7 EUROPE AND WESTERN ASIA, CA. 350–850

From the third century onward, the Western Roman Empire slowly disintegrated. The last Roman emperor in the West, Romulus Augustus, was deposed by the Ostrogothic chieftain Odoacer in 476, but much of the empire had already come under the rule of various barbarian tribes well before this. Scholars have long seen this era as one of the great turning points in Western history, but during the last several decades, focus has shifted to continuities as well as changes. What is now usually termed "late antiquity" has been recognized as a period of creativity and adaptation in Europe and western Asia, not simply of decline and fall.

The two main agents of continuity were the Eastern Roman (or Byzantine) Empire and the Christian church. The Byzantine Empire lasted until 1453, a thousand years longer than the Western Roman Empire, and preserved and transmitted much of ancient law, philosophy, and institutions. Missionaries and church officials spread Christianity within and far beyond the borders of what had been the Roman Empire, transforming a small sect into the most important and wealthiest institution in Europe. The main agents of change in late antiquity were the barbarian groups migrating throughout much of Europe and western Asia. They brought different social, political, and economic structures with them, but as they encountered Roman and Byzantine culture and became Christian, their own ways of doing things were also transformed.
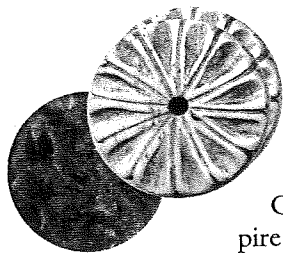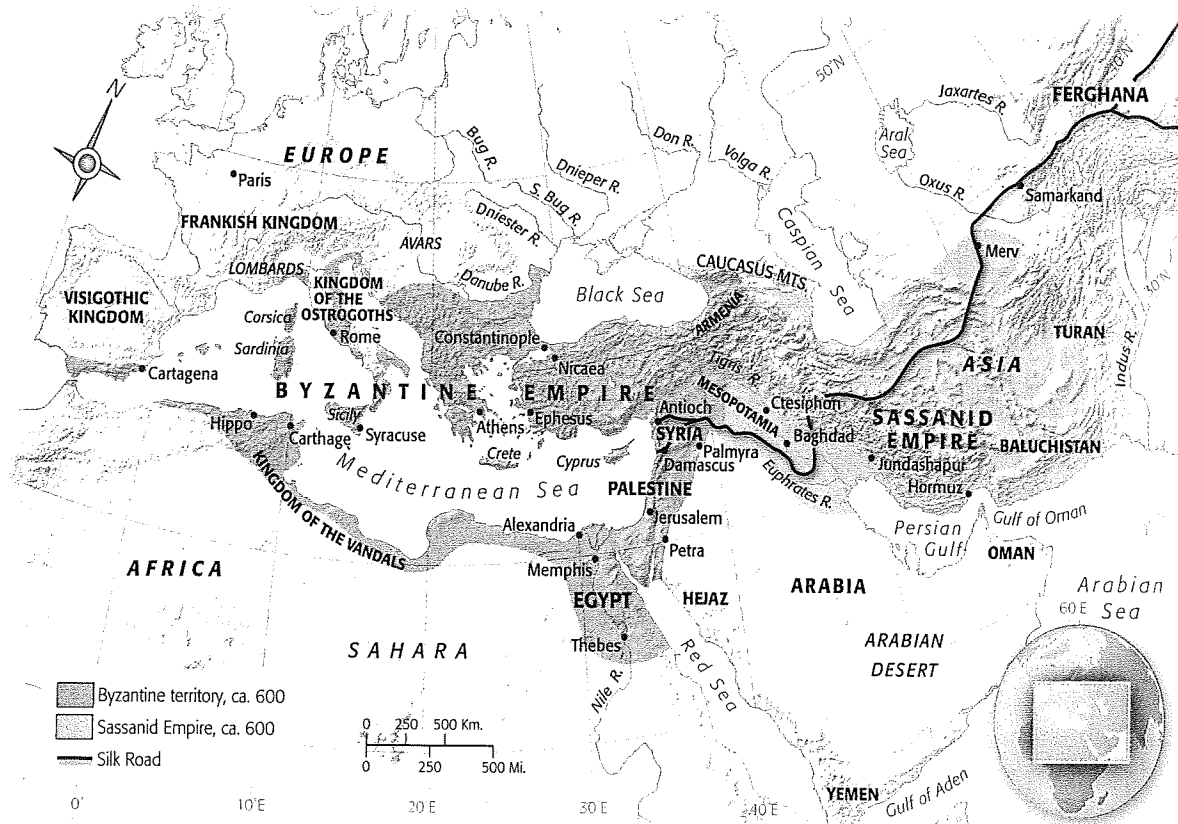
THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

How was the Byzantine Empire able to survive for so long, and what were its most important achievements?

The Emperor Constantine (see page 122) had tried to maintain the unity of the Roman Empire, but during the fifth and sixth centuries the Western and Eastern halves drifted apart. From Constantinople, Eastern Roman emperors worked to hold the empire together and to reconquer at least some of the West from barbarian

MAP 7.1 **The Byzantine and Sassanid Empires** Both the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires included territory that had earlier been part of the Roman Empire. The Sassanid Persians fought Roman armies before the founding of the Byzantine Empire. Later Byzantium and the Sassanids engaged in a series of wars that weakened both and brought neither lasting territorial acquisitions.

tribes. Justinian (r. 527–565) waged long wars against the Ostrogoths and temporarily regained Italy and North Africa, but the costs were high. Justinian's wars exhausted the resources of the state, destroyed Italy's economy, and killed a large part of Italy's population. Weakened, Italy fell easily to another Germanic tribe, the Lombards shortly after Justinian's death. In the late sixth century, the territory of the Western Roman Empire came once again under Germanic sway.

However, the Roman Empire continued in the East. The Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire (see Map 7.1) preserved the forms, institutions, and traditions of the old Roman Empire, and its people even called themselves Romans. Byzantium passed the intellectual heritage of Greco-Roman civilization on to later cultures and also developed its own distinctive characteristics.

Sources of Byzantine Strength

While the Western parts of the Roman Empire gradually succumbed to Germanic invaders, the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire survived. (The Byzantines themselves called their state the "Roman Empire," and only in the sixteenth century did people begin to use the term "Byzantine Empire.") Byzantine emperors traced their lines back past Constantine to Augustus (see page 112). While evolving into a Christian and Greek-speaking state with a multiethnic population centered in the eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans, the Byzantines retained the legal and administrative system of the empire centered at Rome. Thus, the senate that sat in Constantinople

carried on the traditions and preserved the glory of the old Roman senate. The army that defended the empire was the direct descendant of the old Roman legions.

That army was kept very busy, for the Byzantine Empire survived waves of attacks. In 559 a force of Huns and Slavs reached the gates of Constantinople. In 583 the Avars, a mounted Mongol people who had swept across Russia and southeastern Europe, seized Byzantine forts along the Danube and also reached the walls of Constantinople. Between 572 and 630 the Greeks were repeatedly at war with the Sassanid Persians (see below). Beginning in 632 the Arabs pressured the Greek empire. Why didn't one or a combination of these enemies capture Constantinople, as the Germans had taken Rome? The answer lies, first, in the strong military leadership the Greeks possessed. General Priskos (d. 612) skillfully led Byzantine armies to a decisive victory over the Avars in 601. Then, after a long war, the well-organized emperor Heraclius I (r. 610–641) crushed the Persians at Nineveh in Iraq.

Second, the city's location and excellent fortifications proved crucial. The site of Constantinople was not absolutely impregnable, but it was almost so. Constantinople had the most powerful defenses in the ancient world. Massive triple walls protected the city from sea invasion. Within the walls huge cisterns provided water, and vast gardens and grazing areas supplied vegetables and meat. Such strong fortifications and provisions meant that if attacked by sea, a defending people could hold out far longer than a besieging army. The site chosen for the imperial capital in the fourth century enabled Constantinople to survive in the eighth century. Because the city survived, the empire, though reduced in territory, endured.

Chronology

226–651	Sassanid dynasty
312	Constantine legalizes Christianity in Roman Empire
340–419	Life of Saint Jerome; creation of the Vulgate
354–430	Life of Saint Augustine
380	Theodosius makes Christianity official religion of Roman Empire
385–461	Life of Saint Patrick
481–511	Reign of Clovis
527–565	Reign of Justinian
529	*The Rule of Saint Benedict*
541–543	"Justinian plague"
730–843	Iconoclastic controversy
768–814	Reign of Charlemagne; Carolingian Renaissance
1054	Schism between Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches

The Sassanid Empire of Persia and Byzantium

For several centuries the Sassanid Empire of Persia was Byzantium's most regular foe. In 226, Ardashir I (r. 226–243) founded the Sassanid dynasty, which lasted until 651, when it was overthrown by the Muslims. Ardashir expanded his territory and absorbed the Roman province of Mesopotamia.

Centered in the fertile Tigris-Euphrates Valley, but with access to the Persian Gulf and extending south to Meshan (modern Kuwait), the Sassanid Empire's economic prosperity rested on agriculture; its location also proved well suited for commerce. A lucrative caravan trade from Ctesiphon north to Merv and then east to Samarkand linked the Sassanid Empire to the Silk Road and China (see page 138). Persian metalwork, textiles, and glass were exchanged for Chinese silks, and these goods brought about considerable cultural contact between the Sassanids and the Chinese.

