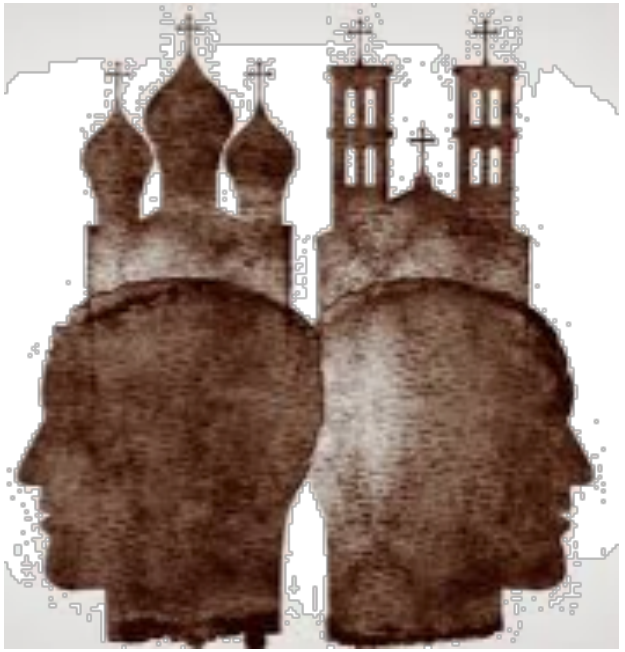
The Modern city of Istanbul was once Constantinople (named for Emperor Constantine). Before that the city was called Byzantium.

Emperor Constantine decided to move the capital of the Holy Roman Empire to Byzantium.



This resulted in the split of the Christian church into the Eastern orthodox church and the Western Catholic church.

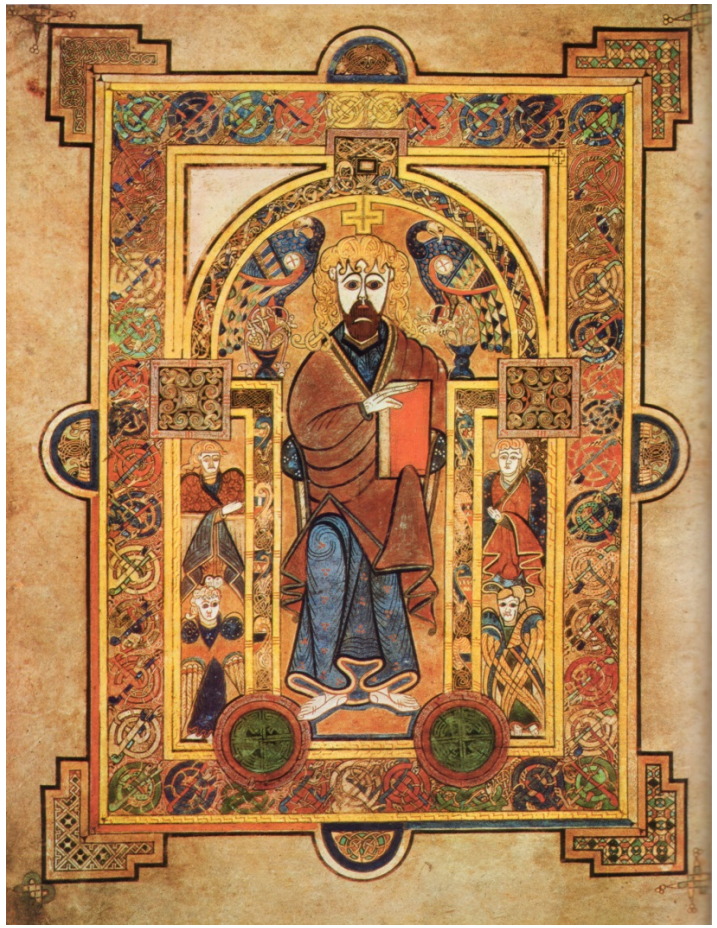
After the reign of Emperor Justinian (AD 527-565, religious images were forbidden. Numerous works of art were destroyed.

In spite of this the "Golden age of Byzantine art" that began during his reign lasted until the end of the 9th century. Byzantine greatness in art came to an end in 1453 when Constantinople was conquered by the Turks. Much of what we know today of Byzantine art is seen Ravenna, Italy, Greece, Serbia, and Russia.

Painting

Frescoes were painted on walls, and icons (religious images) were painted on wooden panels.

Manuscript illumination was the forunner to the dramatic mosaic representations later seen in many eastern orthodox churches. Early Byzantine painting was almost exclusively religious.



Figures were portrayed frontally, with large staring eyes, unsmiling features, and long, narrow faces demonstrating the lack of interest in the human form or realistic portraiture.

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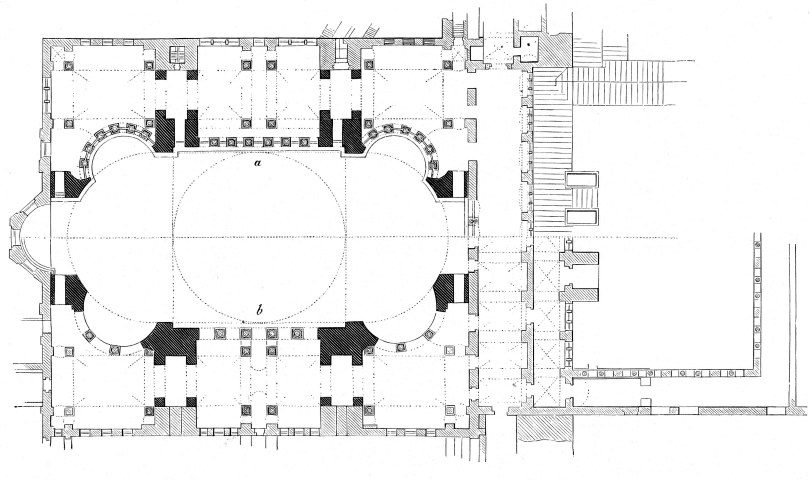
Sculpture

It was generally limited to small ivory book covers or small portable, hinged altars (diptychs, triptychs an polyptychs, depending on the number of panels.) Sculpture of the human form was considered idolatrous and was discouraged. Bas relief decorative carving was used in churches, and beautiful metalwork in gold and silver was created to house the relics of saints. These reliquaries were an important part of every church's treasury.

Architecture

- Byzantine architecture had a far reaching influence on the construction of churches throughout Europe. A development in the construction of Hagia Sophia, a hug church constructed in Ad 532-537 in Constantinople, dramatically affected western architecture . The pendentive (a concave triangular support allowed a round dome to be placed on square pillars.

- The central church plan, with its dome over the crossing, evolved. The floor plans were shaped after the Greek Cross (equal sized legs, or the Roman cross, the rich mosaic used in Hagia Sophia were copied churches throughout Italy. Minarets ere added to Hagia Sophia after the Turkish conquest. And it has since served as the model for a number of Islamic mosques.