Post Classical World: The Byzantine Empire

Origins
- Started off as part of Roman Empire
  - Established as Eastern Roman Empire in 395 C.E. by emperor Theodosum I
  - Original capital of Byzantium
    - 460 C.E. name changed to Constantinople
    - In honor of founder Constantine
    - City considered major world center after fall of Rome
    - Crossroads of European and Mesopotamian Culture
  - Still referred to themselves as Romans
    - Referred to as Romans by neighbors
    - Called Orientals by western Europeans
    - Historians established them as Byzantines to separate them from Western Empire
  - Major differences from Romans
    - Greek language usage
      - Viewed Latin as barbaric
      - Emphasis on Greek revived interest in Hellenistic culture
  - Similar to Romans
    - Christianity
      - Constantinople took role of protector of Christianity
        - Had to deal with rising Muslim threat to holy land
      - Divine Right for Emperors
    - Agrarian based economy
      - Access to eastern Mediterranean agriculture = taxes = rich
    - Facing Barbarian threat
      - Sassanids and Germanic
      - Recruited and used middle Eastern troops instead of Barbarians
    - Elevated Emperor
      - Ceremonial purposes
      - Complex administration and bureaucracy
    - Hippodrome
      - Byzantine high culture centered on horse racing
Emperor Justinian
- Humble origins
  - Born a farmer
  - Brought to Constantinople to be educated at young age
  - Wife Theodora also of humble origins
    - Father was a bear-keeper
    - Mother was an acrobat
    - She worked as actress
      - Possibly also as prostitute
    - Converted to Christianity and became wool spinner
    - Justinian had law changed so a Patrician was able to marry an actress
- Gains throne in 527
  - Co-Ruler with uncle Justin
- Considered last of the “Roman” Emperors
- Set himself on rebuilding the glory of Rome
- Nika Riots
  - 532 C.E.
  - Tax riots
  - Led to destruction of much of the city
    - Allowed for building of grand Hagia Sophia
      - Holy Wisdom
    - Also built up cities’ defenses
  - Justinian thought about leaving
    - Theodora convinced him to stay
      - Resulted in thousands dead as he reasserted his control

Political Achievements
- Prior to Justinian used system of Decurions
  - Roughly 200 members
  - Local wealthy landowners
  - Economic and intellectual elite
  - Heavily taxed
- Barbarian threats
  - Forced Justinian to use more direct control
    - Used loyal Governors instead of Decurions
- Justinian Initiates “One God, One Empire, One Religion”
  - Centralize Government
  - Increase Legal conformity throughout Empire
- Justinian co-ruler with Theodora
  - Both held supreme power
    - Viewed all others as vastly inferior
- Codex Justinianus
  - Code – Revision of Roman Law established by Roman emperors since Hadrian
    - Code used as basis for western law since 12th century
  - Novella – Justinian’s edicts and those made right before him
  - Digest – Opinions of old legal experts
  - Institutes – Opinions of young legal scholars
Expansion of Byzantine Influence

Military Conquest
- Justinian tried to rebuild Roman empire
  - Starting year 533 C.E.
  - Conquered Vandal Kingdom in North Africa and Sicily
    - Resistance till 554 C.E.
  - Took lands from Ostrogoths in Italy and parts of Spain
- Expansion’s Impacts
  - High Casualties
  - Very Expensive
  - Constantine sickened by plague
  - Treasury exhausted
  - Not a lasting Empire
    - Most of African gains lost to Lombards and Muslims
    - Italy remained in Byzantine control till 11th Century
  - Stresses helped contribute to Justinian’s death in 565 C.E.

Religious Conquest
- Byzantines facing pressure in North
  - Avars, Slavs, Bulgars attacking Balkan area
    - Eventually converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity
- Byzantines hoping to gain allies
  - Threatened by Roman Christianity and Franks
  - Used religion to helped unify eastern European people
- Language
  - Byzantines send missionaries Cyril and Methodius to Moravians to convert and develop language
    - Helped Slavs create Greek based alphabet
      - Allowed Slavs to have written language
      - Alphabet called Cyrillic
    - Language spread
      - First to Bulgars
        - Then Bohemians, Kievan Rus, and Ukrainians
      - Allowed for cultural developments within eastern Europe
- Growing threat
  - After Justinian Byzantines soon had to deal with ever growing threat of Muslim empires to the south