Whereas the Parthians had tolerated many religions, the Sassanid Persians made Zoroastrianism the official state religion. Religion and the state were inextricably tied together. The king's power rested on the support of nobles and Zoroastrian priests, who monopolized positions in the court and in the imperial bureaucracy. A highly elaborate court ceremonial and ritual exalted the status of the king and emphasized his semidivine pre-eminence over his subjects. (The Byzantine monarchy, the Roman papacy, and the Muslim caliphate subsequently copied aspects of this Persian

ceremonial.) Zoroastrianism promoted hostility toward Christians because of what was perceived as their connections to Rome and Constantinople, and the sizable Jewish population in Mesopotamia after the **diaspora** (dispersion of the Jews from Jerusalem between 132 and 135) suffered intermittent persecution.

An expansionist foreign policy brought Persia into frequent conflict with Byzantium, and neither side was able to achieve a clear-cut victory. The long wars financed by higher taxation, on top of the arrival of the bubonic plague (see page 168), compounded discontent in both Byzantine and Persian societies. Internal political instability weakened the Sassanid dynasty, and in the seventh century Persian territories were absorbed into the Islamic caliphate (see page 194).

Sassanid Silver and Gold Plate This exquisitely wrought Sassanid plate shows a king hunting from horseback. Hunting was a favorite aristocratic pastime, and fine horses were exported from Persia to many parts of the world, as were Sassanid plates and drinking cups. *(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)*

The Law Code of Justinian

Byzantine emperors organized and preserved Roman law, making a lasting contribution to the medieval and modern worlds. Roman law had developed from many sources—decisions by judges, edicts of the emperors, legislation passed by the senate, and the opinions of jurists expert in the theory and practice of law. By the fourth century, Roman law had become a huge, bewildering mass. Its sheer bulk made it almost unusable.

The emperor Justinian appointed a committee of eminent jurists to sort through and organize the laws. The result was the *Code*, which distilled the legal genius of the Romans into a coherent whole, eliminated outmoded laws and contradictions, and clarified the law itself.

diaspora *The dispersion of the Jews from Jerusalem between 132 and 135.*

Justinian next set about bringing order to the equally huge body of Roman *jurisprudence*, the science or philosophy of law. To harmonize the often differing opinions of Roman jurists, Justinian directed his jurists to clear up disputed points and to issue definitive rulings. Accordingly, in 533 his lawyers published the *Digest*, which codified Roman legal thought. Then Justinian's lawyers compiled a handbook of civil law, the *Institutes*. These three works—the *Code*, the *Digest*, and the *Institutes*—are the backbone of the **corpus juris civilis**, the "body of civil law," which is the foundation of law for nearly every modern European nation.

corpus juris civilis *The "body of civil law," it is composed of the* Code, *the* Digest, *and the* Institutes.

Byzantine Intellectual Life

The Byzantines prized education, and because of them many masterpieces of ancient Greek literature survived to influence the intellectual life of the modern world. The literature of the Byzantine Empire was predominately Greek, although Latin was long spoken by top politicians, scholars, and lawyers. Among members of the large reading public, history was a favorite subject.

The most remarkable Byzantine historian was Procopius (ca. 500–ca. 562), who left a rousing account of Justinian's reconquest of North Africa and Italy. Procopius's *Secret History,* however, is a vicious and uproarious attack on Justinian and his wife, the empress Theodora, which continued the wit and venom of earlier Greek and Roman writers. (See the feature "Individuals in Society: Theodora of Constantinople.")

Theodora of Constantinople

The empress Theodora shown with the halo symbolic of power in Eastern art. (Scala/Art Resource, NY)

The most powerful woman in Byzantine history was the daughter of a bear trainer for the circus. Theodora (ca. 497–548) grew up in what her contemporaries regarded as an undignified and morally suspect atmosphere, and she worked as a dancer and burlesque actress, both dishonorable occupations in the Roman world. Despite her background, she caught the eye of Justinian, who was then a military leader and whose uncle (and adoptive father) Justin had himself risen from obscurity to become the emperor of the Byzantine Empire. Under Justinian's influence, Justin changed the law to allow an actress who had left her disreputable life to marry whom she liked, and Justinian and Theodora married in 525. When Justinian was proclaimed co-emperor with his uncle Justin on April 1, 527, Theodora received the rare title of *augusta,* empress. Thereafter her name was linked with Justinian's in the exercise of imperial power.

Most of our knowledge of Theodora's early life comes from the *Secret History,* a tell-all description of the vices of Justinian and his court, written by Procopius (ca. 550), who was the official court historian and thus spent his days praising those same people. In the *Secret History,* he portrays Theodora and Justinian as demonic, greedy, and vicious, killing courtiers to steal their property. In scene after detailed scene, Procopius portrays Theodora as particularly evil, sexually insatiable, depraved, and cruel, a temptress who used sorcery to attract men, including the hapless Justinian.

In one of his official histories, *The History of the Wars of Justinian,* Procopius presents a very different Theodora. Riots between the supporters of two teams in chariot races—who formed associations somewhat like street gangs and somewhat like political parties—had turned deadly, and Justinian wavered in his handling of the perpetrators. Both sides turned against the emperor, besieging the palace while Justinian was inside it. Shouting N-I-K-A (Victory), the rioters swept through the city, burning and looting, and destroyed half of Constantinople. Justinian's counselors urged flight, but, according to Procopius, Theodora rose and declared:

For one who has reigned, it is intolerable to be an exile. . . . If you wish, O Emperor, to save yourself, there is no difficulty: we have ample funds and there are the ships. Yet reflect whether, when you have once escaped to a place of security, you will not prefer death to safety. I agree with an old saying that the purple [that is, the color worn only by emperors] is a fair winding sheet [to be buried in].

Justinian rallied, had the rioters driven into the hippodrome, and ordered between thirty and thirty-five thousand men and women executed. The revolt was crushed and Justinian's authority restored, an outcome approved by Procopius.

Other sources describe or suggest Theodora's influence on imperial policy. Justinian passed a number of laws that improved the legal status of women, such as allowing women to own property the same way that men could and to be guardians over their own children. He forbade the exposure of unwanted infants, which happened more often to girls than to boys, since boys were valued more highly. Theodora presided at imperial receptions for Arab sheiks, Persian ambassadors, Germanic princesses from the West, and barbarian chieftains from southern Russia. When Justinian fell ill from the bubonic plague in 542, Theodora took over his duties, banning those who discussed his possible successor. Justinian is reputed to have consulted her every day about all aspects of state policy, including religious policy regarding the doctrinal disputes that continued throughout his reign. Theodora's favored interpretation of Christian doctrine about the nature of Christ was not accepted by the main body of theologians in Constantinople—nor by Justinian—but she urged protection of her fellow believers and in one case hid an aged scholar in the women's quarters of the palace.

Theodora's influence over her husband and her power in the Byzantine state continued until she died, perhaps of cancer, twenty years before Justinian. Her influence may have even continued after death, for Justinian continued to pass reforms favoring women and, at the end of his life, accepted her interpretation of Christian doctrine. Institutions that she established, including hospitals, orphanages, houses for the rehabilitation of prostitutes, and churches, continued to be reminders of her charity and piety.

Theodora has been viewed as a symbol of the manipulation of beauty and cleverness to attain position and power, and also as a strong and capable co-ruler who held the empire together during riots, revolts, and deadly epidemics. Just as Procopius expressed both views, the debate has continued to today among writers of science fiction and fantasy as well as biographers and historians.

Questions for Analysis

1. How would you assess the complex legacy of Theodora?

2. Since the public and private views of Procopius are so different regarding the empress, should he be trusted at all as a historical source?

In mathematics and science, the Byzantines discovered little that was new, though they passed Greco-Roman learning on to the Arabs. The best-known Byzantine scientific discovery was an explosive compound known as "Greek fire" made of crude oil mixed with resin and sulfur, which was heated and propelled by a pump through a bronze tube. As the liquid jet left the tube, it was ignited, somewhat like a modern flamethrower. Greek fire saved Constantinople from Arab assault in 678.

The Byzantines devoted a great deal of attention to medicine, and the general level of medical competence was far higher in the Byzantine Empire than it was in western Europe. Yet their physicians could not cope with the terrible disease, often called "the Justinian plague," that swept through the Byzantine Empire and parts of western Europe between 541 and 543. Probably originating in northwestern India and carried to the Mediterranean region by ships, the disease was similar to modern forms of bubonic plague. Characterized by high fevers, chills, delirium, and enlarged lymph nodes, or by inflammation of the lungs that caused hemorrhages of black blood, the plague carried off tens of thousands of people. The epidemic had profound political as well as social consequences. It weakened Justinian's military resources, thus hampering his efforts to restore unity to the Mediterranean world. Losses from the plague also further weakened Byzantine and Persian forces that had badly damaged each other, contributing to their inability to offer more than token opposition to the Muslim armies (see pages 194–195).

