

CLAH4006

**From Village to Empire: An
Introduction to the History of Rome**

The End of Empire?

Dr Matthew Adam Cobb

Characterising the End

- When did the Ancient world come to an end?
- Labels of convenience - Later Empire, Late Antiquity, Byzantine period, Medieval period.
- Edward Gibbon *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* – debasement of earlier Empire, negative impact of Christianity.
- Continuity / transition rather than a radical break? - Catastrophism vs. Continuity.
- West more affected by third century crisis than the East.
- Unity and diversity – can we still speak of a Roman world after the fifth century AD?

The Fourth Century AD

- Constantius II as sole emperor in AD 353 – Arian creed.
- Last pagan emperor Julian (AD 361-63), dies campaigning in Persia – major strategic consequences for Roman Empire.
- Valentinian I (AD 364-75) and Valens (AD 364-78) as co-emperors, Gratian also made emperor in AD 367.
- Valens killed fighting the Goths at Andrianople (AD 378).
- Theodosius I (AD 381) restores the Nicene formula.

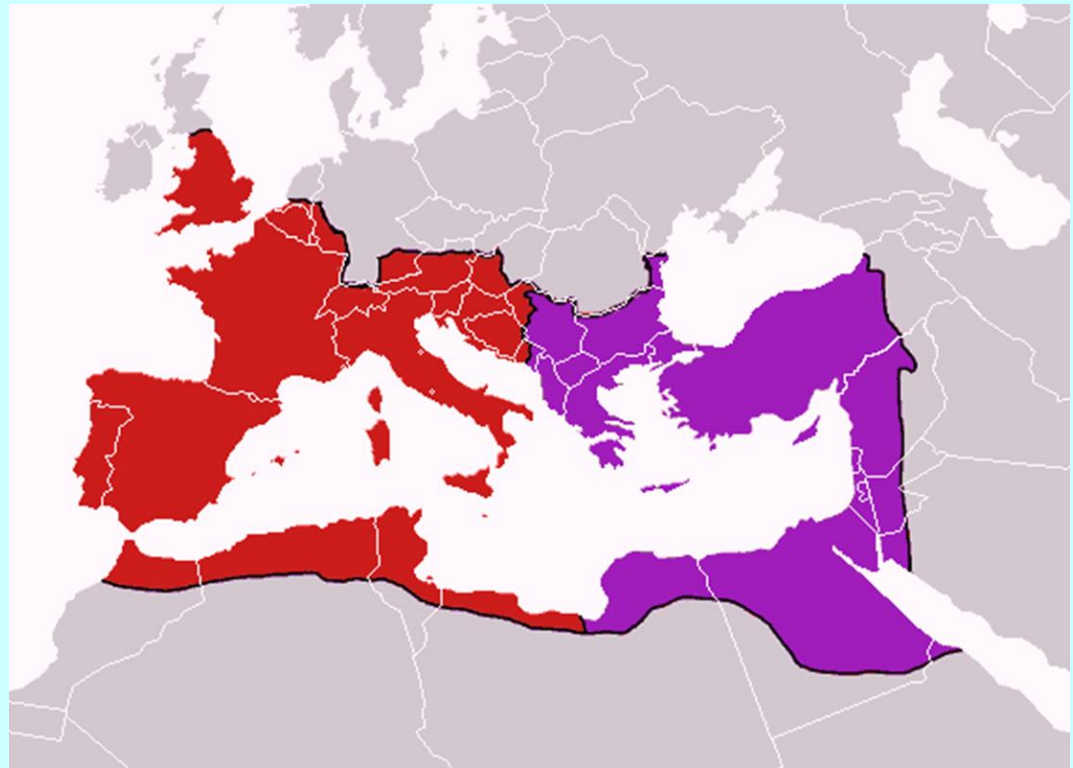
- Power of bishop Ambrose of Milan
 - Theodosius to seek penance for actions of Imperial troops at Thessalonica
- Advocates against Symmachus' request to restore the statute of Victory to the Senate House in Rome.
- Series of laws passed by fourth century emperors laying increasing restrictions and penalties on pagans, Jews, “heretics” and apostates.



Anthony van Dyke (1619-20) St Ambrose barring Theodosius from Milan Cathedral

- Death of Theodosius I in AD 395 - Arcadius becomes emperor of the East – Honorius emperor of the West.
- By fifth century AD Ravenna seat of Emperor in the West.
- Greek East and Latin West – “official” language of military Latin until sixth century AD.

