

Justinian and Byzantine Greatness

Under the rule of Emperor Justinian, 527 to 565 CE, the Byzantine Empire reached the pinnacle of its power and grandeur. Constantinople was called the Queen City by travelers who admired its magnificence. But the Byzantine Empire, like its Western predecessor, endured periods of strife and decline.



Justinian assumed control after one of these periods. He was not a popular emperor at first, and in 532 CE there was a revolt against him. The rebels set fire to a part of the city, and the young emperor might have accepted defeat had it not been for his wife Theodora. As he was about to board a ship and leave the city, she challenged him, "Go if you want to, but for me-I STAY. Imperial purple will make me a splendid shroud!"

she saved him.

must be a negative word.

imagine that today!

Theodora was a strong willed woman. Prior to becoming Queen, she was an actress and even a prostitute. When she met Justinian, there was a law forbidding the upper class Patricians from marrying actresses. He had that rule changed, and made her his wife. She would go on to be arguably the most powerful and influential woman in the empire's history.

women's rights!

With his wife, the emperor stayed and not only put down the revolt by killing all the rebels, but decided to expand his empire in the process. He was able to reunite the Eastern and Western Roman Empires again, although it was lost after his rule.

Legacy



At home, he worked nonstop to beautify the city and is responsible for the construction of the church Saint Sophia (Hagia Sophia). He became learned in law, and wrote two great volumes: *Corpus Juris Civilis*, which incorporated all the Roman laws, and *Institutes*, a digest and explanation of them for law students. These came to be known as the Code of Justinian, another of his lasting legacies.

Legacy

Legacy

After the time of Justinian, the Byzantine Empire began to decline dramatically, plagued by many of the same symptoms that were the causes of the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The Lombards seized Northern Italy and moved steadily southward. Other invaders moved from other areas until finally, Constantinople fell to invading Turks in 1453.

Academic

What are the three main legacies of Justinian?

Write a brief summary of his wife Theodora, in your own words. 3-5 sentences.

Honors

What are the three main legacies of Justinian?

Which of these legacies do you think is most important to us today and why?

Read about Theodora in THE MIDDLE AGES blue books, pages 41-48. Answer questions 1-4 on page 48.

Humanities

What are the three main legacies of Justinian?

Create a 30 second – 1 minute reenactment of the conversation that Justinian and Theodora may have had just before he was about to flee the city. However, the scene is to take place in modern day, and the city is your own, not Constantinople.