Justinian and His Attendants This mosaic detail is composed of thousands of tiny cubes of colored glass or stone called *tessarae*, which are set in plaster against a blazing golden background. Some attempt has been made at naturalistic portraiture. (Scala/Art Resource, NY)

Constantinople: The Second Rome

In the tenth century Constantinople was the greatest city in the Christian world: the seat of the imperial court and administration, a large population center, and the pivot of a large volume of international trade. As a natural geographical entrepôt between East and West, the city's markets offered goods from many parts of the world. Furs and timber flowed across the Black Sea from the Rus (Russia) to the capital, as did slaves across the Mediterranean from northern Europe and the Balkans via Venice. Spices, silks, jewelry, and luxury goods came to Constantinople from India and China by way of Arabia, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. By the eleventh century, only Baghdad exceeded Constantinople in the quantity and value of goods exchanged there.

Jewish, Muslim, and Italian merchants controlled most foreign trade. Among the Greeks, aristocrats and monasteries usually invested their wealth in real estate, which involved little risk but brought little gain. As in western Europe and China, the landed aristocracy always held the dominant social position. Merchants and craftsmen, even when they acquired considerable wealth, never won social prominence.

Constantinople did not enjoy constant political stability. Between the accession of Heraclius in 610 and the fall of the city to Western Crusaders in 1204 (see page 364), four separate dynasties ruled at Constantinople. Imperial government involved such intricate court intrigue, assassinations, and military revolts that the word *byzantine* is sometimes used in English to mean extremely entangled and complicated politics.

What do we know about private life in Constantinople? Research has revealed a fair amount about the Byzantine *oikos,* or household. The Greek household included family members and servants, some of whom were slaves. Artisans lived and worked in their shops. Clerks, civil servants, minor officials, business people—those who today would be called middle class—commonly dwelt in multistory buildings perhaps comparable to the apartment complexes of modern American cities. Wealthy aristocrats resided in freestanding mansions that frequently included interior courts, galleries, large reception halls, small sleeping rooms, reading and writing rooms, baths, and chapels.

In the homes of the upper classes, the segregation of women seems to have been the first principle of interior design. As in ancient Athens, private houses contained a *gynaceum,* or women's apartment, where women were kept strictly separated from the outside world. The fundamental reason for this segregation was the family's honor: "An unchaste daughter is guilty of harming not only herself but also her parents and relatives. That is why you should keep your daughters under lock and key, as if proven guilty or imprudent, in order to avoid venomous bites," as an eleventh-century Byzantine writer put it.[1]

Marriage served as part of a family's strategy for social advancement. The family and the entire kinship group participated in the selection of brides and grooms, choosing spouses that might enhance the family's wealth or prestige.

THE GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

What factors enabled the Christian church to expand and thrive?

As the Western Roman Empire disintegrated in the fourth and fifth centuries, the Christian church survived and grew, becoming the most important institution in Europe. The able administrators and creative thinkers of the church gradually established an orthodox set of beliefs and adopted a system of organization based on that of the Roman state.

The Church and Its Leaders

In early Christian communities believers elected their leaders, but as the centuries passed appointment by existing church leaders or secular rulers became the common pattern. During the reign of Diocletian (284–305), the empire had been divided for administrative purposes into geographical units called **dioceses,** and Christianity adopted this pattern. Each diocese was headed by a bishop who was responsible for organizing preaching, overseeing the community's goods, and maintaining orthodox (established or correct) doctrine. The center of a bishop's authority was his cathedral, a word deriving from the Latin *cathedra,* meaning "chair."

dioceses *Geographic administrative districts of the Church, each under the authority of a bishop and centered around a cathedral.*

The early Christian church benefited from the brilliant administrative abilities of some bishops. Bishop Ambrose, for example, the son of the Roman prefect of Gaul was a trained lawyer and the governor of a province. He is typical of the Roman aristocrats who held high public office, were converted to Christianity, and subsequently became bishops. The church received support from the emperors, and in return the emperors expected the support of the Christian church in maintaining order and unity.

In the fourth century, theological disputes frequently and sharply divided the Christian community. Some disagreements had to do with the nature of Christ. For example, **Arianism,** which originated with Arius (ca. 250–336), a priest of Alexandria held that Jesus was created by the will of God the Father and thus was not co-eternal with him. Arius also reasoned that Jesus the Son must be inferior to God the Father because the Father is incapable of suffering and did not die. Orthodox theologians branded Arius's position a *heresy*—denial of a basic doctrine of faith.

Arianism *A theological belief, originating with Arius, a priest of Alexandria, that denied that Christ was divine and co-eternal with God the Father.*

Arianism enjoyed such popularity and provoked such controversy that Constantine to whom religious disagreement meant civil disorder, interceded. In 325 he summoned a council of church leaders to Nicaea in Asia Minor and presided over it personally. The council produced the Nicene Creed, which defined the orthodox position that Christ is "eternally begotten of the Father" and of the same substance as the Father. Arius and those who refused to accept the creed were banished, the first case of civil punishment for heresy. This participation of the emperor in a theological dispute within the church paved the way for later emperors to claim that they could do the same.

In 380 the emperor Theodosius went further than Constantine and made Christianity the official religion of the empire. Theodosius stripped Roman pagan temples of statues, made the practice of the old Roman state religion a treasonable offense, and persecuted Christians who dissented from orthodox doctrine. Most significant, he allowed the church to establish its own courts. Church courts began to develop their own body of law, called **canon law.** These courts, not the Roman government, had jurisdiction over the clergy and ecclesiastical disputes. The foundation for later growth in church power had been laid.

canon law *The body of internal law that governs the church.*

The Western Church and the Eastern Church

The position of the church differed considerably in the Byzantine East and the Germanic West. The fourth-century emperors Constantine and Theodosius had wanted the church to act as a unifying force within the empire, but the Germanic invasions made that impossible. The bishops of Rome repeatedly called on the emperors at Constantinople for military support against the invaders, but rarely could the emperors send it. The church in the West became less dependent on the emperors' power, and gradually took over political authority, charging taxes, sending troops, and enforcing laws.

Primary Source:
Tertullian, *From* Apologia

After the removal of the imperial capital and the emperor to Constantinople, the bishop of Rome exercised considerable influence in the West, in part because he had no real competitor there. In addition, successive bishops of Rome stressed their special role. According to tradition, Peter, the chief of Christ's first twelve followers, had

lived and been executed in Rome. The popes claimed to be successors to Peter and heirs to his authority, based on Jesus' words: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. . . . Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven." Theologians call this statement the **Petrine Doctrine.** The bishops of Rome came to be known as popes—from the Latin *papa,* for "father"—and in the fifth century began to stress their supremacy over other Christian communities.

In the East, the bishops of Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Constantinople had more power than other bishops, but the emperor's jurisdiction over the church was also fully acknowledged. The emperor in Constantinople nominated the *patriarch,* as the highest prelate of the Eastern church was called. The Eastern emperors looked on religion as a branch of the state. They considered it their duty to protect the faith not only against heathen enemies but also against heretics within the empire. Following the pattern set by Constantine, the emperors summoned councils of bishops and theologians to settle doctrinal disputes.

Petrine Doctrine *The state-ment used by popes, bishops of Rome, based on Jesus' words, to substantiate their claim of being the successors of Saint Peter and heirs to his authority as chief of the apostles.*

The Iconoclastic Controversy

Several theological disputes split the Eastern Christian Church (also called the Ortho-dox Church) in the centuries after Constantine. The most serious was a controversy over *icons*—images or representations of God the Father, Jesus, the Virgin, or the saints in a painting, bas-relief, or mosaic. Since the third century the church had al-lowed people to venerate icons. Although all prayer had to be directed to God the Fa-ther, Christian teaching held that icons representing the saints fostered reverence and that Jesus and the saints could most effectively plead a cause to God the Father. *Icono-clasts,* those who favored the destruction of icons, argued that people were worship-ing the image itself rather than what it signified. This, they claimed, constituted *idolatry,* a violation of the prohibition of images in the Ten Commandments.

The result of the controversy over icons was a terrible theological conflict that split the Byzantine world for a century. In 730 the emperor Leo III (r. 717–741) ordered the destruction of the images. The removal of icons from Byzantine churches pro-voked a violent reaction: entire provinces revolted, and the empire and Roman papacy severed relations. Since Eastern monasteries were the fiercest defenders of icons, Leo's son Constantine V (r. 741–775), nicknamed "Copronymous" ("Dung-name") by his enemies, took the war to the monasteries. He seized their property, executed some of the monks, and forced others into the army. Theological disputes and civil disorder over the icons continued intermittently until 843, when the icons were restored.

The implications of the **iconoclastic controversy** extended far beyond strictly theo-logical issues. Iconoclasm raised the question of the right of the emperor to intervene in religious disputes—a central problem in the relations of church and state. Iconoclasm antagonized the pope and served to encourage him in his quest for an alliance with the Frankish monarchy (see page 182). This further divided the two parts of Christendom, and in 1054 a theological disagreement led the bishop of Rome and the patriarch of Constantinople to excommunicate each other. The outcome was a continuing **schism,** or split, between the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox churches. Finally, the acceptance of icons profoundly influenced subsequent religious art within Christianity. That art rejected the Judaic and Islamic prohibition of figural representation and con-tinued in the Greco-Roman tradition of human representation.

