

Lesson 1: Geography of the Byzantine Empire

Vocabulary

hippodrome an ancient Greek stadium used for horse and chariot racing

Roots of an Empire

The Byzantine Empire was considered a continuation of the Roman Empire. It covered areas of land that were once part of the Roman Empire. At its height, the Byzantine Empire stretched across parts of southern and eastern Europe. It also included parts of the Balkan Peninsula, northern Africa, and southwestern Asia. The summers were dry and hot in the southern and eastern parts of Europe. During the winter, the weather was wet and cool. People grew grapes, olives, wheat, and barley. Most people lived in villages. Many people herded sheep or goats. The climate in northern Africa and most of southwestern Asia was drier and hotter. The winters were warm or mild. The desert regions received little rainfall. Herders moved from place to place to feed their goats, sheep, or camels. Merchants and craftspeople lived in towns or cities. They sold and made goods.


Ultimate Location

Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine Empire. It had a perfect location. It was on the edge of Europe and Asia. Constantinople was located on a peninsula at the southeastern end of Europe. The city sat along the strait of Bosphorus. The Bosphorus helps link the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Ships traveling between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea had to pass through the Bosphorus. This location made Constantinople an important center for trade. The city was guarded on three sides by water. For more protection, leaders built sea walls along the coasts. Constantinople was called Byzantium in ancient times. In 330 the city was renamed in honor of the Roman emperor Constantine I.

A Blend of Culture

The Byzantine Empire developed its own culture. It mixed Greek languages and Roman customs. Like the Romans, most Byzantines lived in wooden houses. As in Roman cities, the city offered public baths, steam rooms, and swimming pools. A **hippodrome** is an ancient Greek stadium that was used for horse and chariot racing. Chariot racing was a popular form of entertainment in the Byzantine Empire. Chariot races were held in the Hippodrome in Constantinople. The Hippodrome was the center of entertainment, ceremonies, and celebrations. The Byzantines called themselves Romans. Yet they mostly spoke the Greek language. Constantinople became the main center of art, architecture, and education. The city's location helped bring about a blend of European and Asian cultures. The Byzantine Empire began to become strong after the western part of the Roman Empire became weak.

Lesson 1: Review

1.  **Sequence** The following events are not in chronological order. List them in their correct time order.

_____ A city is established at the strait of Bosporous.

_____ The Roman Empire weakens.

_____ Constantinople is fortified with sea and land walls.

2. Describe how the physical geography and climate of the Byzantine Empire affected the way people lived.

3. What city was the capital of the Byzantine Empire?

4. How was the Byzantine Empire related to the Roman Empire?

5. **Critical Thinking: Make Inferences** Why did Constantinople become a center of trade?
