Slide 2.1A: Cityscape of Istanbul (formerly Constantinople)
CHAPTER 10

Geography Activity

The Byzantine Empire and Russia

CONSTANTINOPLE—CROSSROADS OF EUROPE AND ASIA

About 650 B.C., a Greek named Byzas wanted to establish a new Greek colony. He consulted the oracle at Delphi for advice on where to locate his settlement. Byzas was told to establish a city "opposite the blind." He took this to mean "blind people." Searching for a site, Byzas reached the Bosphorus. This strait is 28 miles long and 2,000 feet wide. It separates Europe from Asia and connects the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara.

Byzas noted that a Greek colony, Chalcedon, had already been established on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. He felt, however, that the European side was far superior. Here, seven hills rise above the waters of the Bosphorus. An inlet creates a natural harbor. Byzas believed that the people of Chalcedon must have been blind not to recognize this geographic advantage. He realized then that he had found his site "opposite the blind." Byzas' city, Byzantium, was soon established on the European shore.

Byzantium prospered immediately, thanks to its commanding geographic position. It collected tolls from those who sailed beneath the city walls through the Bosphorus. It made the most of its location and became an important trading center. As artisans opened busy shops, the city also became a major producer of goods.

It is no wonder that the Emperor Constantine chose Byzantium to be the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire in A.D. 330. He was attracted by its location on a peninsula that could be fortified. Also the city's location assured its control of the navigation through the Bosphorus from the Black Sea to the Aegean and Mediterranean seas.

Constantine wanted to make Byzantium a capital worthy of a great empire. He ordered the building of more walls around the city. This would make it, he thought, an "impregnable fortress enclosing the sea." He also gave Byzantium a new name in his honor—Constantinople.

By the 900s, Constantinople had become one of the world's largest cities. Located at the crossroads of the world, Constantinople was subject to attack from both east and west. The inhabitants therefore mounted bronze tubes on the walls of the city. When Constantinople was under attack, a substance called "Greek fire" was poured down the tubes onto the invaders. This devastating weapon was a flammable mixture of sulfur, naphtha, and quicklime. When ignited, it became liquid fire. Constantinople was able to defeat all invaders until 1204. Study the map, and answer the questions that follow.
Slide 2.1C: Mosaic Portrait of Empress Theodora
Slide 2.1E: Icon of Mary and Jesus

How the Great Schism Happened

Icons

Catholic Church

Orthodox Church

WEST

EAST
Slide 2.1F: Lands and Trading Routes of the Byzantine Empire

- **Russia**
  - Export:
  - Import:

- **China**
  - Export:
  - Import:

- **India**
  - Export:
  - Import:

- **France**
  - Export:
  - Import:

- **Africa**
  - Export:
  - Import:

- **England**
  - Export:
  - Import:

- **Spain**
  - Export:
  - Import:

A HUB OF TRADE AND CULTURE