Primary Source:
Liudprand of Cremona,
A Report on the Embassy to Constantinople

iconoclastic controversy *The conflict that resulted from the destruction of Christian images in Byzantine churches in 730.*

schism *A division, or split, in church leadership; there were sev-eral major schisms in Christianity.*

Christian Monasticism

Like the great East Asian religions of Jainism and Buddhism (see pages 37–41), Chris-tianity soon developed an ascetic component: monasticism. Christianity began and spread as a city religion. As early as the first century, however, some especially pious Christians felt that the only alternative to the decadence of urban life was complete separation from the world. This desire to withdraw from ordinary life led to the

eremitical *A form of monasticism that began in Egypt in the third century in which individuals and small groups withdrew from cities and organized society to seek God through prayer.*

coenobitic *Communal living in monasteries, encouraged by Saint Basil and the church because it provided an environment for training the aspirant in the virtues of charity, poverty, and freedom from self-deception.*

regular clergy *Clergy who live under the rule (Latin: regulus) of a monastic house; monks and nuns.*

secular clergy *Clergy who staffed the churches where people worshiped and were therefore not separated from the world (Latin: saeculum); priests and bishops.*

Primary Source:
St. Benedict of Nursia,
*The Rule of St. Benedict:
Work and Pray*

development of the monastic life, which took two forms: **eremitical** (isolated) a **coenobitic** (communal). The people who lived in caves and sought shelter in the d ert and mountains were called *hermits,* from the Greek word *eremos.*

Monasticism began in Egypt in the third century. At first individuals and sm groups withdrew from cities and organized society to seek God through prayer caves and shelters in the desert or mountains. Gradually large colonies of mon emerged in the deserts of Upper Egypt. Many devout women also were attracted this eremitical life. Although monks and nuns led isolated lives, ordinary people so recognized them as holy people and sought them as spiritual guides.

Church leaders did not really approve of eremitical life. Hermits sometimes claim to have mystical experiences—direct communications with God. If hermits cou communicate directly with the Lord, what need had they for the priest and the ins tutional church? The church hierarchy encouraged coenobitic monasticism, comm nal living in monasteries, which provided an environment for training the aspirant the virtues of charity, poverty, and freedom from self-deception. In the fourth, fift and sixth centuries, many different kinds of communal monasticism developed Gaul, Italy, Spain, Anglo-Saxon England, and Ireland.

In 529 Benedict of Nursia (480–543), who had experimented with both the er mitical and the communal forms of monastic life, wrote a brief set of regulations f the monks who had gathered around him at Monte Cassino between Rome and N ples. Benedict's guide for monastic life, known as the *Rule,* slowly replaced all other *The Rule of Saint Benedict* has influenced all forms of organized religious life in th Roman church.

Men and women who lived in monastic houses all followed sets of rules, first tho of Benedict and later those written by other individuals, and because of this came t be called **regular clergy,** from the Latin word *regulus* (rule). Priests and bishops wh staffed churches in which people worshiped and who were not cut off from th world were called **secular clergy.** (According to official church doctrine, women a not members of the clergy, but this distinction was not clear to most mediev people.)

The Rule of Saint Benedict offered a simple code for ordinary men. It outlined monastic life of regularity, discipline, and moderation in an atmosphere of silenc Each monk had ample food and adequate sleep. The monk spent part of each day i formal prayer, chanting psalms and other prayers from the Bible. The rest of the da was passed in manual labor, study, and private prayer.

Why did the Benedictine form of monasticism eventually replace other forms c Western monasticism? The monastic life as conceived by Saint Benedict struck a bal ance between asceticism and activity. It thus provided opportunities for men of en tirely different abilities and talents—from mechanics to gardeners to literary scholar The Benedictine form of religious life also proved congenial to women. Five mile from Monte Cassino at Plombariola, Benedict's twin sister Scholastica (480–543 adapted the *Rule* for the use of her community of nuns.

Benedictine monasticism also succeeded partly because it was so materially success ful. In the seventh and eighth centuries, monasteries pushed back forest and waste land, drained swamps, and experimented with crop rotation. Such Benedictine house made a significant contribution to the agricultural development of Europe, earnin immense wealth in the process. The communal nature of their organization, whereby property was held in common and profits were pooled and reinvested, made this con tribution possible.

Finally, monasteries conducted schools for local young people. Some learned abou prescriptions and herbal remedies and went on to provide medical treatment for thei localities. A few copied manuscripts and wrote books. Local and royal govern ments drew on the services of the literate men and able administrators the monaster ies produced.

Monasticism in the Greek Orthodox world differed in fundamental ways from the monasticism that evolved in western Europe. First, while *The Rule of Saint Benedict* gradually became the universal guide for all western European monasteries, each individual house in the Byzantine world developed its own set of rules for organization and behavior. Second, education never became a central feature of the Greek houses. Monks and nuns had to be literate to perform the services of the choir, and children destined for the monastic life were taught to read and write, but no monastery assumed responsibility for the general training of the local young. Since bishops and patriarchs of the Greek church were recruited only from the monasteries, Greek houses did, however, exercise a cultural influence.

CHRISTIAN IDEAS AND PRACTICES

How did Christian thinkers and missionaries adapt Greco-Roman ideas to Christian theology and develop effective techniques to convert barbarian peoples to Christianity?

The evolution of Christianity was not simply a matter of institutions such as the papacy and monasteries, but also of ideas. Initially, Christians had believed that the end of the world was near and that they should dissociate themselves from the "filth" of Roman culture. Gradually, however, Christians developed a culture of ideas that

drew on classical influences. At the same time, missionaries sponsored by bishops a monasteries spread Christian ideas and institutions far beyond the borders of the R man Empire, often adapting them to existing notions as they assimilated pagan pe ples to Christianity.
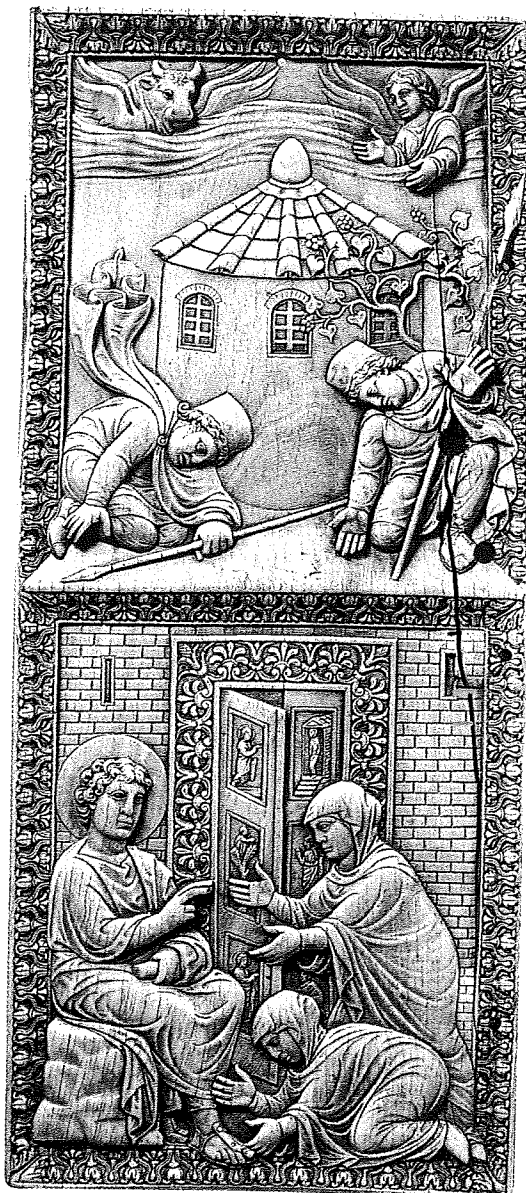
The Marys at Jesus' Tomb This late-fourth-century ivory panel tells the story of Mary Magdalene and another Mary who went to Jesus' tomb to anoint the body (Matthew 28:1–7). At the top guards collapse when an angel descends from Heaven, and at the bottom the Marys listen to the angel telling them that Jesus had risen. Immediately after this, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus appears to the women. Here the artist uses Roman artistic styles to convey Christian subject matter, an example of the assimilation of classical form and Christian teaching. (Castello Sforzesco/Scala/Art Resource, NY)

Adjustment to Classical Culture

Christians in the first and second centuries believed that Christ wou soon fulfill his promise to return and that the end of the world w near. Thus they considered knowledge useless and learning a waste time, and they preached the duty of Christians to prepare for the Se ond Coming of the Lord. The church father Tertullian (ca. 160–22(claimed: "We have no need for curiosity since Jesus Christ, nor f(inquiry since the gospel."

On the other hand, Christianity encouraged adjustment to the ide: and institutions of the Roman world. Some biblical texts urged Chri tians to accept the existing social, economic, and political establish ment. Christians really had little choice. Jewish and Roman cultur(were the only cultures early Christians knew; they had to adapt the Roman education to their Christian beliefs. The result was compr(mise, as evidenced by the distinguished theologian Saint Jerom (340–419). He thought that Christians should study the best of an cient thought because it would direct their minds to God, and h translated the Old and New Testaments from Hebrew and Greek int(vernacular Latin; his edition is known as the Vulgate.