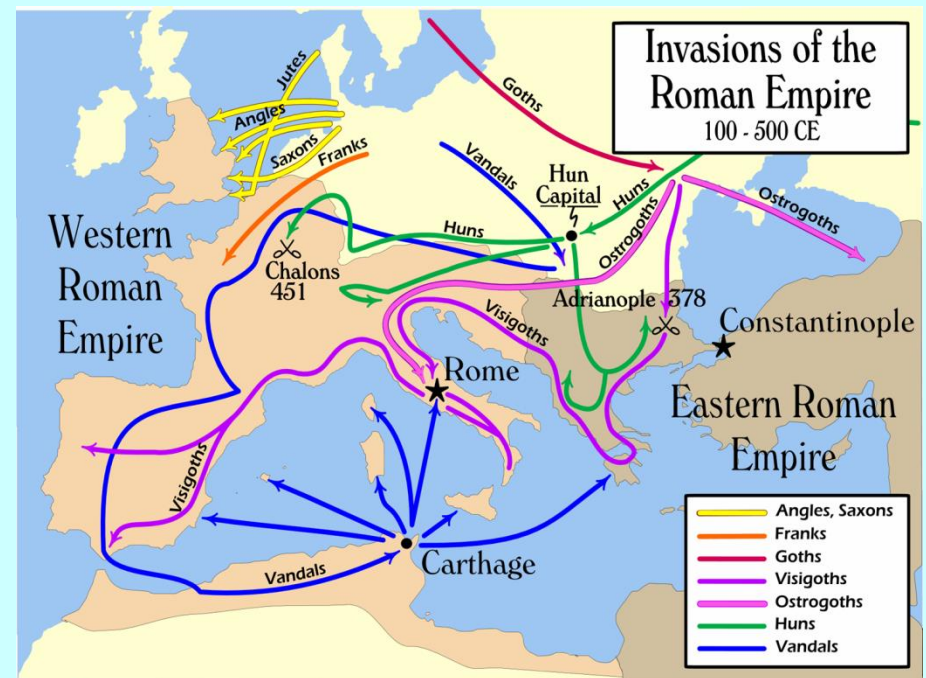
“The Empire now devolved upon Arcadius and Honorius, who, although apparently the rulers, were so in name only: complete control was exercised by Rufinus in the east and Stilicho in the west... all senators were distressed at the present plight.” – **Zosimus *New History* 5.1.9.**



“Barbarians” and the Empire

- Sources often present contrast between civilised Romans and barbarian ‘others’ – Jordanes *Getica* creates mythic Scandinavian genealogy for the Goths.
- Scholarly reaction against term “Germanic” – development of identities through interaction with the Roman Empire.
- Western emperors after Theodosius I are often puppets of military commanders.

“Constantine destroyed this security [i.e. Diocletian’s supposed strong frontier defences] by removing most of the troops from the frontiers and stationing them in the cities which did not need assistance, thus both stripping of protection those being molested by the barbarians and subjecting the cities left alone by them to the outrages of the soldiers, so that henceforth most have been deserted.” – **Zosimus *New History* 2.34.**

