

Name:

Date:

Period:

Gardener's Notes

Unit 9 - Chapter 12: Byzantine Art

Shortly after Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 CE, he moved the capital of the Roman Empire to the Greek-speaking city of Byzantium in the East. The city of Byzantium was located on a peninsula, which was an advantage for defensive purposes. Tribes from Asia and eastern and central Europe, such as the Huns, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, and Vandals, were migrating and threatening parts of the Roman Empire. Constantine's decision to move the capital was wise because Rome was sacked soon after, whereas his new capital, which he named Constantinople, would not be conquered for several hundred years. In addition, Byzantium's location was at the crossroads of trade among Europe, North Africa, and Asia. Their locations allowed it to control and tax this valuable trade.

Art produced by the eastern part of what was left of the Roman Empire is known as Byzantine art. Byzantine art has a few important characteristics. Chronologically, it succeeds early Christian art, and it has predominantly Christian themes and imagery. Byzantine art is not focused on realism and naturalism as is Classical Greco-Roman art. Early Byzantine art maintains some characteristics of Classical art, just as early Christian art does. However, these elements gradually give way to a distinctly Byzantine aesthetic.

*Past AP Art history tests have included multiple-choice questions about the Byzantine aesthetic, mosaics, ivory devotional sculptures, icons and iconoclasm, and the Hagia Sophia (a famous Byzantine church). Other tests include a slide-based short essay that asks students to identify the classical and Byzantine elements contained in an early Byzantine work of art. **Understanding the Byzantine aesthetic and its emphasis on Christianity are keys to recognizing Byzantine art.***

1. Byzantine Art Basics

- a. **The Three "F"s: Flat, Floating, Frontal – describe these attributes in one work**
- b. **And a "G": What part of an icon used "g"old?**

2. Emperor Justinian

- a. **List 3 artworks that use Justinian as a subject.**
- b. **Compare one of these works to a work from the earlier Roman Empire.**
- c. **How did artists mix Roman, pagan, and Christian elements?**

3. Hagia Sophia

- a. What is a pendentive? Describe how it is used in this building.**
- b. How is this building different from the Pantheon?**
- c. What effect do windows have on the interior of this building?**

4. Ravenna and Its Mosaics

- a. Why are mosaics important to Byzantine art? What are the effects of mosaics on the viewer?**
- b. Why do we study mosaics in Ravenna and not examples in Constantinople (Istanbul)?**

5. Justinian Mosaic

- a. Describe the figures in this mosaic.**
- b. What does this mosaic say about Justinian?**
- c. What is recessional space? Does this mosaic use it?**
- d. Looking at how these figures are portrayed, what can we conclude about the message or significance of this work?**

6. Theodora Mosaic

- a. *Describe this mosaic.*
- b. *What does this mosaic say about Theodora?*

7. Icons and Iconoclasm

- a. *What are icons? Cite an example.*
- b. *What is encaustic? Which work uses this technique?*
- c. *What is tempera? Which work uses this technique?*
- d. *What is iconoclasm? What effect did it have on Byzantine art?*

8. Ivory Religious Art

- a. *What were the purposes of these works? Cite an example.*

9. *Christ as Pantocrator*

- a. What was the role of Jesus Christ as Pantocrator?
- b. Describe an example.

10. *Spread of Byzantine Icons*

- a. Describe the features of the Vladimir Virgin.
- b. What is distinctive about this icon?

Additional Notes

Conclusion

The Byzantine Empire exerted a profound influence on the history of European art. Many Italian artists emulated the Byzantine aesthetic with its flat figures that appeared to be floating, frontal arrangements, and golden backgrounds, which lasted until the Renaissance. The Ottonian Empire of the tenth-century Germany copied the Byzantine aesthetic. The Byzantine architects Anthemius and Isidorus built the first great dome since the Pantheon when they build Hagia Sophia. They even developed the support method of pendentives, a unique solution to Sophia's interior space. Byzantine domes became so famous that Islamic leaders summoned Byzantine architects to design some of their mosques and pilgrimage sites. What Byzantine art lacks in realism and naturalism – characteristics of ancient Greek and Roman works – it makes up for in its distinctly spiritual aesthetic, the foundation of one of the most recognizable styles in art history.