillars of gold and silver, and lamps of silver and gold more than a man can count.

Close to the walls of the palace is also a place of amusement belonging to the emperor, which is called the Hippodrome,

and every year on the anniversary of the birth of Jesus the emperor gives a great entertainment there. And in that place men from all the races of the world come before the emperor and empress with jugglery and without jugglery, and they introduce lions, leopards, bears, and wild asses, and they engage them in combat with one another; and the same thing is done with birds. No entertainment like this is to be found in any other land. . . .

From every part of the Byzantine empire tribute is brought here every year, and they fill strongholds with garments of silk, purple, and gold. Like unto these storehouses and this wealth there is nothing in the whole world to be found. It is said that the tribute of the city amounts every year to 20,000 gold pieces, derived both from the rents of shops and markets and from the tribute of merchants who enter by sea or land.

The Greek inhabitants are very rich in gold and precious stones, and they go clothed in garments of silk and gold embroidery, and they ride horses and look like princes. Indeed, the land is very rich in all cloth stuffs and in bread, meat, and wine.

Wealth like that of Constantinople is not to be found in the whole world. Here also are men learned in all the books of the Greeks, and they eat and drink, every man under his vine and his fig-tree.

For Further Reflection

- How is it possible to account for the prosperity that Benjamin of Tudela found in Constantinople?

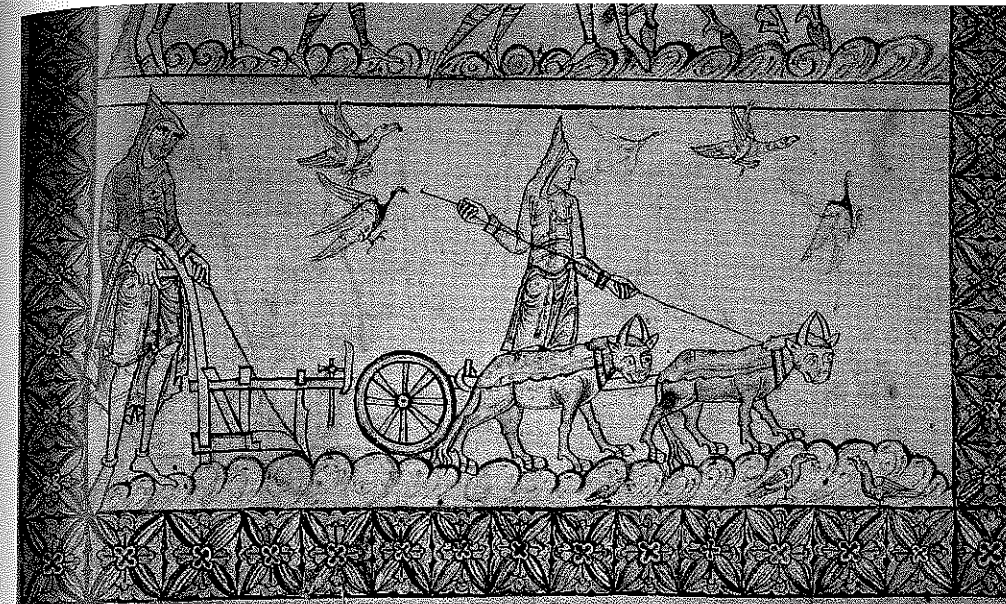
Source: Benjamin of Tudela. *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*. Trans. by M. N. Adler. London: H. Frowde, 1907. (Translation slightly modified.)

through its lands. Moreover, Byzantium served as the western anchor of the Eurasian trading network that revived the Silk Roads of classical times. Silk and porcelain came to Constantinople from China, spices from India and southeast Asia. Carpets arrived from Persia and woolen textiles from western Europe, while timber, furs, honey, amber, and slaves came from Russia and Scandinavia. Byzantine subjects consumed some commodities from distant lands, but they redistributed most products, often after adding to their value by further processing—by fashioning jewelry out of gems imported from India, for example, or by dyeing raw woolen cloth imported from western Europe.

As Byzantium prospered, western Europe struggled to find its economic footing in an era of intermittent invasion and political turmoil, which disrupted both agricultural production and large-scale manufacturing. While dealing with

political and military challenges, though, western Europeans also adopted a series of innovations that yielded increased agricultural production.