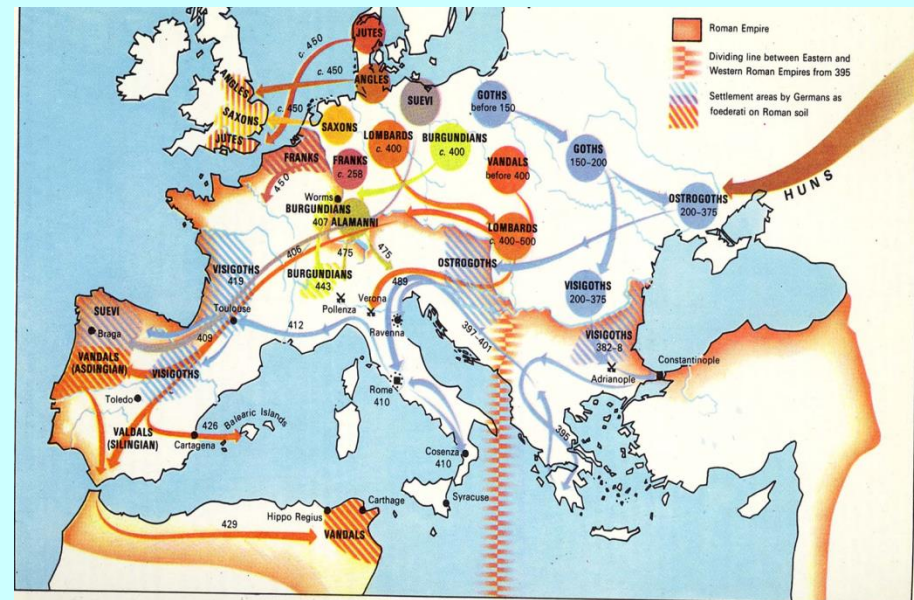


Late Roman Army

- Poor performance attributed by contemporary sources to recruitment of “barbarians”.
- Also billeting soldiers in towns (softness) – payment in supplies as well as cash.
- *Bucellari* as de facto retainers for generals.
- Barbarian generals serving in the role of *magister militum* (e.g. Stilicho, Odoacer).
- A variety of different units without unity or structure?
- Archaeology indicates watch-towers and fortified store-bases to secure supply system to forward troops and to watch barbarians in Roman territory.

Foederati

- In earlier period *foederati* (federates) were foreign troops called upon irregularly to aid campaigns.
- By the late Empire term came to mean barbarian troops settled upon Roman land in exchange for military service – reliability variable.
- Grants of land undermining Roman control and reducing the Roman tax base.
- Difficult to recruit men from Roman population – power of landlords unwilling to relinquish labour.
- Use of archaeology to determine “barbarian” settlement patterns?



Migrations and areas of settlement of Germanic tribes, 4th and 5th cents.

Abandonment of Britain

- Britain formally abandoned by Honorius in AD 410.
- Bulk of troops had already left - some troops who had supported usurpers prior to AD 406 remained.
- Increasing raids from Saxons.
- Town in Britain rapidly disappear.
- Rescript of Honorius.

“Thus happened this revolt or defection of Britain and the Celtic nations, when Constantine usurped the empire, by whose lax rule the barbarians were emboldened to commit such devastations... Honorius... sent letters to the cities of Britain, advising them to be watchful of their own security...” – **Zosimus 6.175, 177.**

Sacks of Rome

- Visigoths invade Italy but after defeated by Stilicho.
- Invade again in AD 408, and capture Rome in 410.
- Alaric dies shortly after sack of Rome.
- Rome again sacked in AD 455 by the Vandals.

“The siege of the city was lifted only after five thousand pounds of gold, thirty thousand pounds of silver, four thousand silken tunics, three thousand scarlet-dyed hides, and three thousand pounds of pepper had been paid. Statues were stripped of their decorations and, when that was not enough, those of gold and silver melted down. When further negotiations regarding a homeland for the Goths broke down, Rome again was besieged and, this time, sacked...” - **Jerome, *Letter 127*** (To Principia).

The Huns

- A peoples originating from steppe-lands (probably in modern Khazakhstan).
- Ammianus believes arrival of the Huns forced the Tervingi and Greuthingi to cross the Danube into Roman territory.
- Attila the Hun receiving large subsidies, crossed Danube the early AD 440s.
- Defeats of two Roman armies.
- Defeated by collation of Roman soldiers and *foederati* at the Catalaunian Fields (AD 451).

“[The Huns] are abnormally savage. From the moment of birth they mark they make deep gashes in their children’s cheeks... they have squat bodies, strong limbs and thick necks... live on the roots of plants and half-raw flesh... Being lightly equipped and very sudden in their movements they can deliberately scatter and gallop about at random, inflicting tremendous slaughter... they are totally ignorant of the distinction between right and wrong...” – **Amm. Marc. 31.2.**

“Attila's residence, which was situated here, was said to be more splendid than his houses in other places... many persons who had lawsuits with one another came up and received his judgment... When the hour arrived we went to the palace, along with the embassy from the western Romans, and stood on the threshold of the hall in the presence of Attila...” – **Priscus** (part of embassy in AD 448/49).

“Fall of the Western Empire”

- AD 476 – Romulus Augustus, last emperor of the West is deposed by Odoacer who takes the title *rex*.

“And in proportion as the barbarian element among them became strong, just so did the prestige of the Roman soldiers at once decline... Now there was a certain man among the Romans named Odoacer, one of the bodyguards of the emperor... when he had received the supreme power in this way, he did the emperor no further harm, but allowed him to live thereafter as a private citizen...” – **Procopius Wars 5.1.5-6.**



Thomas Cole (1836) *Desolation*

Late Roman Society

Labour

- General decline of large-scale slave ownership.
- *Servus et colonus* (both a slave and a *colonus*) – state legislating in an attempt to control the tax base.
- Serfdom? – is life radically different from earlier periods?