Christian attitudes toward gender and sexuality provide a good ex ample of the ways early Christians both adopted and adapted the view of their contemporary world. In his plan of salvation, Jesus considerec women the equal of men. He attributed no disreputable qualities t(women and did not refer to them as inferior creatures. On the con trary, women were among his earliest and most faithful converts.

Women took an active role in the spread of Christianity, preaching acting as missionaries, being martyred alongside men, and perhaps even baptizing believers. Because early Christians believed that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent, they devoted their energies to their new spiritual family of co-believers. Early Christians often met in people's homes and called one another brother and sister, a meta-phorical use of family terms that was new to the Roman Empire. Some women embraced the ideal of virginity and either singly or in monastic communities declared themselves "virgins in the service of Christ." All this made Christianity seem dangerous to many Romans, especially when becoming Christian actually led some young people to avoid marriage, which was viewed by Romans as the foundation of society and the proper patriarchal order.

Not all Christian teachings about gender were radical, however. In the first century C.E. male church leaders began to place restrictions on female believers. Paul and later writers forbade women to preach, and women were gradually excluded from holding official positions in Christianity other than in women's monasteries. In so limiting the activities of female believers Christianity was following classical Medi-terranean culture, just as it patterned its official hierarchy after that of the Roman Empire.

Christian teachings about sexuality also built on classical culture. Many early church leaders, who are often called the church fathers, renounced marriage and sought to live chaste lives not only because they expected the Second Coming imminently, but also because they accepted the hostility toward the body that derived from certain strains of Hellenistic philosophy. Just as spirit was superior to matter, the mind was superior to the body. Though God had clearly sanctioned marriage, celibacy was the highest good. This emphasis on self-denial led to a strong streak of misogyny (hatred of women) in their writings, for they saw women and female sexuality as the chief obstacles to their preferred existence. They also saw intercourse as little more than animal lust, the triumph of the inferior body over the superior mind. Same-sex relations—which were generally acceptable in the Greco-Roman world, especially if they were between socially unequal individuals—were evil. The church fathers' misogyny and hostility toward sexuality had a greater influence on the formation of later attitudes than did the relatively egalitarian actions and words of Jesus.

Saint Augustine

The most influential church father in the West was Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Saint Augustine was born into an urban family in what is now Algeria in North Africa. His father, a minor civil servant, was a pagan; his mother, Monica, a devout Christian. It was not until adulthood that he converted to his mother's religion. As bishop of the city of Hippo Regius, he was a renowned preacher, a vigorous defender of orthodox Christianity, and the author of more than ninety-three books and treatises.

Augustine's autobiography, *The Confessions,* is a literary masterpiece. Written in the rhetorical style and language of late Roman antiquity, it marks the synthesis of Greco-Roman forms and Christian thought. *The Confessions* describes Augustine's moral struggle, the conflict between his spiritual aspirations and his sensual self. Many Greek and Roman philosophers had taught that knowledge and virtue are the same: a person who knows what is right will do what is right. Augustine rejected this idea, arguing that people do not always act on the basis of rational knowledge. Instead the basic or dynamic force in any individual is the will. When Adam ate the fruit forbidden by God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6), he committed the "original sin" and corrupted the will, wrote Augustine. Adam's sin was not simply his own, but was passed on to all later humans through sexual intercourse; even infants were tainted. Augustine viewed sexual desire as the result of Adam and Eve's disobedience, linking sexuality even more clearly with sin than had earlier church fathers. Because Adam disobeyed God, all human beings have an innate tendency to sin: their will is weak. But according to Augustine, God restores the strength of the will through grace, which is transmitted in certain rituals that the church defined as **sacraments.** Augustine's ideas on sin, grace, and redemption became the foundation of all subsequent Western Christian theology, Protestant as well as Catholic.

**Primary Source:
Saint Augustine,
From City of God:
*A Denunciation of
Paganism***

sacraments *Certain rituals of the church believed to act as a conduit of God's grace. The Eucharist and baptism were among the sacraments.*

Missionary Activity

The word *catholic* derives from a Greek word meaning "general," "universal," or "worldwide." Christ had said that his teaching was for all peoples, and Christians sought to make their faith catholic—that is, worldwide or believed everywhere. The Mediterranean served as the highway over which Christianity spread to the cities of the empire (see Map 7.2). From there missionaries took Christian teachings to the countryside, and then to areas beyond the borders of the empire.

Religion was not a private or individual matter. It was a social affair, and the religion of the chieftain or king determined the religion of the people. Thus missionaries

concentrated their initial efforts not on the people, but on kings or tribal chieftains According to custom, kings negotiated with all foreign powers, including the gods Because the Christian missionaries represented a "foreign" power (the Christian God), the king dealt with them. Barbarian kings accepted Christianity because they believed the Christian God was more powerful than pagan gods and the Christian God would deliver victory in battle; or because Christianity taught obedience to (kingly) authority; or because Christian priests possessed knowledge and a charisma that could be associated with kingly power. Kings who converted, such as Ethelbert of Kent and the Frankish chieftain Clovis, sometimes had wives who had converted first and influenced their husbands. Tradition identifies the conversion of Ireland with Saint Patrick (ca. 385–461). After a vision urged him to Christianize Ireland, Patrick studied in Gaul and in 432 was consecrated a bishop. He returned to Ireland, where he converted the Irish tribe by tribe, first baptizing the king.

The Christianization of the English really began in 597, when Pope Gregory I sent a delegation of monks to England. The conversion of the English had far-reaching consequences because Britain later served as a base for the Christianization of the European continent (see Map 7.2). Between the fifth and tenth centuries, the great

MAP 7.2 **The Spread of Christianity and Islam**   Originating in the area near Jerusalem, Christianity spread throughout the cities of the Roman world along sea-lanes and roads, then into more rural areas. Islam spread from the Arabian peninsula into the Mediterranean, first by land and then by sea.

majority of peoples living on the European continent and the nearby islands accepted the Christian religion—that is, they received baptism, though baptism in itself did not automatically transform people into Christians.

In eastern Europe, missionaries traveled far beyond the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire. In 863 the emperor Michael III sent the brothers Cyril (826–869) and Methodius (815–885) to preach Christianity in Moravia (the region of modern central Czech Republic). Other missionaries succeeded in converting the Russians in the tenth century. Cyril invented a Slavic alphabet using Greek characters, and this script (called the "Cyrillic alphabet") is still in use today. Cyrillic script made possible the birth of Russian literature. Similarly, Byzantine art and architecture became the basis of and inspiration for Russian forms. The Byzantines were so successful that the Russians claimed to be the successors of the Byzantine Empire. For a time Moscow was even known as the "Third Rome" (the second Rome being Constantinople).

Conversion and Assimilation

Most of the peoples living in northern and eastern Europe idealized the military virtues of physical strength, ferocity in battle, and loyalty to the leader. Thus they had trouble accepting the Christian precepts of "love your enemies" and "turn the other cheek," and they found the Christian notions of sin and repentance virtually incomprehensible. How did missionaries and priests get masses of pagan and illiterate peoples to understand Christian ideals and teachings? They did it through preaching, through assimilation, and through the penitential system.

Preaching aimed at presenting the basic teachings of Christianity and strengthening the newly baptized in their faith through stories about the lives of Christ and the saints. Deeply ingrained pagan customs and practices, however, could not be stamped out by words alone or even by imperial edicts. Christian missionaries often pursued a policy of assimilation, easing the conversion of pagan men and women by stressing similarities between their customs and beliefs and those of Christianity. In the same way that classically trained scholars such as Jerome and Augustine blended Greco-Roman and Christian ideas, missionaries and converts mixed pagan ideas and practices with Christian ones. Bogs and lakes sacred to Germanic gods became associated with saints, as did various aspects of ordinary life, such as traveling, planting crops, and worrying about a sick child. Aspects of existing midwinter celebrations, which often centered on the return of the sun as the days became longer, were incorporated into celebrations of Christmas. Spring rituals involving eggs and rabbits (both symbols of fertility) were added to Easter.