Heavy Plows One innovation involved a new kind of heavy plow that gradually replaced the light Mediterranean plows that had made their way north at the time of the Roman empire. In light, well-drained Mediterranean soils, cultivators used small wooden plows that broke the surface of the soil, created a furrow, and uprooted weeds. This type of plow made little headway in the heavy, moist soils of the north. After the eighth century a more serviceable plow came into use: a heavy tool equipped with iron tips and a mould-board that turned the soil so as to aerate it thoroughly and break up the root networks of weeds. The heavy plow was a more expensive piece of equipment than the light Mediterranean plow, and it



In this twelfth-century manuscript illustration, a peasant guides a heavy, wheeled plow while his wife prods the oxen that pull the plow.

required cultivators to harness more energy to pull it through damp northern soils. Once hitched to oxen or draft horses, however, the heavy plow contributed to greater agricultural production.

As the heavy plow spread throughout western Europe, cultivators took several additional steps that increased agricultural production. They cleared new lands for cultivation and built ponds for fish. They constructed water mills, which enabled them to take advantage of a ready and renewable source of inanimate energy, thus freeing human and animal energy for other work. They employed a special horse collar, which allowed them to rely less on slow-moving oxen and more on speedier horses to pull their heavy plows. They increased cultivation of beans and other legumes, which enriched diets throughout western Christendom. Thus western Europeans made numerous small adaptations that created a foundation for rural prosperity after 1000 c.e.

Trade in Western Christendom By no means did trade disappear from western Europe. Local markets and fairs offered opportunities for small-scale exchange, and itinerant peddlers shopped their wares from one settlement to another. Maritime trade flourished in the Mediterranean despite Muslim conquests in the region. Christian merchants from Italy and Spain regularly traded across religious boundary lines with Muslims of Sicily, Spain, and north Africa, who linked Europe indirectly with a larger world of communication and exchange.

Norse Merchant-Mariners Maritime trade flourished also in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. Most active among the early medieval merchants in the northern seas were Norse seafarers,

kinsmen of the Vikings. Norse traders followed the same routes as Viking raiders, and many individual mariners no doubt turned from commerce to plunder and back again as opportunities arose. Norse merchants called at ports from Russia to Ireland, carrying cargoes of fish and furs from Scandinavia, honey from Poland, wheat from England, wine from France, beer from the Low Countries, and swords from Germany. By traveling down the Russian rivers to the Black Sea, they were able to trade actively in both the Byzantine and the Abbasid empires. Thus, like Mediterranean merchants, but by different routes, Norse mariners linked western Europe with the world of Islam. Indeed, the Carolingian empire depended heavily on this connection: Norse merchants took Scandinavian products to the Abbasid empire and exchanged them for silver, which they traded at Carolingian ports for wine, jugs, glassware, and other products. The silver transported from the Abbasid empire by Norse merchants was a principal source of bullion used for minting coins in early medieval Europe and hence a crucially important element of the western European economy. Thus, even if western

Thinking about ENCOUNTERS

Northern Connections

During the postclassical era, Norse mariners found their way to most regions of Europe as well as the Abbasid empire and even ventured across the Atlantic Ocean to Greenland and North America. In what specific ways did Norse merchants and travelers create links between Europe and the larger world? What were the effects of those connections for Byzantine and western European peoples?

European merchants were not as numerous or prominent as their Byzantine counterparts, they nevertheless participated in the trading networks of the larger eastern hemisphere.

Social Development in the Two Worlds of Christendom

Byzantium: An Urban Society The Byzantine empire was rich in large, prosperous, cosmopolitan cities, including Alexandria, Antioch, and Damascus, to mention only a few. Indeed, until the Muslim conquests of the late seventh and eighth centuries, Byzantium was probably the world's most urbanized society, and residents of its cities enjoyed the benefits and observed urban traditions inherited from the classical Mediterranean world. Yet Constantinople had no rival among Byzantine cities. Subjects of the Byzantine empire referred to it simply as "the City." The heart of the City was the imperial palace, which employed twenty thousand workers as palace staff. Peacocks strutted through gardens filled with sculptures and fountains. Most famous of them was a gold fountain that spouted wine for imperial guests.

City Life Aristocrats maintained enormous palaces that included courtyards, reception halls, libraries, chapels, and quarters for members of the extended family as well as servants and slaves. In the fifth century Constantinople boasted 4,388 mansions, as well as 14 imperial and princely palaces. Women lived in separate apartments and did not receive male visitors from outside the household. Nor did they participate in banquets and parties, especially when wine flowed freely or when the affairs were likely to become so festive that they

could compromise a woman's reputation. In Constantinople as well as other cities, upper-class women generally wore veils, like their Mediterranean ancestors from centuries past, to discourage the attention of men outside their own families.