“...a law instituted by our ancestors holds tenants down by a kind of eternal right, so that they are not allowed to leave the places by whose crops they are nurtured or deserts the fields which they have once undertaken to cultivate...”

– ***Codex Justinianus* 9.51.1.**

Elite

- Senatorial class no longer tied to Rome – expanded by Constantine – classes tied to office holding *clarissimi*, *spectabiles*, *illustres*.
- Fourth century villa boom in the West.
- Archaeological evidence for long distance exchange in Mediterranean – gift-giving or transferring goods among the elite?
- Increasingly wealthy and powerful church hierarchy – proliferation of large churches and pilgrim centres – Melania the Younger and Pinianus.

Urban Life

- Public buildings often falling out of use and stone being recycled for fortifications.
- Archaeological picture generally indicates urban contraction (picture varies across Mediterranean) – decline quicker in West.
- Houses sub-divided and shops and workshop encroaching onto streets.

Education and Learning

- Less literate society? – fewer circulating texts, less familiarity with Classical literature.
- Classical style education continues to be undertaken by the elite – law, oratory, rhetoric, philosophy.
- Monastic centres become places of learning – greater concern in Christian literature to appeal to all classes of society.

“So that the illiterate who are unable to read the Holy Scriptures may, by gazing at the pictures, become mindful of the manly deeds of those who have genuinely served the true God and may be roused to emulate those glorious and celebrated feats.” – **Nilus of Sinai** (fifth century AD).

Byzantium

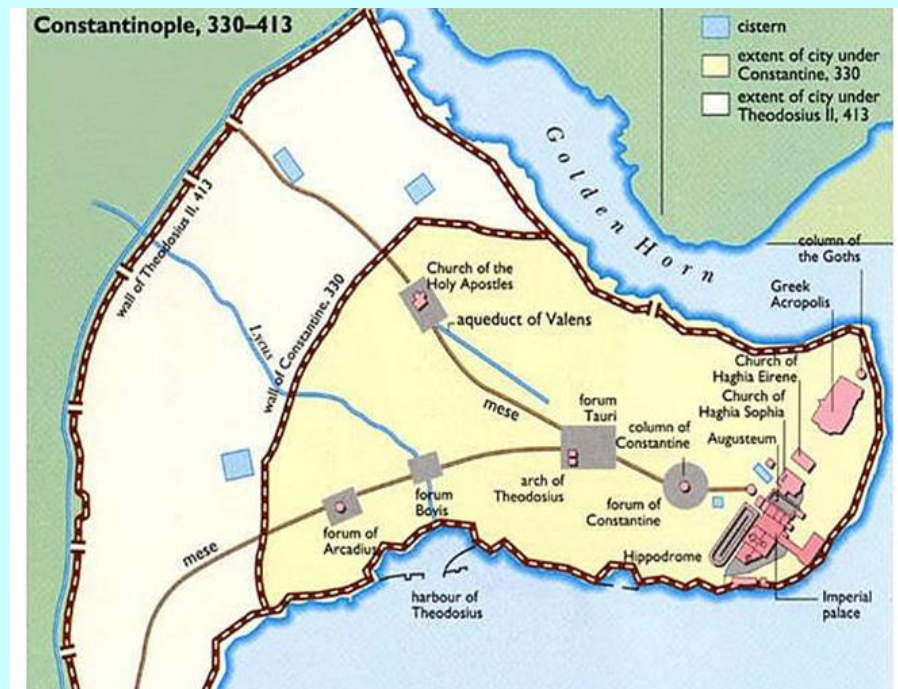
- Byzantion (Latinized to Byzantium) – Greek colony on Thracian Bosphorus – re-founded by Constantine in AD 324.
- Constantinople would remain an Imperial capital for eleven centuries (and another five under the Ottomans – as Istanbul).
- Byzantines still claimed Roman legacy – *Romaioi* – in Arabic *Rûm*.
- The adjective *byzantinus* was developed in Renaissance period to distinguish this Empire.
- Eastern Roman Empire - Hellenic in culture and language.
- When to classify the beginning of the Byzantine Empire – foundation (AD 324) or inauguration (AD 330) of Constantinople? Split of East and West (AD 395)? Fall of Western Roman Empire (AD 476)?
- Latin continues in use in some spheres down to the sixth century AD – e.g. Law (Theodosian and Justinianic Codes) – Latin script on coins – Roman offices and symbols.

