

**BYZANTINE ISTANBUL
(330-1453 CE):
CONSTANTINOPE**



BYZANTINE ISTANBUL (330-1453 CE): CONSTANTINOPLE

Description

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain why Constantine the Great chose to relocate the Roman capital to Byzantium, how the city preserved and expanded Greco-Roman philosophy and scholarship after the fall of Rome in the 5th century CE, and why, after over 1000 years as a center of Christianity, Constantinople fell to the Muslim forces in 1453.

Subjects

World History, European History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Istanbul Archaeological Museum
- Hagia Sophia, Istanbul
- Hippodrome, Istanbul
- Damatrys Palace, Istanbul
- Great Palace, Istanbul
- Various Byzantine Museums, Greece
- Constantine the Great Statue, Vatican
- Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

Essential Questions

- Who was Constantine the Great?
- Why did he establish the city of Constantinople in 330 CE?
- Why was the Eastern Roman Empire called “Byzantine”?
- What happened to the Byzantine Empire after the Fall of Rome in the 5th century CE?
- What happened to the Byzantine Empire to cause its fall in 1453?
- What remnants of Byzantine culture are found in Istanbul today?

Academic Summary

Salminius Sozomenus (Greek Church Historian), *Ecclesiastical History*, 5th Century CE

The Emperor [Constantine] always intent on the advancement of religion erected splendid Christian temples to God in every place---especially in great cities such as Nicomedia in Bithynia, Antioch on the Orontes, and Byzantium. He greatly improved this latter city, and made it equal to Rome in power and influence; for when he had settled his empire as he was minded, and had freed himself from foreign foes, he resolved on founding a city which should be called by his own name, and should equal in fame even Rome. With this intent he went to the plain at the foot of Troy on the Hellespont . . . and here he laid out the plan of a large and beautiful city, and built gates on a high spot of ground, whence they are still visible from the sea to sailors. But when he had proceeded thus far, God appeared to him by night and bade him seek another site for his city.

Led by the divine hand, he came to Byzantium in Thrace, beyond Chalcedon in Bithynia, and here he desired to build his city, and render it worthy of the name of Constantine. In obedience to the command of God, he therefore enlarged the city formerly called Byzantium, and surrounded it with high walls; likewise he built splendid dwelling houses; and being aware that the former population was not enough for so great a city, he peopled it with men of rank and their families, whom he summoned from Rome and from other countries. He imposed special taxes to cover the expenses of building and adorning the city, and of supplying the inhabitants with food. He erected all the needed edifices for a great capital---a hippodrome, fountains, porticoes and other beautiful adornments. He named it Constantinople and New Rome---and established it as the Roman capital . . .

He created another Senate which he endowed with the same honors and privileges as that of Rome, and he strove to render the city of his name equal in every way to Rome in Italy; nor were his wishes in vain, for by the favor of God, it became the most populous and wealthy of cities. As this city became the capital of the Empire during the period of religious prosperity, it was not polluted by altars, Grecian temples, nor pagan sacrifices. Constantine also honored this new city of Christ by adorning it with many and splendid houses of prayer, in which the Deity vouchsafed to bless the efforts of the Emperor by giving sensible manifestations of his presence.

A Description of Constantinople (excerpts)

Gonzalez DB Clavijo to the Court of Timour, 1406

The city of Constantinople is surrounded by a high and strong wall, with towers. The wall has three angles, and from angle to angle there is a distance of six miles, so that the whole city is eighteen miles in circumference, which is six leagues; two sides facing the sea, and one facing the land. At the angle which does not face the sea, on a hill, are the palaces of the emperor.

Though the city is so large, it is not all well peopled, for in the middle of it there

are many enclosures, where there are corn fields, and fruit gardens. The most populous part is near the sea; and the greatest traffic is from the city, by the gates which open on the sea, especially the gates leading to the city of Pera ... This city of Constantinople contains many great churches and monasteries, but most of them are in ruins; though it seems clear that, in former times, when the city was in its youth, it was the most renowned city in the world. They say that even now there are three thousand churches, large and small; and within the city there are fountains and wells of sweet water; and in a part below the church which is dedicated to the Holy Apostle, there is a bridge reaching from one valley to another, over houses and gardens, by which water used to come, for the irrigation of those gardens.