Dwellings of less privileged classes were not so splendid. Artisans and crafts workers commonly lived in rooms above their shops, while clerks and government officials occupied multistory apartment buildings. Workers and the poor lived in rickety tenements where they shared kitchens and sanitary facilities with their neighbors.

Attractions of Constantinople Even for the poor, though, the City had its attractions. As the heir of Rome, Constantinople was a city of baths, which were sites of relaxation and exercise as well as hygienic bathing. Taverns and restaurants offered settings for social gatherings—checkers, chess, and dice games were especially popular activities at taverns—and theaters provided entertainment in the form of song, dance, and striptease. Mass entertainment took place in the Hippodrome, a large stadium adjacent to the imperial palace, where Byzantine subjects watched chariot races, athletic matches, contests between wild animals, and circuses featuring acts by clowns, jugglers, acrobats, and dwarfs.

Western Europe: A Rural Society Cities to the west had once offered similar pleasures, but they largely disappeared in the wake of Germanic invasions and the collapse of the western Roman empire in the late fifth century. The agricultural surplus of western Europe was sufficient to sustain local political elites but not substantial enough to support large, urban populations of artisans, crafts workers, merchants, and professionals.



A manuscript illustration depicts one Byzantine woman weaving cloth (left) while another spins thread (right). Both women veil their hair for modesty. Women workers were prominent in Byzantine textile production.

Sources from the Past

Pope Gregory the Great on Peasant Taxation on the Papal Estates, ca. 600

Some useful insights into the lives and experiences of peasants can be found in this letter written by Pope Gregory I (also known as Gregory the Great) in about 600 C.E. The Pope demonstrates concern for the excessive tax burden tenant farmers working in papal estates are being forced to pay, both through the practice of "superadding" and also because of the use of unjust weights. But despite papal concern, the document reminds us just how harsh the lives of peasant farmers in early medieval Europe were.

We have also learned that in some of the holdings of the Church a most unjust exaction is made, so that three half measures out of seventy—it is shameful to say it—are solicited from the tenants; and furthermore, even this does not suffice, but they are said to be asked for something more, over and above this, by reason of a long-standing custom. This practice we absolutely detest, and we wish it to be absolutely eradicated from our patrimony. But let your experience guide you, whether it be a case of receiving a pound more, or whether it be a case of taking more than rightful measure from the serfs; and let everything count towards the sum total of the rent; and insofar as the serfs can bear it, let them pay full rent reckoned at two parts out of seventy by weight. Nor should the market tax be collected at more than a just pound weight, neither an excessive pound weight, nor other burdens greater than a pound; but by your calculation, so far as you are able to do it, let it be reckoned against the sum total of the rent, and so let filthy exaction never occur.

But in order that these very burdens, imposed unjustly, which we have caused to be reckoned as part of the rent, may not in some way be increased after our death, and the rent be thus increased, and the serfs again be compelled to pay the burdens of superadding, we desire you to make out schedules of security about the rents, inscribing therein the amount of rent which each ought to pay, including the market tax, the grain tax, and other payments. But as for what has been taken for the use of the overseer from these little excrescences, we desire this to be taken from the sum total of the rent and applied to your own use.

Above all we wish you to attend to this carefully, that unjust weights be not used in collecting the rents. If you should find such, destroy them, and introduce new and just ones. For my son, the servant of God, the Deacon, has already found such as displeased him, but he did not have the authority to change them. Except in the case of inferior and cheap provisions, we want nothing over and above just weights to be demanded of the coloni of the Church.

We have further learned that if any one of the serfs has done wrong, punishment is not inflicted upon the man himself, but payment is levied on his property. Concerning this we ordain that whoever commits wrong shall, as is fitting, be punished; but let there be no acceptance of any payment whatever from him, except, perchance, a small sum which may defray the expenses of the bailiff sent to him.