East in the Face of Crisis

- Main threats the Balkan frontier and the Sassanid Persian Empire.
- Major barbarian threats often deflected westward.
- East more densely urbanised – greater economic prosperity – similar trends in fifth century of expansion of aristocratic estates.
- Ostrogothic confederation settles in northern Balkans – Theodoric persuaded to march west and depose Odoacer.

Constantinople

- Theodosius I makes Constantinople his base (AD 380) – peripatetic phase of the imperial court ends.
- End of 4th century population bigger than Antioch (c.200,000) – by reign of Justinian (AD 527-565) population c 500,000.
- *Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae* (c. AD 425-430) – lists 14 churches, 52 colonnaded streets, 153 private baths and several cisterns.
- Earlier walls of Constantine, new walls erected during the reign of Theodosius II (AD 402-450) between 404-13.



Religious Divisions

- Council summoned by Theodosius I in AD 381 – Bishop of Constantinople granted primacy over all other patriarchates, save for Rome.
- Tensions with Arians, a number of Goths massacred in a Church in AD 400.
- Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) – nature of Christ (Human and Divine) – Orthodox position vs. Syriac and Egyptian Churches.
- Eventual Schism between East and West.

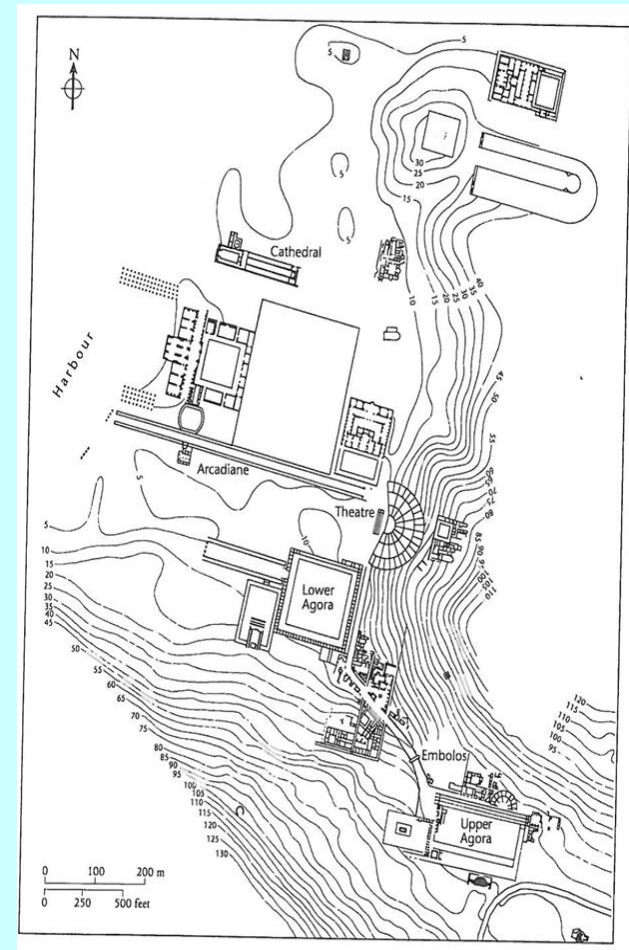
East and West

- Despite fragmenting West – relations between the two still important.
- Marriage alliances – Theodosius II (AD 408-450) sends expedition to support the claim of Valentinian III (423/25-455) – married to Theodosius' daughter Licinia Eudoxia.
- Expeditions to Africa – Leo sends 1,000 ships (AD 468) – joint effort with western government but ends in failure – cost of 130,000 lbs of gold.

“And the Emperor Leo, wishing to punish the Vandals because of these things, was gathering an army against them; and they say that this army amounted to about one hundred thousand men... they say, thirteen hundred centenaria were expended by him to no purpose... he made Basiliscus commander-in-chief, the brother of his wife Berine... had not purposely played the coward and hesitated, but had undertaken to go straight for Carthage, he would have captured it at the first onset...” – **Procopius *Wars* 3.6.**

Byzantine Society

- Municipal burden heavy on local elite - local towns cities started to be run more by governors, bishops and great landowners – benefaction skewed towards main centres.
- Public venues like theatres or hippodrome were the places where the public could express discontent.
- Maintenance of earlier civic structures – church building and fortifications new features.
- ***The Life of Symeon the Fool*** – mentions civic life in Emesa (Homs) – markets, theatre, baths, colonnaded streets, churches, mansions of rich and shacks of poor, shops, workshops and cook-shops.



