

The Fall of the Byzantine Empire

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Logan Fleming

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The Byzantine Empire was one of the world's greatest empires, coming out of the fractured Roman Empire, starting in 330 AD when Emperor Constantine I moved the capital to Byzantium, which would be renamed into Constantinople, and lasting until 1453 AD, when the Ottoman Empire invaded the city. Why did the Byzantine Empire fall exactly? What were the effects of the fall? Political, Economic, and Social? How did the fall of the Byzantine Empire come to effect the rule of the Ottoman Turks in the region?

When the Byzantine Empire fell in 1453 AD, there were many factors that played into its fall. It wasn't as simple as just the nation being invaded. There are many factors that would play into the Byzantine's fall. Political, economic, and social. By the time of its fall in 1453.

Byzantium had already been in decline for over 300 years. The nation had been reduced to only a couple of territories, consisting of around two islands in the Aegean, as well as the city of Constantinople. The city that once had over a million people, had been reduced to just 75,000 inhabitants by the fall. Why is this? Throughout Byzantine history, it was embroiled in war and religion, which ended up being the two biggest driving factors of the state's society and the foreign affairs of the nation. In the seventh century, the Saracens and the Slavs brought the Byzantines to their knees, and in response, they had to reorganize the provinces, which resulted in the establishment of the theme system.

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The theme system is described as “Small military estates granted to individuals for military service”. The theme system had managed to bring Byzantine back to what it once was by the time of the tenth century, making them the most powerful state “throughout the Christian-Moslem world”. This however did not last long, because in the eleventh century, with the battle of Manzikert in 1071, with the Byzantines losing Anatolia to the Ottoman Turks. During this time, the free peasant proprietors were being reduced to serfs as a result of individuals who possessed the soldier-peasantry getting into powerful positions within the empire, and using the positions they held in order to increase holdings, usually through dubious means.

The emperors of the time realized the dangers that these developments pose to the stability of the nation, and so emperors like Basil II would enact ways to preserve the free peasantry, because they knew that it was something that would keep the state together. The strict one came from Basil II, who ordered a measure which “required the landed aristocracy to pay the tax arrears to the peasants too poor to meet their own obligations.” During the chaos of the peasantry, a similar situation would occur within the military as well; When the aristocracy was absorbing peasantry holdings, they would end up absorbing soldier holdings as well. The emperors of the tenth century were concerned about the protection of the interests of these soldiers that were effected, with Constantine Porphyrogenitus writing in his novel he had issued for the protection of the soldiers of said estates, “The army is to the state what the head is to the body . . . He who neglects it neglects the safety of the state . . . Therefore in promulgating our Constitution [on the military estates], we feel we are working for the welfare of all. ”

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Ultimately, a mixture of political, social, and economic struggles, and military defeats from outside forces would lead to the fall of the Byzantine Empire, with the Ottoman Turks driving the collapse in 1453 after taking Constantinople.

The fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 AD at the hands of the Ottoman Turks had many effects socially, politically, and economically throughout the region formerly ruled by the Eastern Roman Empire. The city of Constantinople, after its conquest by the Ottomans, was referred to as Konstantiniyye, the Arabic/Ottoman form of the name. The city would be referred to this way for centuries until 1930, when the Republic of Turkey would rename it to Istanbul. The Turks would persecute Christian's in the region, and would turn the city Islamic to fit the image of their nation. Many modern Turkish scholars, due to nationalistic pride, ignore the chaos that came with the Turkish occupation of Byzantine territories. This is understandable, but as a historian, it was their job to present history in a non-biased way, which modern Turkish scholars don't do a majority of the time.

The fall of the Byzantine Empire had many effects on how Ottoman rule over the areas that Byzantium had once ruled over, along with the Balkans in general. The Ottoman Empire was an empire that spanned throughout the Arabian Peninsula, encompassing modern day Turkey, Iraq, Armenia, Syria, Israel, Palestine, parts of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, northern Africa, and finally, the nations in the Balkans, including Greece. Each of these nations were vastly different from each other, however.

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When Byzantium fell in 1453, this paved the way for the Ottoman Empire to take over more of the Balkans, with the Turks being able to expand into Europe as a result of the collapse of the major power in the region. Most scholars debate when the city of Constantinople was founded itself, but archeological evidence points to the 7th century B.C being the foundation of the city. Under the Ottoman Empire for several centuries, Constantinople would become a thriving hub, and would reach its peak in construction and development during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (c. 1494–1566). During the 19th century, Sultan Mahmud II would seek to modernize the city, with it becoming more western due to doves of Europeans visiting the city.

In the later half of the 19th century, transportation services and public services would be implemented, with bridges and railways linking the city to Europe being constructed. While the fall of the Byzantine Empire saw the collapse of a major Christian power that had participated in the crusades, cultural and economic development would see the light of day within the city. After Byzantium fell, the remnants of the Roman Empire, The Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire would both claim to be the successors of Rome. Historians argue that there is no true successor to Rome, just states that assumed the title, while others suggest that the institutions such as the Eastern Orthodox Church or the Catholic Church carried the title. There was also the Holy Roman Empire, which had been founded in 800, trying to claim legitimacy from the Papal states, and tried to take control over what used to be the Western Roman Empire.

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