We have further learned that as often as a tenant has taken anything from a colonus it has not been returned, though repayment was demanded of the tenant; therefore we order that whatever has been taken with violence from any of the serfs be restored to him from whom it was taken and not put to our use, lest we ourselves seem to be the authors of violence. Further, we wish, that when you send outside the patrimony, those who are engaged in your service, small payments be received from them. Yet so that it turn out to their advantage, because we do not desire that the purse of the Church be disgraced by filthy lucre. We also order you carefully to prevent the placing of tenants on the holdings of the Church for payments, lest, through payments being sought, tenants be frequently changed, from which changing what else takes place but that the estates of the Church are never cultivated? Even the payments from charter lands should be reduced according to the sum total of the rent. On the score of filling the barns and collecting their contents we desire you to receive from the holdings of the Church only what is customary; what we have ordered you to buy should be bought from strangers.

Have that part of my letter which relates to the serfs read throughout all our holdings, that they may know wherein they might protect themselves from violence with our authority, and let there be given to them either an authentic document or a copy of the same.

For Further Reflection

- On the basis of the letter from Pope Gregory the Great, what were some of the ways in which peasants and their labor were being exploited on papal estates at the end of the fifth century?

Source: J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Vol. LXXVII p. 498 (Paris, 1849), reprinted in Roy C. Cave and Herbert H. Coulson, eds., *A Source Book for Medieval Economic History* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1936; reprint ed., New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1965), pp. 41–43. (Translation slightly modified.)

Towns survived, but they served more as economic hubs of surrounding regions than as vibrant centers integrating the economic activities of distant lands.

The Question of Feudalism How did the peoples of western Christendom reorganize their society after the collapse of the western Roman empire? Historians once routinely used the term *feudalism* to characterize the political and social order of medieval Europe. They spoke of a “feudal system” involving a hierarchy of lords and vassals, who collectively took charge of political and military affairs on the basis of personal relationships. Lords supposedly provided grants of land to their retainers in exchange for loyalty and military service. Over the years, scholarship has somewhat undermined that view of medieval society, and some historians have abandoned the concept of feudalism as a model that tends to oversimplify a more complex society. They argue that it is more accurate to view early medieval Europe as a society in which local political and military elites worked in various ad hoc ways to organize their territories and maintain social order. The arrangements they adopted had deep implications for the lives of political and military elites themselves and also for their relationships with commoners.

In the absence of an effective central authority such as an emperor, local notables or lords mobilized small private armies composed of armed retainers. Some of these lords were descendants of Carolingian or other ruling houses, and others were ambitious strongmen—essentially local warlords. Both the lords and their retainers were warriors with horses, weapons, and military expertise. Lords sometimes rewarded their retainers with grants of land or some other valuable, such as the right to income generated by a mill, the right to receive rents or payments from a village, or even a payment of money. In other cases, lords supported their retainers by maintaining them in their own households, where they provided equipment and training in military affairs. After the year 1000, lords increasingly hired their retainers, paying them for services on the basis of need. By one mechanism or another, lords and retainers constituted themselves as privileged political and military elites who dominated local regions.

Peasants Lords and retainers supported themselves and their families principally on the basis of the surplus agricultural production that they commandeered from a subject peasantry. Political and military elites obliged local peasants to provide labor services and payments of rents in kind, such as a portion of the harvest, a chicken, or a dozen eggs. Male peasants typically worked three days a week for their lords while also providing additional labor services during planting and harvesting season. Women peasants churned butter, made cheese, brewed beer, spun thread, wove cloth, or sewed clothes for their lords as well as for their own families. Some peasants also kept sheep or cattle, and their obligations to lords included products from their herds. Because lords provided peasants with land to cultivate and often with tools and animals

as well, peasants had little opportunity to move to different lands. Indeed, they were commonly able to do so only with permission from their lords. They even had to pay fees for the right to marry a peasant who worked for a different lord.

Population During the fifth and sixth centuries, epidemic disease and political turmoil took a demographic toll in both Byzantium and western Europe. From a high point of about thirty-six million at the time of the Roman empire in 200 c.e., population fell to about twenty-six million in the year 600—nineteen million in Byzantium and seven million in western Europe. Population fluctuated dramatically over the next two centuries, as Byzantium lost territories to Muslims and western Europeans suffered repeated invasion. After the eighth century, however, both Byzantium and western Europe entered an era of demographic recovery. Political stability created a foundation for a more productive agricultural economy just as new food crops made their way from the Muslim world to Byzantium and Mediterranean Europe. Hard durum wheat, rice, spinach, artichokes, eggplant, lemons, limes, oranges, and melons brought increased calories and dietetic variety that supported increasing populations. By the year 800 the two provinces of Christendom had a combined population of about twenty-nine million, which rose to about thirty-two million in 900 and thirty-six million in 1000—the level of the Roman empire’s population some eight centuries earlier. Thus by the year 1000, both Byzantium and western Europe had built productive agricultural economies that sustained sizable and increasing populations.