Plan of Late Antique Ephesus

Justinian AD 527-565

Powers of Justinian

- Civil law was reformed and codified – Emperor established as the only legitimate source of law – *Institutes* (AD 533); *Digest* (533); *Codex Justinianus* (534).
- Attempts to reconcile pro and anti-Chalcedonian positions – resistant bishops punished and excluded – claims imperial authority to regulate priesthoods and the Church.



Mosaics of San Vitale – Ravenna (AD 547)

- In the AD 330s Justinian attacks the Vandals in North Africa (533-34) and the Ostrogoths in Italy (535-553).
- Avars establish themselves on the Pannonian plain.
- Major treaty between Byzantium and Persia concluded in AD 533 – former paid 11,000 lb of gold for peace.
- Khurso I sack Antioch in AD 540 - AD 561 “fifth-year peace” concluded.

“I shudder when I describe so great a disaster, and pass it on to be remembered for future generations, and I know what God’s will could be in raising up the affairs of a man or a place, and then casting them down and whipping them out for no apparent reason.” –
Procopius *Wars* 2.10.4.



Nika Riots – AD 532

- Prior to seventh century inaugurations may take place in hippodrome – e.g. Emperor Leo (AD 457-74).
- Justinian addresses the people from the Imperial box during the Nika revolt, swore an oath on Gospels in front of them – some chanted “Augustus Justinian, you are victorious”, other chanted “You are foresworn, ass.” – ***Chronicon Paschale***.

“Now the emperor and his court were deliberating as to whether... [to] remain or... [to take] flight in the ships... queen [Theodora] had spoken thus, all were filled with boldness... Concluding, therefore, that he must go against the populace who had taken their stand in the hippodrome... he drew his sword from its sheath and, commanding the others to do likewise... there perished among the populace on that day more than thirty thousand.” – **Procopius *Wars* 1.24.32 ff.**