Also instrumental in converting pagans was the rite of reconciliation in which the sinner was able to receive God's forgiveness. The penitent knelt individually before the priest, who asked about the sins the penitent might have committed. A penance such as fasting on bread and water for a period of time or saying specific prayers was imposed as medicine for the soul. The priest and penitent were guided by manuals known as **penitentials,** which included lists of sins and the appropriate penance. Penitentials gave pagans a sense of the behavior expected of Christians. The penitential system also encouraged the private examination of conscience and offered relief from the burden of sinful deeds.

penitentials *Manuals for the examination of conscience.*

Most religious observances continued to be community matters, however, as they had been in the ancient world. People joined with family members, friends, and neighbors to celebrate baptisms and funerals, presided over by a priest. They prayed to saints or to the Virgin Mary to intercede with God, or they simply asked the saints for protection and blessing. The entire village participated in processions marking saints' days or points in the agricultural year, often carrying images of saints or their **relics**— bones, articles of clothing, or other objects associated with the life of a saint—around the houses and fields.

relics *Bones, articles of clothing, or other material objects associated with the life of a saint, used as an expedient to worship or to invoke the blessing and protection of that particular saint.*
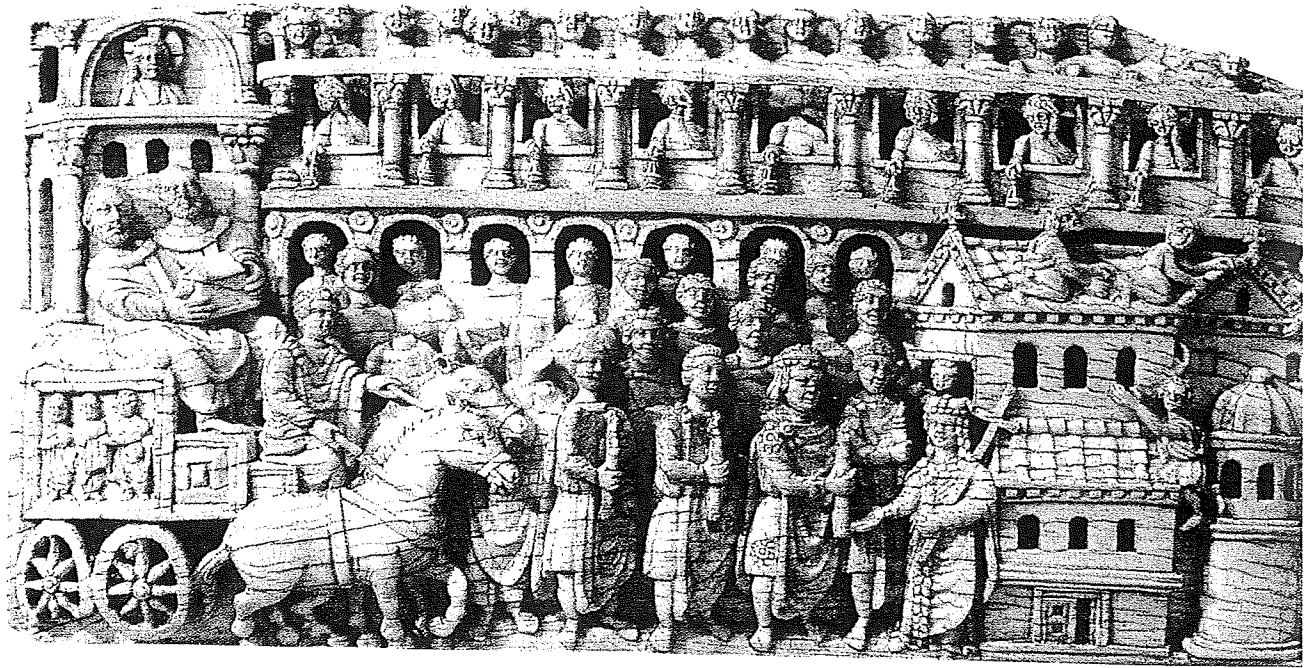
Procession to a New Church In this sixth-century ivory carving, two men in a wagon, ac-
companied by a procession of people holding candles, carry a relic casket to a church under constructic
Workers are putting tiles on the church roof. New churches often received holy items when they were
dedicated, and processions were common ways in which people expressed community devotion. (Cathe-
dral Treasury, Trier/Photo: Ann Muenchow)

MIGRATING PEOPLES

*How did the barbarians shape social, economic, and
political structures in Europe and western Asia?*

The migration of peoples from one area to another has been a continuing feature c
world history. The causes of early migrations varied and are not thoroughly undei
stood by scholars. But there is no question that they profoundly affected both th
regions to which peoples moved and the regions they left behind.

Celts, Huns, and Germans

In surveying the world around them, the ancient Greeks often conceptualized thing
in dichotomies, or sets of opposites: light and dark, hot and cold, wet and dry, minc
and body, male and female, and so on. One of their key dichotomies was Greek anc
non-Greek, and the Greeks coined the word *barbaros* for those whose native languag
was not Greek, because they seemed to the Greeks to be speaking nonsense syllables—
bar, bar, bar. ("Bar-bar" is the Greek equivalent to "blah-blah" or "yada-yada.") *Bar-
baros* originally meant simply someone who did not speak Greek, but gradually it alsc
implied unruly, savage, and more primitive than the advanced civilization of Greece.
The word brought this meaning with it when it came into Latin and other Europear
languages, with the Romans referring to those who lived beyond the northeastern
boundary of Roman territory as **"barbarians."**

barbarians *A name given by
the Romans to all peoples living
outside the frontiers of the Roman
Empire (except the Persians).*

Migrating groups that the Romans labeled barbarians had pressed along the Rhine-
Danube frontier of the Roman Empire since about 150 C.E. (see page 122). In the

third and fourth centuries, increasing pressures on the frontiers from the east and north placed greater demands on Roman military manpower, which plague and a declining birthrate had reduced. Therefore, Roman generals recruited refugees and tribes allied with the Romans to serve in the Roman army, and some rose to the highest ranks.

Why did the barbarians migrate? In part, they were searching for more regular supplies of food, better farmland, and a warmer climate. Conflicts within and among barbarian groups also led to war and disruption, which motivated groups to move. Franks fought Alemanni in Gaul, while Visigoths fought Vandals in the Iberian peninsula and across North Africa. Pressure from Germanic-speaking groups caused Celtic-speaking peoples to move westward, settling in Brittany (modern northwestern France) and throughout the British Isles (England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland). The Picts of Scotland as well as the Welsh, Britons, and Irish were peoples of Celtic descent (see Map 7.3).

A very significant factor in barbarian migration was pressure from nomadic steppe peoples from central Asia. This included the Alans, Avars, Bulghars, Khazars, and most prominently the Huns, who attacked the Black Sea area and the Eastern Roman Empire beginning in the fourth century. Under the leadership of their warrior-king Attila, the Huns swept into central Europe in 451, attacking Roman settlements in the Balkans and Germanic settlements along the Danube and Rhine Rivers. After Attila turned his army southward and crossed the Alps into Italy, a papal delegation,