THE EVOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES IN BYZANTIUM AND WESTERN EUROPE

As heirs of the Roman empire, Byzantium and western Europe were both Christian societies. As in the cases of political, social, and economic affairs, though, the two big realms of Christendom created distinctive and ultimately competing forms of their common religious inheritance. In both Byzantium and western Europe, Christianity served as the principal source of religious, moral, and cultural authority. Both lands supported ecclesiastical hierarchies with networks of monasteries. Both societies also worked to extend the reach of Christianity by sending missionaries to seek converts in northerly territories from Russia and Slavic lands to Scandinavia and the British Isles. By the year 1000 the twin heirs of Roman Christianity had laid the foundations for a large Christian cultural zone in the western part of the Eurasian continent that paralleled the Buddhist and Islamic cultural zones farther east. Yet even as they were promoting Christianity in their own societies and beyond, church authorities in Byzantium and western Europe fell into deep disagreement on matters of doctrine, ritual, and church authority. By the mid-eleventh century, their differences had become so great that church leaders formally denounced



A mosaic from the floor of a chapel at Worcester College in England, depicting Pope Gregory I.

one another and established two rival communities: the Eastern Orthodox church in Byzantium and the Roman Catholic church in western Europe.

Popes and Patriarchs

Christianity had a more hierarchical organizational structure than any other major religious tradition. There was no pope of Buddhism, no patriarch in the Islamic world. Christianity, however, inherited a strong organizational structure from the time of the late Roman empire. In the early middle ages, the two most important Christian authorities were the bishop of Rome, known as the pope, and the patriarch of Constantinople.

The Papacy When the western Roman empire collapsed, the **papacy** survived and claimed continuing spiritual authority over all the lands formerly embraced by the Roman empire. At first the popes cooperated closely with the Byzantine emperors, who seemed to be the natural heirs of the emperors of Rome. Beginning in the late sixth century, however, the

popes acted more independently and devoted their efforts to strengthening the western Christian church based at Rome and clearly distinguishing it from the eastern Christian church based at Constantinople.

Pope Gregory I The individual most responsible for charting an independent course for the Roman church was **Pope Gregory I** (590–604 c.e.), also known as Gregory the Great. As pope, Gregory faced an array of challenges. During the late sixth century, the Germanic Lombards campaigned in Italy, menacing Rome and the church in the process. Gregory mobilized local resources and organized the defense of Rome, thus saving both the city and the church. He also faced difficulties within the church, since bishops frequently acted as though they were supreme ecclesiastical authorities within their own dioceses. To regain the initiative, Gregory reasserted claims to papal primacy—the notion that the bishop of Rome was the ultimate authority for all the Christian church. Gregory also made contributions as a theologian. He emphasized the sacrament of penance, which required individuals to confess their sins to their priests and atone for them by penitential acts—a practice that enhanced the influence of the Roman church in the lives of individuals.

The Patriarchs The **patriarchs** of Constantinople were powerful officials, but they did not enjoy the independence of their brethren to the west. Following the tradition of caesaropapism inaugurated by the emperor Constantine in the fourth century, Byzantine emperors treated the church as a department of state. They appointed the patriarchs, and they instructed patriarchs, bishops, and priests to deliver sermons that supported imperial policy and encouraged obedience to imperial authorities. This caesaropapism was a source of tension between imperial and ecclesiastical authorities, and it also had the potential to provoke popular dissent when imperial views clashed with those of the larger society.

Iconoclasm The most divisive ecclesiastical policy implemented by Byzantine emperors was **iconoclasm**, inaugurated by Emperor Leo III (reigned 717–741 c.e.). Byzantium had a long tradition of producing icons—paintings of Jesus, saints, and other religious figures—many of which were splendid works of art. Most theologians took these icons as visual stimulations that inspired reverence for holy personages. Leo, however, became convinced that the veneration of images was sinful, tantamount to the worship of idols. In 726 c.e., he embarked on a policy of iconoclasm (which literally means “breaking of icons”), destroying religious images and prohibiting their use in churches. The policy immediately sparked protests and even riots throughout the empire, because icons were extremely popular among the laity. Debates about iconoclasm raged for more than a century. Only in 843 did Leo’s followers abandon the policy of iconoclasm.

iconoclasm (eye-KAHN-oh-klazm)

This illustration from a psalter prepared about 900 C.E. depicts an iconoclast whitewashing an image of Jesus painted on a wall.



