

The Byzantine Dynasties and Military

Justinian Dynasty (518 - 610) the **largest** area and most "**Roman**" of all these dynasties.

Imperial Rome depended mostly on massive, infantry-heavy legions to do their conquering for them. Under Diocleation's rule cavalry (this was not common to the Roman army) became an important aspect of the Roman military. This basic system remained in place until the fifth century when Justinian reformed the field army. The basic unit was reduced in size to make it more mobile and the army in general began to be much more diverse. Justinian still relied on barbarian forces to support his imperial forces which were again greatly reduced under his rule even though he more than doubled the Byzantine Empire's land area.

Heraclian Dynasty (610 - 717) unable to keep all of the land conquered by the Justinians; organized into **themes**, constant **warfare** with Persia & Muslims; first to have a "**Byzantine**" identity.

Due to the pressure from Persia and the Muslims, Emperors such as Heraclius or his grandson Constans II were forced to drastically change the military. They created what is known as a "Theme" system. This is where the empire gave veteran soldiers frontier land, or land on the borders. In exchange for the land all men on working the land must provide military service. This land was hereditary as was the obligation to provide military service. This continued well into the Macedonian Dynasty.

Isaurian Dynasty (717 - 867) **Iconoclasm** (religious problems) and **Invasions** weakened the Byzantines.

In 726 Emperor Leo III sent out the edict that all Icons were to be removed from public view. The Pope in the West not understanding why Icons were such a big deal, this was mainly due to the fact Icons were not as popular in the West. Here we can really see the divide Catholic divide between the east and west. This dynasty also has the first woman to rule the Byzantine Empire. Eirene started out as regent for her infant son, but 10 years later she blinded him and took the throne for herself.

Macedonian Dynasty (867 - 1057) **revival of Byzantine power** and culture; trade increased, territory and power grew.

With the Theme system the Macedonian dynasty able to push back the advancing Muslim Empire. While the Theme system was a success it did eventually decline. Wealthy aristocrats bought up land on the frontiers, forcing the small farmers out. The empire filled this gap by hiring mercenaries.

Komnenoi Dynasty (1057 - 1204) stable government, but power began to fade due to **Crusades** and the growing strength of both Western Europe and the Muslim world.

Mercenaries became expensive and as the Byzantine lost money and land. This forced the Byzantine Empire to rely more on diplomacy to survive.

Latin Occupation (1204 - 1261) **Western Christian crusaders** took control of Constantinople.

Palaiologoi Dynasty (1261 - 1453) The **final** dynasty, scrambling over the last 200 years to hold off the invading Ottoman (Muslim) Turks, with **Constantinople** falling in 1453.

In the end the Byzantine empire could only muster up about 7,000 troops. It has been recorded that under Emperor Constantine the few remaining troops fought nobly until they were completely over taken by the Ottoman Turks.