Vandal Landowner In this mosaic, a Vandal landowner rides out from his Roman-style house. His clothing—Roman short tunic, cloak, and sandals—reflects the way some Celtic and Germanic tribes accepted Roman lifestyles, though his beard is more typical of barbarian men's fashion. *(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)*
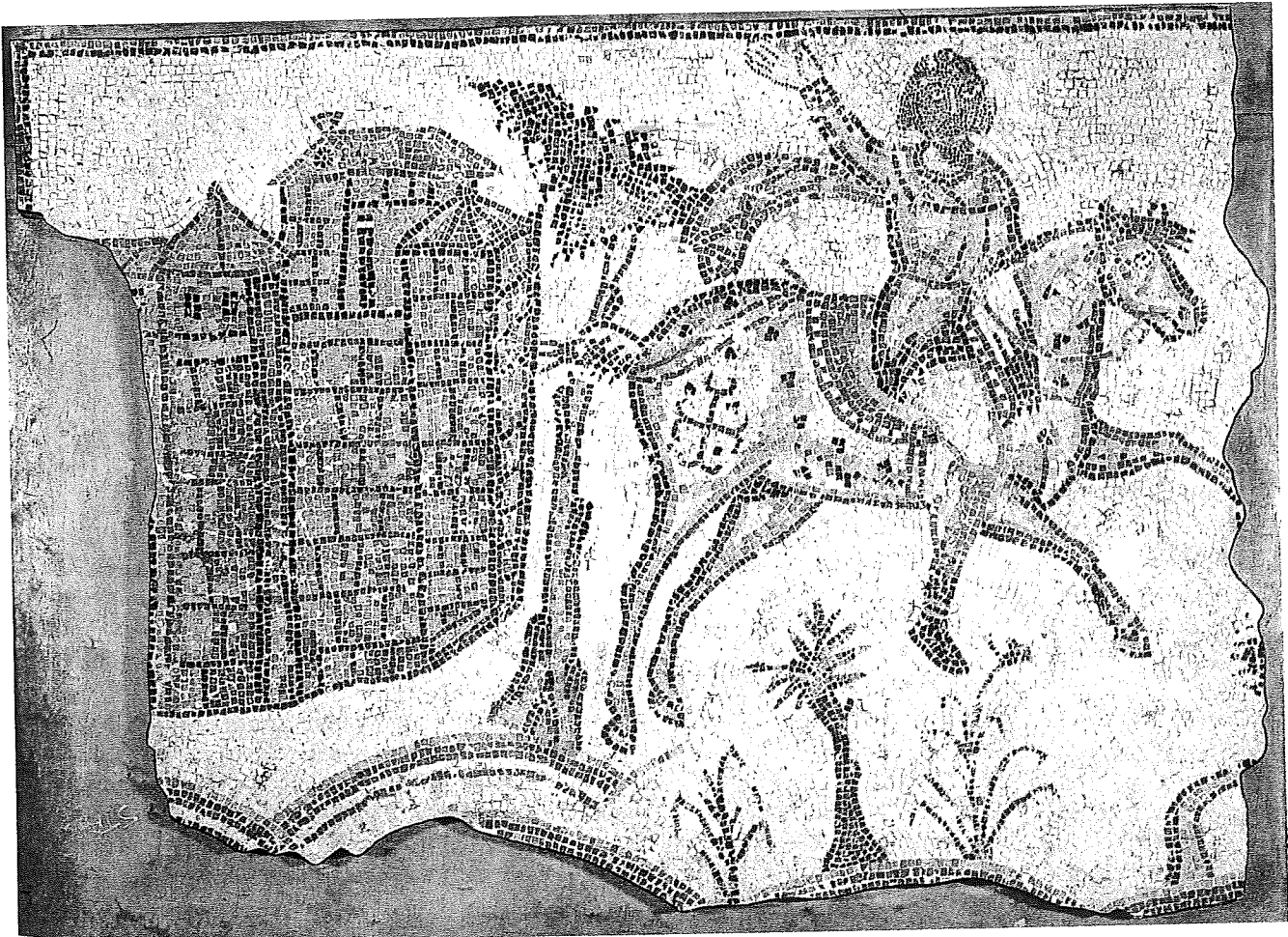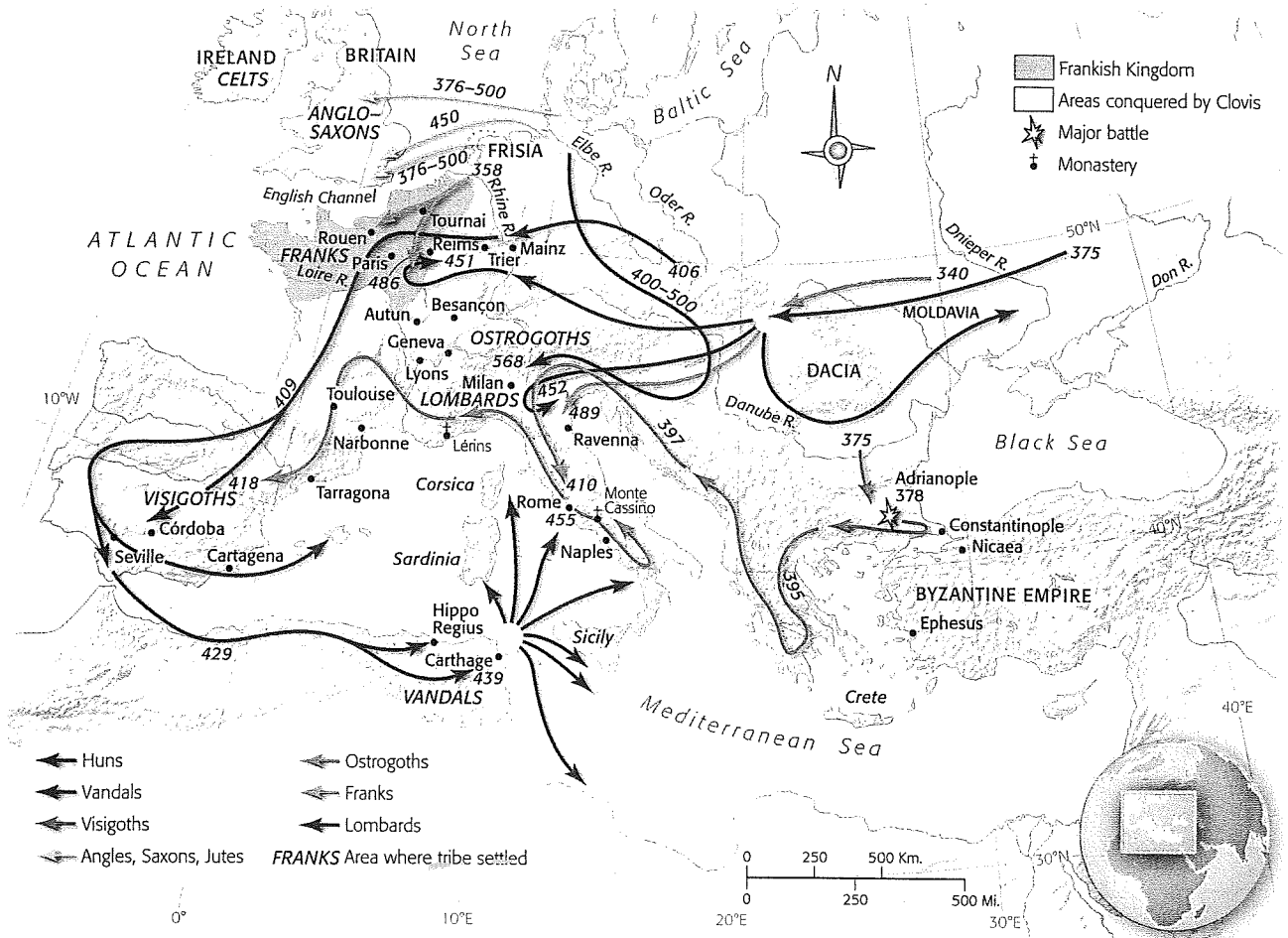
MAP 7.3 **The Barbarian Migrations** Various barbarian groups migrated throughout Europe and western Asia in late antiquity, pushed and pulled by a number of factors. Many of them formed loosely structured states, of which the Frankish Kingdom would become the most significant.

including Pope Leo I himself, asked him not to attack Rome. Though papal diplomacy was later credited with stopping the advance of the Huns, a plague that spread among Hunnic troops and their dwindling food supplies were probably much more important. The Huns retreated from Italy, and within a year Attila was dead. Later leaders were not as effective, and the Huns were never again an important factor in European history. Their conquests had slowed down the movements of various other groups, however, allowing barbarian peoples to absorb more of Roman culture as they picked the Western Roman Empire apart.

The largest group of barbarians were people who spoke Germanic languages. Many modern scholars have tried to explain who the Germans were. The present consensus, based on the study of linguistic and archaeological evidence, is that there were not one but rather many Germanic peoples with somewhat different cultural traditions.

Barbarian Society

Germanic and Celtic society had originated in the northern parts of central and western Europe and the southern regions of Scandinavia during the Iron Age (800–

500 B.C.E.). After the end of the Western Roman Empire, barbarian customs and traditions formed the basis of European society for centuries.

Barbarians generally had no notion of the state as we use the term today; they thought in social, not political, terms. The basic social unit was the tribe, a group whose members believed that they were all descended from a common ancestor. Blood united them; kinship protected them. Law was custom—unwritten, preserved in the minds of the elders of the tribe, and handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation.

Barbarian tribes were led by tribal chieftains, who are often called kings, though this implies broader power than they actually had. The chief was the member recognized as the strongest and bravest in battle and was elected from among the male members of the strongest family. He led the tribe in war, settled disputes among its members, conducted negotiations with outside powers, and offered sacrifices to the gods. The period of migrations and conquests of the Western Roman Empire witnessed the strengthening of kingship among tribes.

Early barbarian tribes had no written laws, but beginning in the late sixth century some tribal chieftains began to collect, write, and publish lists of their customs at the urging of Christian missionaries. The churchmen wanted to understand barbarian ways in order to assimilate the tribes to Christianity. Moreover, by the sixth century many barbarian kings needed regulations for the Romans under their jurisdiction as well as for their own people.

Today, if a person holds up a bank, American law maintains that the robber attacks both the bank and the state in which it exists—a sophisticated notion involving the abstract idea of the state. In early Germanic law, all crimes were regarded as crimes against a person.

According to the code of one Germanic tribe, the Salian Franks, every person had a particular monetary value to the tribe. This value was called the **wergeld,** which literally means "man-money" or "money to buy off the spear." Men of fighting age had the highest wergeld, then women of childbearing age, children, and finally the aged. Everyone's value reflected his or her potential military worthiness. If a person accused of a crime agreed to pay the wergeld and if the victim and his or her family accepted the payment, there was peace. If the accused refused to pay the wergeld or if the victim's family refused to accept it, a blood feud ensued.

wergeld *"Man-money" or "money to buy off the spear"; according to the code of the Salian Franks, this is the particular monetary value of each member of the tribe.*

Social and Economic Structures

Barbarian groups usually resided in small villages, and climate and geography determined the basic patterns of agricultural and pastoral life. Many tribes lived in small settlements on the edges of clearings where they raised barley, wheat, oats, peas, and beans. Men and women tilled their fields with simple wooden scratch plows and harvested their grains with small iron sickles. The kernels of grain were eaten as porridge, ground up for flour, or fermented into strong, thick beer. The vast majority of people's caloric intake came from grain in some form.

Within the small villages, there were great differences in wealth and status. Free men and their families constituted the largest class. The number of cattle a man possessed indicated his wealth and determined his social status. Free men also shared in tribal warfare. Slaves (prisoners of war) worked as farm laborers, herdsmen, and household servants.

Barbarian tribes were understood as made up of kin groups, and those kin groups were made up of families, the basic social unit in barbarian society. Families were responsible for the debts and actions of their members and for keeping the peace in general. Germanic society was patriarchal: within each household the father had authority over his wife, children, and slaves. Some wealthy and powerful men had more than one wife, a pattern that continued even after they became Christian, but polygamy

was not widespread among ordinary people. A woman was considered to be under the legal guardianship of a man, and she had fewer rights to own property than did Roman women in the late empire. However, once they were widowed (and there must have been many widows in such a violent, warring society), women sometimes assumed their husbands' rights over family property and held the guardianship of their children.