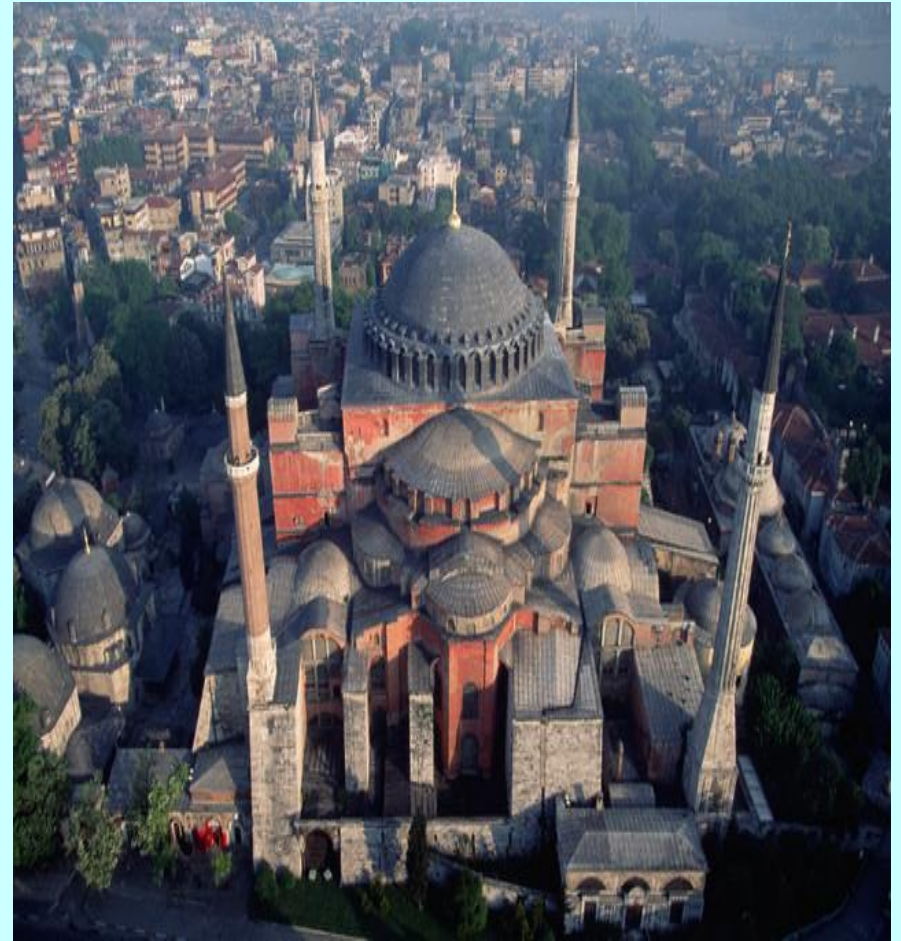


Base of obelisk of Theodosius II – in the Hippodrome.

Hagia Sophia

- Replaces earlier building destroyed in the Nika riots.
- Dedicated AD 535, dome replaced in 563 after original collapsed.

“Both its breadth and its length have been so carefully proportioned, that it may not improperly be said to be exceedingly long and at the same time unusually broad... The whole ceiling is overlaid with pure gold... who could recount the beauty of the columns and the stones with which the church is adorned?” – **Procopius**
***Buildings* 1.28, 54, 59.**



Church of Holy Wisdom

Bubonic Plague – AD 540s

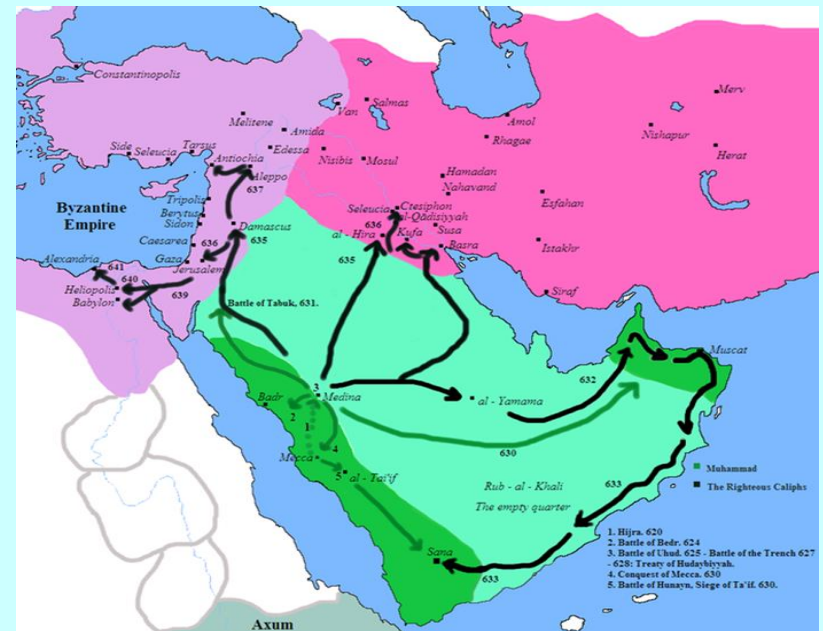
- Population of the Byzantine Empire may have been reduced by a third?

“During these times there was a pestilence... which the whole human race came near to being annihilated... with some the body broke out with black pustules about as large as a lentil and these did not survive even one day, but all succumbed immediately. With many also a vomiting of blood ensued without visible cause and straightway brought death... Now the disease in Byzantium ran a course of four months... and afterwards the tale of dead reached five thousand each day, and again it even came to ten thousand and still more than that. – **Procopius *Wars* 2.22-23.**

“I too, the writer of this history... was afflicted in the early stages of the plague with the so-called buboes, while I was still just a schoolboy. In various attacks of the plague many of my children died, as well as my wife and other members of the my family... for the attack returned up to my own day, as it were in cyclic progression... the plague having returned four times to Antioch and this being the fourth attack in the cycle.” – **Evagrius *Ecclesiastical History* 4.29.**

From the Late Antique to the Medieval

- Byzantine-Sassanid War AD 602-628:
 - “Holy warfare”
 - Help from Christian lords of the Caucuses.
 - Besieging of Constantinople by Sassanids and Avars (AD 625).
 - True Cross restored to Jerusalem (AD 628).
- Rise of Islam:
 - Muhammad claims revelations from God – c. 610s.
 - By AD 620s Muhammad units much of Arabia under his leadership.
 - Muhammad dies around AD 632 – his successors go on to conquer Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Persia during the seventh century.



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