Monks and Missionaries

Consumed with matters of theology, ritual, and church politics, popes and patriarchs rarely dealt directly with the lay population of their churches. For personal religious instruction and inspiration, lay Christians looked less to the church hierarchy than to local monasteries.

Asceticism Christian **monasticism** grew out of the efforts of devout individuals to lead especially holy lives. Early Christian ascetics in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia adopted extreme regimes of self-denial in order to focus all their attention on religious matters. Some lived alone as hermits. Others formed communes where they devoted themselves to the pursuit of holiness rather than worldly success. Many dedicated themselves to celibacy, fasting, and prayer.

Drawn by their reputation for piety, disciples gathered around these ascetics and established communities of men and women determined to follow their example. These communities became the earliest monasteries. During the early days of monasticism, each community developed its own rules, procedures, and priorities. The result was wild inconsistency: some monasteries imposed harsh and austere regimes of self-denial, and others offered little or no guidance.

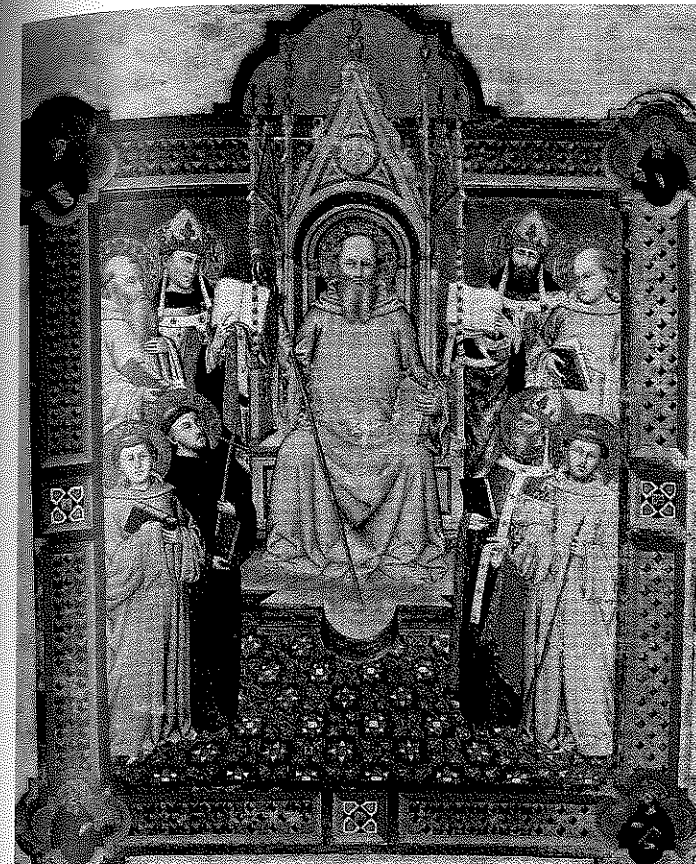
St. Basil and St. Benedict Monasteries became much more influential when reformers provided them with discipline and a sense of purpose. The two most important reformers

were the patriarch **St. Basil** of Caesarea (329–379 C.E.) in Byzantium and **St. Benedict** of Nursia (480–547 C.E.) in Italy. Both men prepared regulations for monasteries that provided for mild but not debilitating **asceticism** combined with meditation and work on behalf of the church. In both Basilian and Benedictine monasteries, individuals gave up their personal possessions and lived communal, celibate lives under the direction of the abbots who supervised the communities. Poverty, chastity, and obedience became the prime virtues for Basilian and Benedictine monks. At certain hours monks came together for religious services and prayers, dividing the remainder of the day into periods for study, reflection, and labor.