In a street which leads to one of the gates of the city, opposite Pera, there is a pair of stocks fixed in the ground, for men who are to be imprisoned, or who break any of the city regulations, or who sell meat or bread with false weights. Such persons are taken to this place, and left there day and night, exposed to the weather. Between the city walls and the sea, opposite Pera, there are many houses, in which many things are sold, and warehouses.

A Second Rome...

On 11 May 330 CE, Constantine the Great, Emperor of Rome and the first ruler of a united Roman Empire since its split almost 50 years earlier, dedicated a new imperial capital city on the shores of the Bosphorus Strait at the intersection between the Black and Adriatic Seas. Over the next couple of decades, "New Rome" would be carefully planned out and built up under the emperor's supervision until it rivaled, and even surpassed, the grandeur and prominence of its predecessor in Italy. Although he had decreed Christianity legal in the empire years earlier through the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, just before he died in 337, Constantine himself was baptized in his new capital. In memory of their first Christian emperor, Church leaders after his death subsequently began informally calling the city "Constantinople." The name would become official by 400 CE and would last until 1928, when the city would be renamed Istanbul.

Constantinople was built on the foundations of an old Greek city called Byzantium. After the Fall of Western Rome in the 5th century CE to Germanic barbarian tribes, the Eastern Empire became known as "Byzantine" to differentiate it from the old Eastern Roman Empire. Legend says Byzantium was founded by a Greek colonist named Byzas under the direction of the Oracle at Delphi in the 7th century BCE. After the Romans besieged and took the city in 190 BCE, its position as a trading center ensured its continued existence and prosperity. At the crossroads of major land and sea trading routes, Byzantium caught the attention of Roman Emperors during the imperial age. To Constantine, who claimed to have seen a vision of the city in a dream, Byzantium seemed like a perfect choice for his new capital.

Over the next 1000 years, the city grew to be the largest in Europe. After Western Rome fell to barbarian invaders from the Germanic lands in the 5th century, Constantinople quickly became the center of culture and learning in Europe. At its peak during Europe's Middle Ages, Constantinople was the richest city on the continent.

Great churches and palaces were built celebrating this immense wealth and power, including Hagia Sophia (the Church of the Holy Wisdom), the largest and most important church in Christendom before the building of St. Peter's in Rome in the 16th century. While Western Europe languished through a dark age of ignorance before the Renaissance, Byzantine scholars, architects, mathematicians, philosophers and scribes preserved Greco-Roman culture. Only after trade re-opened with Constantinople in the late medieval period did Western Europe begin to experience a rebirth of that knowledge.

Constantinople remained in Christian hands until 1453, although not under the spiritual control of the Roman Pope. In 1054, as a result of the Great Schism, a religious and ecumenical split in the Christian Church that had been brewing for decades, the Eastern Orthodox Church was created in Constantinople. Under the control of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Eastern Church survived the city's capture by Ottoman Muslim armies in the 15th century.

On 29 May 1453, after over four centuries of standing as a bulwark for Christianity against Islamic armies in what had been the Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople fell to the Ottomans under Sultan Mehmed II. The Byzantine Empire and its Roman legacy collapsed. Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque (it became a museum in 1931). Constantinople would go on to serve as the Ottoman imperial capital until its fall to Turkish revolutionaries in the aftermath of the Great War, when its name was officially changed to Istanbul (a Turkish word for the city unofficially used since the 10th century). Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain why Constantine the Great chose to relocate the Roman capital to Byzantium, how the city preserved and expanded Greco-Roman philosophy and scholarship after the fall of Rome in the 5th century CE, and why, after over 1000 years as a center of Christianity, Constantinople fell to the sultan's forces in 1453.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain why Constantine the Great chose to relocate the Roman imperial capital to Byzantium in 330 CE.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Constantinople preserved and expanded Greco-Roman philosophy and scholarship after the fall of Western Rome in the 5th century CE.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain why, after over 1000 years as a center of Christianity, Constantinople fell to Muslim forces in 1453.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Why did Diocletian split the Roman Empire in 285 CE? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Byzantine History (30 min)
- Video – Constantinople (5 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on Constantinople, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced Students should focus on primary sources.
- Suggestion: See links below for a worksheet on Constantinople.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on Constantinople. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail why Constantine the Great chose to relocate the Roman capital to Byzantium, how the city preserved and expanded Greco-Roman philosophy and scholarship after the fall of Rome in the 5th century CE, and why, after over 1000 years as a center of Christianity, Constantinople fell to the sultan's forces in 1453.

