

## Eastern Roman Empire

The eastern part of the Roman Empire, consisting of Anatolia, parts of North Africa, Greece, the Balkans, Syria, and Palestine, in many ways had its own cultural traditions. Firstly, people in the eastern half, although multiethnic and multilingual, spoke Greek, one of the most enduring aspects of Hellenization of Alexander the Great and the successor kingdoms that grew up in his wake. Secondly, parts of the eastern provinces were better able to hold onto the wealth flowing through its cities. At the time of Emperor Diocletian's reorganization, through which he desired a capital in the east to shore up the borders against invasion, cities in this part had long been among the wealthiest in the Roman Empire. Cities such as Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Emperor Constantine's new capital at Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople, stood on major trade routes and hosted markets that served as trade hubs. Emperors taxed all trade coming through the city of Constantinople, which connected Europe and Asia, and set up customs houses to collect regular revenues. The steady flow of wealth enabled the emperors to stave off invasion, at least in part, in the east by bribing those at their borders. Thirdly, there was a tendency in the eastern part of the empire to view leadership, or kingship, in light of divine inspiration. From the time of Augustus, emperors embraced this tendency, something they would not dare do in Rome itself with its traditional aversion to the idea of monarchy. The tradition of viewing kings as divinely inspired was also reflected in the prevalence of mystery religions in the eastern provinces, many of which promised a more personal connection with the divine. Christian ceremonies inherited aspects of this mystical approach to religion in the east, ultimately feeding into some of the differences in religious tradition that developed between the eastern and western portions of the Christian church. Perhaps more importantly, the tradition of attaching divine inspiration to kingship created fertile ground for the fusion of imperial and spiritual power emperors would come to assume. Emperors in the eastern part of the empire controlled appointments of the top church officials, or patriarchs, of key cities, with the patriarch of Constantinople being the most important. The emperor's actions were considered sanctioned by God, giving him spiritual protection for civil maneuvers and direct influence over the church in a quasi-priestly manner, carrying out actions reserved for clergy. This identification with the church and new kind of divinity for the emperor made it that much more important for him to enforce religious unity and orthodoxy, or correct belief as it was defined by church councils. From such a position, an emperor such as Justinian (535-567) in the mid-sixth century was able to control industry, commerce, and trade through heavy regulation, maintaining a more or less permanent war economy, as well as centralize the bureaucracies of the state and church into one, enforcing religious orthodoxy along the way. These conditions also allowed him to launch a campaign to reconquer the western provinces that had fallen under the rule of Germanic tribes. While Justinian and the people in the east considered themselves Roman, and would continue to do so, at least in the imperial sense, historians have labeled the time period beginning with the imperial changes initiated by Justinian as "Byzantine," after the traditional name of Constantinople.