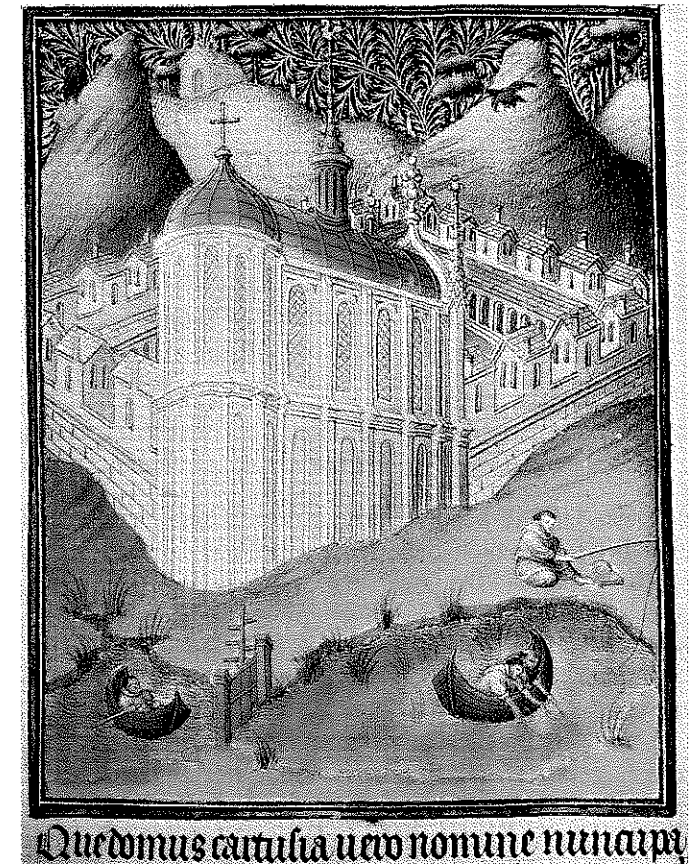
St. Scholastica Monasteries throughout Byzantium adopted the Basilian rule for their own use, while their counterparts in western Europe largely followed the rule of St. Benedict. Through the influence of St. Benedict's sister, the nun **St. Scholastica** (482–543 C.E.), an adaptation of the Benedictine rule soon provided guidance for the religious life of women living in convents.

Monasticism and Society Like Buddhist monasteries in Asian lands and charitable religious foundations in Muslim lands, Christian monasteries provided a variety of social services that enabled them to build close relations with local communities. Monks and nuns offered spiritual counsel to local laity, and they organized relief efforts by supplying food and medical attention at times of natural or other calamities. Monasteries and convents served both as orphanages and as

asceticism (uh-SET-uh-siz-uhm)



A fourteenth-century manuscript illustration shows St. Benedict with his crozier, the staff carried by abbots to symbolize their position (left), and meeting with two monks beside a fishpond at their monastery (right). What does the fishpond suggest about the economic significance of monasteries?



Quedomus cartula uero nomine nuncupa

inns for travelers. Sometimes they also provided rudimentary educational services for local communities.

Because of the various roles they played in the larger society, monasteries were particularly effective agents in the spread of Christianity. While providing social services, monks also zealously preached Christianity and tended to the spiritual needs of rural populations. For many people, a local neighboring monastery was the only source of instruction in Christian doctrine, and a local monastic church offered the only practical opportunity for them to take part in religious services. Through patience and persistence over decades and centuries, monks and nuns helped to instill Christian values in countless generations of European peasants.

Missionaries Some monks went beyond the bounds of their own society and sought to spread Christianity in the larger world. Indeed, one of the remarkable developments of the early middle ages was the creation of a large Christian cultural zone in the western part of the Eurasian continent.

Christianity was already well established in the Mediterranean region, but pagan Germanic and Slavic peoples occupied

the more northerly parts of Europe. In the late sixth century, Pope Gregory I sent **missionaries** to England and targeted the pagan Germanic kings who ruled various parts of the island, hoping that their conversion would induce their subjects to adopt Christianity. This tactic largely succeeded: by the early seventh century Christianity enjoyed a stable foothold, and by 800 England was securely within the fold of the Roman church. The Franks and Charlemagne later sponsored efforts to extend Christianity to northern Germany and Scandinavia. They met spirited resistance from Germanic peoples, who had no desire to abandon their inherited gods or pagan beliefs, but by the year 1000 Christianity had won a sizable and growing following.