Extension

On tour: Archaeological Museum, Istanbul

While on tour, students in Istanbul can visit the Archaeological Museum. It sits within walking distance of both the Topkapi Palace and Hagia Sophia. The museum is open from 9am-5pm (closed Mondays). Inside, students can see for themselves some of the greatest examples of Roman / Byzantine art and artifacts in the world. The museum also has a collection called "Istanbul through the Ages" containing artifacts that help tell the story of Istanbul's long and complicated history from Greek outpost to Roman metropolis to Byzantine capital to Ottoman capital to Turkey's largest city. Admission to anyone 12 and over is 10 Turkish Lira (approximately US\$4.50).

On tour: Hagia Sophia (Church of the Holy Wisdom), Istanbul

While on tour, students in Istanbul can visit Hagia Sophia (Church of the Holy Wisdom – Ayasofya in Turkish), where they can see for themselves the building that served as the central cathedral for Eastern Christianity for almost 1000 years. Built in the 6th century under orders from Emperor Justinian, it has some of the greatest Christian mosaics surviving from the period. When the Ottomans took the city in 1453, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque and the mosaics were covered under Islamic law (probably preserving them). Some remain covered. In 1930, the mosque was decommissioned and the Turkish government turned the building into a museum. Tickets are 25 Turkish Lira (about US\$11.50). Hagia Sophia is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is considered one of the world's great wonders.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/sozomen-constantinople1.asp
“Constantine Finds Constantinople” by Sozomen 324 CE (primary source) – from the Ancient History Sourcebook at Fordham University
- http://archive.org/stream/ser1works26hakluoft/ser1works26hakluoft_djvu.txt
Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo (primary source) – online translated full text source at the Internet Archive website. The section on Constantinople begins on page 29.
- www.livius.org/cn-cs/constantinople/constantinople01.html
Constantinople: Constantine’s City (website)
- http://miaarnold.weebly.com/uploads/2/3/0/7/23078142/constantinople_worksheet.pdf
Constantinople Worksheet (worksheet PDF)
- http://clas.ufl.edu/users/kapparis/Rome_Christianity/ByzantineHistory.ppt
Byzantine History (PowerPoint) – from Kostas Kapparis, Associate Professor of Classics and Director of the Center for Greek Studies at the University of Florida
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRYS8jR7CVo
Byzantium – A Tale of Three Cities (video). This 3-hour video by the BBC is far too long for any in-class showings, but is highly recommended for students and teachers who want to gain a full understanding of the Byzantine Empire. The video is in 3 parts, each approximately 1 hour in length.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWa8vOjmiMs
The Byzantine Empire (video) – short 4-minute video appropriate for all classes.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw66_DkulyM
History’s Turning Points – AD 1453 Siege of Constantinople (video). 25-minute video from the History Channel.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWljhb1DEQ8
Byzantium: The Lost Empire (video). This 3 ½ hour video by The Learning Channel is far too long for any in-class showings, but is highly recommended for students and teachers who want to gain a full understanding of the Byzantine Empire. The video is in 3 parts, each approximately 1 hour in length.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yr2NLbZ6YBw
Engineering an Empire: The Byzantines (video). This 45-minute video from the History Channel, although perhaps too long for many in-class showings, is well worth watching. Highly recommended for students and teachers.

Background Information

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire
Byzantine Empire– Wikipedia article

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinople
Constantinople – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_the_Great
Constantine the Great – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople
Byzantine Istanbul – Constantinople: The New Rome
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople-hagia-sophia
Byzantine Istanbul – Constantinople: Hagia Sophia
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-fall-of-constantinople-1453
Byzantine Istanbul – Fall of Constantinople 1453
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-great-schism-of-1054
Great Schism of 1054 – Catholic vs. Orthodox

Key Terms

- Byzantine Empire
- Byzantium
- Constantine the Great
- Constantinople
- Great Schism of 1054
- Hagia Sophia
- Ottoman Empire