The Frankish Kingdom

Between 450 and 565, Germanic tribes established a number of kingdoms, but none other than the Frankish kingdom lasted very long. The Germanic kingdoms did not have definite geographical boundaries, and their locations are approximate. The Vandals, whose destructive ways are commemorated in the word *vandal,* settled in North Africa. In northern and western Europe in the sixth century, the Burgundians ruled over part of what is now France and the Ostrogoths much of what is now Italy.

The most enduring Germanic kingdom was established by the Frankish chieftain Clovis (r. 481–511). Originally only a petty chieftain in northwestern Gaul (modern Belgium), Clovis began to expand his territories in 486. His Catholic wife Clothild worked to convert her husband and supported the founding of churches and monasteries. Clothild typifies the role women played in the Christianization and Romanization of the Germanic kingdoms. Clovis's conversion to Orthodox Christianity in 496 won him the crucial support of the papacy and the bishops of Gaul. (See the feature "Listening to the Past: The Conversion of Clovis" on pages 188–189.) As the defender of Roman Catholicism against heretical Germanic tribes, Clovis went on to conquer the Visigoths, extending his domain to include much of what is now France and southwestern Germany. Because he was descended from the half-legendary chieftain Merovech, the dynasty that Clovis founded has been called **Merovingian.**

Merovingian *A dynasty founded in 481 by the Frankish chieftain Clovis in what is now France, so called because Clovis claimed descent from the semi-legendary leader Merovech.*

When Clovis died, following Frankish custom, his kingdom was divided among his four sons. For the next two centuries, the land was often wracked by civil war. So brutal were these wars that historians used to use the term *Dark Ages* to apply to the entire Merovingian period. Yet recent research has presented a more complex picture.

Merovingian kings based their administration on the *civitas,* the city and the surrounding territory over which a *count* presided. The count raised troops, collected royal revenues, and provided justice on the basis of local, not royal, law. At the king's court—that is, wherever the king was present—an official called the *mayor of the palace* supervised legal, financial, and household officials; the mayor of the palace also governed in the king's absence. In the seventh century, that position was held by members of an increasingly powerful family, the **Carolingians,** who further increased their power through advantageous marriages, a well-earned reputation for military strength, and the help of the church.

Carolingians *A Frankish family that increased its power through selective marriage, political acumen, and military victory to the point that it was able to replace the Merovingians as the rulers of the Frankish kingdom during the seventh century.*

The Carolingians replaced the Merovingians as rulers of the Frankish kingdom, cementing their authority when the Carolingian Charles Martel defeated Muslim invaders in 732 at the Battle of Poitiers in central France. Muslims and Christians have interpreted the battle differently. Muslims considered it a minor skirmish and attributed the Frankish victory to Muslim difficulties in maintaining supply lines over long distances and to ethnic conflicts and unrest in Islamic Spain. Charles Martel and later Carolingians used it to portray themselves as defenders of Christendom against the Muslims.

The battle of Poitiers helped the Carolingians acquire the support of the church, perhaps their most important asset. They further strengthened their ties to the church by supporting the work of missionaries who preached Christianity to pagan peoples, along with the Christian duty to obey secular authorities.

Map legend:
- Frankish Kingdom, 768
- Areas conquered by Charlemagne
- Tributary peoples
- Byzantine territory
- Viking settlement
- Early Viking raids, trade, and colonization routes

TREATY OF VERDUN, 843
- Charles the Bald
- Lothair
- Louis the German
- Tributary peoples

MAP 7.4 **The Carolingian World and Viking Expansion** Charlemagne added large amounts of territory to the Frankish Kingdom, although his actual power in these areas was often quite limited. His grandsons weakened the kingdom by dividing it into three parts. Viking invasions and migrations, which began in the eighth century, also diminished Frankish holdings and power.

Charlemagne

The most powerful of the Carolingians was Charles the Great (r. 768–814), generally known as Charlemagne. In the autumn of the year 800, Charlemagne visited Rome, where on Christmas Day Pope Leo III crowned him Holy Roman Emperor. The event had momentous consequences. In taking as his motto *Renovatio romani imperi* (Revival of the Roman Empire), Charlemagne was deliberately perpetuating old Roman imperial ideas while identifying with the new Rome of the Christian church. From Baghdad, Harun al Rashid, caliph of the Abbasid Empire (786–809), congratulated Charlemagne on his coronation with the gift of an elephant. But although the Muslim caliph recognized Charlemagne as a fellow sovereign, the Greeks regarded the papal acts as rebellious and Charlemagne as a usurper. The imperial coronation thus marks a decisive break between Rome and Constantinople.

Charlemagne built on the military and diplomatic foundations of his ancestors. His most striking characteristic was his phenomenal energy, which helps explain his great military achievements. Continuing the expansionist policies of his ancestors, Charlemagne fought more than fifty campaigns, and by around 805 the Frankish kingdom included all of continental Europe except Spain, Scandinavia, southern Italy, and the Slavic fringes of the East (see Map 7.4).

For administrative purposes, Charlemagne divided his entire kingdom into counties. Each of the approximately six hundred counties was governed by a count, who had full military and judicial power and held his office for life but could be removed by the emperor for misconduct. As a link between local authorities and the central government, Charlemagne appointed officials called *missi dominici,* "agents of the lord king." Each year beginning in 802, two missi, usually a count and a bishop or abbot, visited assigned districts. They checked up on the counts and their districts' judicial, financial, and clerical activities.

It is ironic that Charlemagne's most enduring legacy was the stimulus he gave to scholarship and learning. Barely literate, preoccupied with the control of vast territories, much more a warrior than a thinker, Charlemagne nevertheless set in motion a cultural revival that later historians called the "Carolingian Renaissance." The Carolingian Renaissance was a rebirth of interest in, study of, and preservation of the language, ideas, and achievements of classical Greece and Rome. Scholars at Charlemagne's capital of Aachen copied books and manuscripts and built up libraries.

Charlemagne left his vast empire to his sole surviving son, Louis the Pious (r. 814–840), who attempted to keep the empire intact. This proved to be impossible. Members of the nobility engaged in plots and open warfare against the emperor, often allying themselves with one of Louis's three sons. In 843, shortly after Louis's death, those sons agreed to the **Treaty of Verdun,** which divided the empire into three parts: Charles the Bald received the western part, Lothar the middle and the title of emperor, and Louis the eastern part, from which he acquired the title "the German." Though of course no one knew it at the time, this treaty set the pattern for political bound-

> **Primary Source:**
> **Charlemagne, *From Capitulary on Saxony and A Letter to Pope Leo III***

Germanic Bracteate (Gold Leaf) Pendant This late-fifth-century piece, with the head of Rome above a wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, reflects Germanic assimilation of Roman legend and artistic design. *(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)*

aries in Europe that has been maintained until today. Other than brief periods under Napoleon and Hitler, Europe would never again see as large a unified state as it had under Charlemagne, which is one reason he has become a symbol of European unity in the twenty-first century.

The weakening of central power was hastened by invasions and migrations from the north, south, and east. Thus Charlemagne's empire ended in much the same way that the Roman Empire had earlier, a combination of internal weakness and external pressure.

Treaty of Verdun *A treaty, ratified in 843, that divided the territories of Charlemagne between his three surviving grandsons and formed the precursor states of modern Germany, France, and Italy.*

Chapter Summary

> To assess your mastery of this chapter and read the primary sources listed in the margins, visit bedfordstmartins.com/mckayworld or see *Sources of World Societies.*

• How was the Byzantine Empire able to survive for so long, and what were its most important achievements?

Late antiquity was a period of rupture and transformation in Europe and western Asia, but also of continuities and assimilation. In the east, the Byzantine Empire withstood attacks from Germanic tribes and steppe peoples and remained a state until 1453, a thousand years longer than the Western Roman Empire. Byzantium preserved the philosophical and scientific texts of the ancient world—which later formed the basis for study in science and medicine in both Europe and the Arabic world—and produced a great synthesis of Roman law, the Justinian *Code,* which shapes legal structures in much of Europe and former European colonies to this day.

• What factors enabled the Christian church to expand and thrive?

Christianity gained the support of the fourth-century emperors and gradually adopted the Roman system of hierarchical organization. The church possessed able administrators and leaders whose skills were tested in the chaotic environment of the end of the Roman Empire in the West. Bishops expanded their activities, and in the fifth century the bishops of Rome began to stress their supremacy over other Christian communities. Monasteries offered opportunities for individuals to develop deeper spiritual devotion and also provided a model of Christian living, a pattern of agricultural development, and a place for education and learning.

• How did Christian thinkers and missionaries adapt Greco-Roman ideas to Christian theology and develop effective techniques to convert barbarian peoples to Christianity?

Christian thinkers reinterpreted the classics in a Christian sense, incorporating elements of Greek and Roman philosophy and of various pagan religious

Key Terms

diaspora
corpus juris civilis
dioceses
Arianism
canon law
Petrine Doctrine
iconoclastic controversy
schism
eremitical
coenobitic
regular clergy
secular clergy
sacraments
penitentials
relics
barbarians
wergeld
Merovingian
Carolingians
Treaty of Verdun