Meanwhile, Byzantine authorities sent missionaries to Balkan and Slavic lands. The most famous of the missionaries to the Slavs were Saints Cyril and Methodius, two brothers from Thessaloniki in Greece. During the mid-ninth century, Cyril and Methodius conducted missions in Bulgaria and Moravia (which included much of the modern Czech, Slovakian, and Hungarian territories). There they devised an alphabet, known as the Cyrillic alphabet, for the previously illiterate Slavic

Reverberations of ●●●●●●●●

The Spread of Religious Traditions

Between the late sixth century and 1000 c.e., missionaries from both the Roman and Byzantine churches moved north and west in quests to bring Christianity to nonbelievers. While the Roman missionaries were successful in the British Isles, Scandinavia, and among Germanic peoples, the Byzantine missionaries had their greatest successes in the Balkans and in Slavic lands. Consider the long-term impact that the spread of these different traditions had in the lands where they won converts in terms of art, literature, and culture. In what ways are these legacies still visible in western and eastern Europe today?

peoples. Though adapted from written Greek, the Cyrillic alphabet represented the sounds of Slavic languages more precisely than did the Greek, and it remained in use in much of eastern Europe until supplanted by the Roman alphabet in the twentieth century. In Russia and many other parts of the former Soviet Union, the Cyrillic alphabet survives to the present day.

North of Bulgaria another Slavic people began to organize large states: the Russians. About 989, at the urging of Byzantine missionaries, Prince Vladimir of Kiev converted to Christianity and ordered his subjects to follow his example. Vladimir was no paragon of virtue: he lauded drunkenness and reportedly maintained a harem of eight hundred young women. After his conversion, however, Byzantine influences flowed rapidly into Russia. Cyrillic writing, literacy, and Christian missions all spread quickly throughout Russia. Byzantine teachers traveled north to establish schools, and Byzantine priests conducted services for Russian converts. Thus Kiev served as a conduit for the spread of Byzantine cultural and religious influence in Russia.

Two Churches

Although they professed the same basic Christian doctrine, the churches of Constantinople and Rome experienced increasing friction after the sixth century. Tensions mirrored political strains, such as deep resentment in Byzantium after Charlemagne accepted the title of emperor from the pope in Rome. Yet church authorities in Constantinople and Rome also harbored different views on religious and theological issues. The iconoclastic movement of the eighth and ninth centuries was one focus of difference. Western theologians regarded religious images as perfectly appropriate aids to devotion and resented Byzantine claims to the contrary, whereas the iconoclasts took offense at the efforts of their Roman counterparts to have images restored in Byzantium.

Religious Rivalry Over time the Christian churches based in Constantinople and Rome disagreed on many other points.

Some ritual and doctrinal differences concerned forms of worship and the precise wording of theological teachings—relatively minor issues that in and of themselves need not have caused deep division in the larger Christian community. Byzantine theologians objected, for example, to the fact that western priests shaved their beards and used unleavened rather than leavened bread when saying Mass. Other differences concerned more substantive theological matters, such as the precise relationship between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—all regarded as manifestations of God by most Christian theologians of the day.



Monasteries were the principal centers of literacy in western Europe during the early middle ages. In this manuscript illustration, one monk copies a manuscript, another makes geometric calculations, a third cuts parchment, two work on the building, and one more rings the bells that call monks and members of the surrounding community to religious services.

Thinking about TRADITIONS

Competing Christianities

The Byzantine empire and western Europe inherited the same Christianity from the late Roman empire. How did Christianity develop along distinct lines in the two regions? What influences contributed to the development of such different—and so far irreconcilable—understandings of Christianity?

Schism Alongside ritual and doctrinal differences, the Byzantine patriarchs and the Roman popes disputed their respective rights and powers. Patriarchs argued for the autonomy of all major Christian jurisdictions, including that of Constantinople, whereas popes asserted the primacy of Rome as the sole seat of authority for all Christendom. Ultimately, relations became so strained that the eastern and western churches went separate ways. In 1054 the patriarch and pope mutually excommunicated each other, each refusing to recognize the other's church as properly Christian. This decision had profound historical consequences because, despite efforts at reconciliation, the **schism** between eastern and western churches has persisted to the present day.

In light of the schism, historians refer to the eastern Christian church after 1054 as the Eastern Orthodox church and its western counterpart as the Roman Catholic church.

CHRONOLOGY

313–337	Reign of Constantine
329–379	Life of St. Basil of Caesarea
476	Collapse of the western Roman empire
480–547	Life of St. Benedict of Nursia
482–543	Life of St. Scholastica
527–565	Reign of Justinian
590–604	Reign of Pope Gregory I
717–741	Reign of Leo III
726–843	Iconoclastic controversy
732	Battle of Tours
751–843	Carolingian kingdom
768–814	Reign of Charlemagne
800	Coronation of Charlemagne as emperor
9th century	Missions of St. Cyril and St. Methodius to the Slavs
989	Conversion of Prince Vladimir of Kiev to Christianity
1054	Schism between Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches