

# The Origins of the Byzantine Empire: Anachronism and Evolution in Modern Historiography

Joseph D. Wagner

---

## Introduction

The modern understanding of the Byzantine Empire, the Roman Empire, which survived in Eastern Europe for over a thousand years, is a fallacy. There is no doubt that the Byzantines existed or that their empire occupied a place in the pantheon of world power. The issue under consideration is not so much when the Byzantine Empire began, but rather when this evolution of the Roman Empire first took place and how modern scholars view Byzantine origins. The term Byzantine Empire is an anachronism because what modern historiography calls “the Byzantines” never existed. Rather, these people considered themselves Roman even until the collapse of their empire in 1453 CE.

This is relevant in today’s historiography for many reasons, among them because the Byzantines have not been studied with as much vigor as compared to their Greek and Roman ancestors. This is also an important historical issue because of a recent book detailing how the Byzantines dealt with their neighbors over the centuries. Edward Luttwak, a former political advisor and Johns Hopkins-trained historian, argued in his 2009 book *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* that the Byzantines were skilled diplomats, using money and land transfers to keep invading armies at bay.<sup>279</sup> Luttwak proceeded to question whether these same strategies could be applied elsewhere; for example, in the United States. There are three schools of thought that rise from the relevant historiography: The Continuity School, the Discontinuity School, and the Evolution School. All three schools of thought will be discussed with due reference to their authors after an explanation of methodology.

## Methodology

The origins of the Byzantine Empire and its civilization reach back deep into the Greek civilization, the Roman political and legal system, and the Christian religion. Through the fusion of these three ideas was born the modern notion of the Byzantine Empire. Though modern historiography may refer to this Empire or civilization as “Byzantine,” the “Byzantines” themselves never called themselves anything but “Romans” until well into the fourteenth century, and only then calling themselves “Greeks.”<sup>280</sup> But where have modern historians stood on recounting the past of the “Byzantines?” Where does the narrative generally start and where does it end? Several historians of the past fifteen-hundred years have tried to answer this question, beginning as early as the Greek philosophers of the sixth century Before the Common Era (BCE), going all the way to 1917 of the common era (CE) with the fall of the Romanov Dynasty, the supposed “Third Rome” of the Russians.

For the purposes of this paper, it will be expedient to begin with the formation of the Roman imperial system under the Emperor Octavian Augustus in 31 BCE going all the way to the fall of the city of Constantinople on May 29, 1453 CE. These dates were chosen for two reasons: first, these dates establish basic chronological parameters for looking at the Roman political and legal

---

<sup>279</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1-3.

<sup>280</sup> Colin Wells, *Sailing from Byzantium: How a Lost Empire Shaped the World* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2007), 26.

system and the introduction of the Christian religion into this system; second, a paper of this scope can only deal with certain thematic parameters, such as, politics, religion, ideology, language, and culture. It was necessary to bookend this paper between 31 BCE and 1453 CE to do justice to each of the three schools of thought and view the thematic parameters in the light of how these historians have dealt with the issue of Byzantine political, cultural, and religious formation.

### **The Continuity School**

The beginning of historiography on this subject can be traced back to Procopius, the court historian for the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century C.E. In his book, *The Secret History*, Procopius argues immediately after the death of Justinian in 565, the people in the eastern half of the Empire still considered themselves “Roman.” For Procopius, the Roman Empire simply continued on, governing from a different location.<sup>281</sup> The idea of Roman continuity in the eastern half of its realm travelled all the way to modern times. Edward Gibbon’s *magnum opus The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is a classic in the field of professional history.<sup>282</sup> Though his analyses are considered outdated by contemporary standards of historiography, his work is still consulted as a serious work of scholarship.

Gibbon can be seen as the father of the Continuity School, a school which embodies the argument that the Roman Empire, after Constantine moved the capital of his empire east to the Greek city of Byzantium, continued on for more than a thousand years, finally ending in 1453 with the fall of the city of Constantinople. Gibbon speaks of the history of the Roman Empire continuing in the East. Gibbon also discusses the rise of Charlemagne saying, though, that his empire was a German empire, not the reassumption of Rome in the west.<sup>283</sup> The next author in the Continuity School wrote in the mid-eighteenth century. Lord Mahon, a military historian, wrote *The Life of Belisarius*, the primary general under Justinian. Mahon argues that as Greek ousted Latin as the primary language of the Empire, the people still considered themselves Roman, not Greek or Byzantine, because they considered themselves Rome’s heirs.<sup>284</sup>

The Continuity School continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arriving in the twentieth century with a renewed sense of scholarship. The prominent Byzantinists Norman Baynes and Henry Moss argued that when the Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Empire east and began caring for the Christian Church, the old Rome of the Caesars simply continued on in a different location with a new religion, though the adoption of Christianity as the official state religion would not happen for another seven decades.<sup>285</sup> One of the more recent books on the subject came out in 1984, Deno John Geanakoplos’s *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*. Geanakoplos, a trained historian in the field of Byzantine studies, argued that Constantine was inspired by the Emperor Diocletian’s reforms to unify the Empire under one system of government and religion in a new capital. These reforms, though, did not spell an end to the Roman Empire and the start of a new Empire. Rather, it was

---

<sup>281</sup> Procopius, *The Secret History* (New York: Penguin, 2007), vii. While Justinian is not necessarily explicit on this point, he never uses the term “Byzantine” to describe the Roman Empire in the East. Occasionally, he will describe the Empire as “Eastern.” See *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>282</sup> Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire: Abridged Edition* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>284</sup> Lord Mahon, *The Life of Belisarius* (London: John Murray, 1848), 5.

<sup>285</sup> Norman H. Baynes and H. St.L.B. Moss, eds., *Byzantium: An Introduction to East Roman Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 29.

simply a matter of taking the existing Empire, reforming its infrastructure, and moving the capital.<sup>286</sup>

All of these authors focused on four main themes: The political, religious, cultural, and linguistic. While all of these are certainly the main players in the argument of when and if the Byzantine Empire began, we cannot limit ourselves to these four thematic parameters. Historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries understood that more was required than just looking at the political, religious, and linguistic parameters. Other historians came along and looked at such things as psychology, culture, art, architecture, and ideological. Again, while there were no explicit arguments going on in the historiography on this topic, there was a tacit counter-argument that emerged in the 1890s.

### **The Discontinuity School**

The Discontinuity School began under the aegis of Charles Oman. Though not a trained historian in any sense of the word, he argued that Constantine moved the capital of the Empire east for the explicit purpose of founding a new empire, the Byzantine Empire.<sup>287</sup> Oman's argument is tacit at best, making one wonder what Constantine really thought when he moved the capital. Oman does not answer this, nor does he provide any evidence to suggest one argument over the other. In the years that followed, Paul Van Den Ven, a professor of history at Princeton University, argued in his article "When did the Byzantine Empire and Civilization Come into Being?" that once Constantine adopted Christianity as the predominant state religion, this spelled a policy shift from former Roman practices, thus ushering in a new era in world politics. The fact that Constantinople, founded specifically for the Christian religion, was established, this is the deciding factor in the creation of a new empire.<sup>288</sup>

The Discontinuity School was not necessarily accepted within academia for several decades. Once it reemerged, the scene shifted to an economic focus. Glanville Downey, a professor of classics at Indiana University, argued that because of Justinian's love of monumental building, the economy became strained. Coupled with the Plague of 542 and Justinian's new law codes, these events spelled the end of Roman Empire.<sup>289</sup> The economic and institutional theme was taken up again by Robert Lopez in 1978 with his book *Byzantium and the World around it: Economic and Institutional Relations*. Lopez argued that because of Justinian's need to be remembered, his reforms brought about the creation of a new empire.<sup>290</sup>

The popular historian and travel writer John Julius Norwich argued in his 1989 book *Byzantium: The Early Centuries* that because of Constantine's reforms and moving the capital of the Empire east, Constantine inaugurated a new era in the life of the Roman Empire, one that would mean the end of Rome with its legacy taken up by the Byzantine Empire. Again, the religious theme comes back into play with Norwich arguing that because Constantine founded Constantinople as a Christian city, this act spelled the death of the Roman Empire and the birth of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>291</sup>

---

<sup>286</sup> Deno John Geanakoplos, *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

<sup>287</sup> Charles Oman, *The Byzantine Empire* (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2009), 28.

<sup>288</sup> Paul Van Den Ven, "When Did the Byzantine Empire and Civilization Come into Being?" *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1916 I* (1919): 308.

<sup>289</sup> Glanville Downey, "Justinian as Builder," *The Art Bulletin* 32, no. 4 (December 1950): 262, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3047311> (accessed December 2, 2014).

<sup>290</sup> Robert Lopez, *Byzantium and the World around it: Economic and Institutional Relations* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1978), 447.

<sup>291</sup> John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 67.

The Discontinuity School gained more traction in the 1990s with Warren Treadgold's *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*. Treadgold, professor of Byzantine History at St. Louis University, argues the origins of the Byzantine Empire can be traced back to Diocletian's formation of the tetrarchy, the division of the Empire into four distinct units.<sup>292</sup> Diocletian divided the Empire first into two distinct parts, a western half and an eastern half. He subsequently moved his capital east because he recognized the economic and cultural wealth in that part of the Empire. Once this break between the east and the west was made, the split became permanent, not just politically and economically, but also culturally.<sup>293</sup> Walter Kaegi keeps to this argument in his 2004 book *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*. Kaegi, though, argues that Heraclius, the emperor in the seventh century, was the founder of the Byzantine Empire because he chose to be crowned Emperor in an exclusively religious ceremony while placing his reign under the protection of the Mother of God, Mary.<sup>294</sup> Kaegi argues that this act of religious devotion, taken from the Greek Christian culture that now pervaded the eastern half of the Empire, is the moment when the Byzantine Empire came into existence.

### **The Evolution School**

The Discontinuity School and the Continuity School are still going strong in the field of Byzantine historiography, but the faults with these schools are they either give a romantic view of a Rome that never fell or contend that there is a clearly definable date for the end of the Roman Empire and start of the Byzantine Empire, respectively. Neither of these schools fully understood that, while there may be a clear end to one empire and the clear beginning to another, the issue at stake is far too complicated for simple answers. The historiography on this issue is reflective of the increase in understanding of who the Romans were and who the Byzantines were. In addition, scholars, both professional and amateur, have been learning alongside their audience, especially over the last twenty years or so. For example: The Continuity School argues that there may have been a slight shift in emphasis in the Roman Empire to bring about a Byzantine era, they argue that Rome did not fall until 1453. Whereas the Discontinuity School argues for a clear end of Rome and a clear beginning of Byzantium, though where one ends and the other begins is still debated.

The soil of Medieval studies was fertile for a harvest of new ideas. In the early twenty-first century, two scholars both planted seeds that bore much fruit. Averil Cameron and Sarolta Takács both began a new school of thought that will shape Late Antique and proto-Byzantine studies for generations to come. Instead of relying on former modes of thought to convey ideas within this field, both began to look objective at the ontology of Roman-ness and Byzantine-ness, looking at political and religious ideologies in a new light. This advent of fresh scholarship brought about the Evolution School. This third and new school argues that Byzantium was the direct heir of Rome, but does not argue that Rome never fell. The Evolution School argues Rome ended and Byzantium began, but several themes survived from one empire into the other.

Cameron argues in her 2006 book *The Byzantines* that Rome did not necessarily end and Byzantium did not necessarily begin. Rather, she argues, there was a gentle evolution between Rome that segued into Byzantium.<sup>295</sup> When metamorphosis occurred, though, Cameron does not answer definitively. While the Roman Empire may have fallen in 476 C.E. as she observes, the Byzantine Empire did not just pick up where Rome left off; the Byzantine Empire came into being slowly. She says it is far too difficult to answer the question of when the Byzantine Empire began.

---

<sup>292</sup> Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 14.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Walter Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 259.

<sup>295</sup> Averil Cameron, *The Byzantines* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2006), 20.

Instead, Sarolta Takács answered that question three years later with her book *The Construction of Authority in Ancient Rome and Byzantium: The Rhetoric of Empire*. Takács argues that the evolution between Rome and Byzantium took place between the reigns of Justinian in the late sixth century and Heraclius in early seventh century.<sup>296</sup>

Takács's argument is the best argument so far in the field because she does not claim Rome lasted until 1453, neither does she argue that Rome totally died. Instead, she claims that Rome ended in spirit and Byzantine took this spirit in the guise of certain political ideologies like *Pater patriae*, the Father of Country, to perpetuate their legitimate claim to be Rome's descendant. If there could be an end to Rome and the start of Byzantium, Takács argues that the Roman Empire ended under Justinian and the Byzantine Empire started under Heraclius about 45 years later. She bases her argument on Justinian being the last culturally Latin emperor, speaking Latin as his first language and thinking in a Western mindset. Heraclius was the first Byzantine Emperor because he was crowned emperor in an exclusively religious ceremony in Hagia Sophia, using the, by now, firmly established Greek-Byzantine rite of Christianity in a liturgical ceremony, placing his reign under the protection of the Mother of God.<sup>297</sup>

Takács's argument is and will be the trendsetter for future scholarship in the field of Late Antique and proto-Byzantine studies. Taking Cameron's ideas of evolution to the next logical level, Takács will be read for years as the new paradigm in understanding Roman-ness and Byzantine-ness and how these themes translate into political thoughts of what their empires were. Takács's does include the Carolingian "Holy, Roman, Empire" in her analysis. She does not argue that Charlemagne's empire is necessarily Rome's direct descendant, but she includes it because of the close relationship that existed between the Roman Church and Charlemagne's loose confederation of German states. This is a valuable contribution to Byzantine studies because it shows how multiple powers were claiming legitimate connections with Rome to substantiate their own claims to power. Byzantium, though, is the legitimate successor because of the direct links between Constantine and Heraclius.

Some would argue that Takács fits more into the Discontinuity School since she claims an end to one empire and the beginning of another. The political ideology of *Pater patriae*, though, is the tie that binds the two empires together, linking both of them without claiming that Byzantium is the same as Rome. Takács understands this subtlety and takes into consideration the political and ideological legacy without becoming alienated by the fallacy of Rome falling in 1453. With all of this said, more research will have to be done into the idea of Moscow's claims of being a "Third Rome." John Meyendorff, a priest of the Orthodox Church in America and a trained historian, has already explored this concept with his 2003 book *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow: Historical and Theological Studies*.<sup>298</sup> It will be beneficial to many academic fields, though, if someone could use Takács's methodology and apply it to how the tsars commandeered the Roman and Byzantine legacy to legitimate their own claims of a Roman-Byzantine legacy.

### **Historical Background**

The time has come for a new history of the origins of the Byzantine Empire. These origins explicitly begin with the formation of the Roman Empire under the emperor Octavian, running throughout the life of the Roman Empire to Hadrian, a hellenophile, to Diocletian's tetrarchy, and

---

<sup>296</sup> Sarolta A. Takács, *The Construction of Authority in Ancient Rome and Byzantium: The Rhetoric of Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xx.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>298</sup> See: John Meyendorff, *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow: Historical and Theological Studies* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2003).

to Constantine's adoption of Christianity as the predominant state religion when he moved the capital of the Empire east to the ancient Greek city of Byzantium. This continued through the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire in 395 C.E. under Theodosius to the end of the Roman Empire under Justinian. For a period of forty-five years there was a gap between Rome and Byzantium with a series of emperors who did not know how to administer the government, finally culminating with reign of Emperor Heraclius, the first Byzantine Emperor, when he was crowned in a religious ceremony in Hagia Sophia, the chief church of the Byzantine Empire. While some scholars may take issue with these milestones and dates, this is merely a broad survey of the end of one empire evolving into the beginning of another. Therefore, more work will inevitably have to be done to understand both Empires, but what follows is hopefully the start of further examinations into this field.

The Roman Empire began under the conquering hand of Octavian, the nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar, in 31 BCE. After securing his place as *princeps*, the first citizen, and wielding a crippling blow on the ancient Egyptian empire of Cleopatra and her lover Marc Antony, Octavian went to work laying the foundation of his power base, namely by centralizing his military, political, economic, and judicial powers. Not only were all these powers centralized in the city of Rome, but Octavian centralized these powers within himself as the *Imperator*, the Emperor.<sup>299</sup>

Early in the second century, the Emperor Hadrian continued the imperial tradition of the Roman Empire, but fused these traditions with those of the ancient Greeks. Hadrian, himself a hellenophile (lover of all things Greek), infused new life in the Greek-speaking east by reviving its economy. This economic rejuvenation allowed for a certain level of Greek independence in the Peloponnesus, thus giving confidence back to the Greeks, making them feel equal to their Roman masters.<sup>300</sup> This Greek confidence eventually manifested itself in the person of Diocles, a Hellenized Illyrian from Dalmatia, modern-day Croatia. After romanizing his name, the Emperor Diocletian, heirless, adopted his fellow soldier Maximian in 285 CE to succeed him.<sup>301</sup> Diocletian is most remembered for his administrative division of the Roman Empire into the four parts, commonly referred to as the "Tetrarchy." In this system, Diocletian ruled as head over all the Empire, but concerned himself primarily with the eastern half of the empire where he ruled. A junior emperor, or *Augustus*, ruled in the West. Both Diocletian and his *Augustus* each had a junior emperor, a *Caesar* (*Caesarii* in the plural). Diocletian's tetrarchy was supposed to solve the very Roman problem of a disorganized and sordid succession, but it proved more troublesome.<sup>302</sup>

Diocletian knew that the imperial infrastructure was in dire need of reform, considering the system was over two centuries old and it peaked under the Emperor Trajan in the mid-second century of the Common Era.<sup>303</sup> His division of the Roman Empire along cultural (Greek East, Latin West) lines, though, proved to be key in the eventual split that brought about the "Byzantine Empire." While the administrative split also intended to bring about a clean and orderly succession, it instead obfuscated the succession and brought about civil war between Maximian, Maximin, Constantius, Galerius, Licinius, and Constantine.<sup>304</sup> In 312 CE, before the battle of Milvian Bridge in Rome, Constantine claims to have seen a vision of the *chi-rho* (first two letters of "Christ" in Greek superimposed upon each other) in the sky. Constantine ordered his soldiers to paint this sign

---

<sup>299</sup> John W. Barker, *Justinian and the Later Roman Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), viii.

<sup>300</sup> Thorsten Oppen, *Hadrian: Empire and Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 26.

<sup>301</sup> Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, 13.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>303</sup> Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 497.

<sup>304</sup> Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, 36.

on their shields before going into battle, convinced that Jesus Christ spoke to him, *In hoc signo vinces*, “In this sign, conquer.”<sup>305</sup> Constantine won the day and saw that the tides of culture already shifted east. In 324 CE, Constantine moved his capital east to the ancient Greek city of Byzantium, a strategically-placed city on the Bosphorus, literally the bridge between the west (Europe) and east (Asia). After a massive six-year building campaign, Constantine renamed the city in his honor, Constantinople, on May 11, 330.<sup>306</sup> Constantinople would prove to be the center of a new empire, fusing the best elements of Greek civilization, Roman political and legal structures, and the Christian religion. This did not happen quickly, though, as evolution rarely does.

Constantine had many challenges to face, though he consolidated all power within himself. One way he controlled his newly-relocated empire was through the old Roman doctrine of *pater patriae* (“father of the land”). This doctrine communicated the emperor’s role as a father-figure and protector of, not just the land itself, but its people.<sup>307</sup> It was not surprising Constantine employed this time-tested doctrine for his newly-reformed empire. What is surprising, though, is that he adapted it to a Christian audience, thus reshaping an already modified doctrine. Therefore, Constantine was not only the head of the state, but also the protector of the Church. Constantine took his role of *Pater patriae* seriously, going so far as to call an ecclesiastical council - the Council of Nicea - and draw the bishops of the Church together to sort out the Arian heresy.<sup>308</sup>

After Constantine’s death, he divided the Empire among his three sons, thus leading to more internal political conflicts. In 395, the co-Emperors Arcadius and Honorius, ruling in the east and west, respectively, divided the Empire into two administrative units - Greek East and Latin West. This administrative split was supposed to make the Empire more manageable, but instead broke it up still further along the old cultural and linguistic fault lines.

The fall of the Roman Empire is usually dated to September 4, 476. The Germanic warrior-king Odoacer deposed the boy-emperor Romulus Augustulus (*Augustulus* itself meaning “little Augustus”) and sent the imperial regalia back to the Emperor Zeno in Constantinople, thus respecting the traditions of Rome. In so doing, Zeno bestowed upon Odoacer the title of “Patrician” and Odoacer became the *de facto* King of Italy.<sup>309</sup> In reality, though, while Zeno may have ruled all of the Empire, it was Odoacer who now ruled the entire West. In essence, the Latin West of the Roman Empire was all but lost to the East, in politics and in memory. It was not until 527 with the coronation of Justinian as Emperor of the Romans that the West was thought of again. Justinian has left historians with a colorful reputation, like marrying Theodora, a former circus performer, i.e. prostitute. One of his political contributions was to reunite the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire.

After many attempts, Belisarius, Justinian’s chief general, reconquered those Western lands and incorporated them back into the Empire. Throughout his reign, Justinian undertook many reforms in the whole of his realm to stabilize an already fragile state of affairs. He rewrote the legal code, republishing it in 529 as the *Codex Justinianus*.<sup>310</sup> Justinian was the last of the thoroughly “Roman” emperors, being the last to speak Latin as a first language (he barely spoke

---

<sup>305</sup> Eusebius, *Eusebius: The Church History*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), 305.

<sup>306</sup> Norwich, *Byzantium*, 26.

<sup>307</sup> Takács, *The Construction of Authority in Ancient Rome and Byzantium*, xx.

<sup>308</sup> H.W. Crocker III, *Triumph: The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church: A 2,000 Year History* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 54.

<sup>309</sup> Andrew Gillett, "Rome, Ravenna and the Last Western Emperors," *Papers of the British School in Rome* Vol. 69 (2001): 135, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40311008>, (accessed October 28, 2014).

<sup>310</sup> Downey, “Justinian as Builder,” 262.

Greek) and thinking in a western (i.e. “Roman”) mindset; he died in 565. After a series of four bumbling emperors, feeling their way through confusion and, more often than not, incompetency, Heraclius emerged in 610, establishing Greek as the official language of the Empire and giving it a decidedly Christian direction, being coronated under the protection of Mary, the Mother of God.<sup>311</sup> Constantine may have used *Pater patriae* as a religious tool when he took over the Empire, but this ideology was adapted from the secular realm. When Heraclius took over, the shift from a Roman civilization to a Byzantine civilization had already taken place under his four predecessors, spurred on by the reforms of Justinian.

Heraclius’ accession to power is nothing short of paradigm-altering, as his reign really marks the beginning of the Byzantine civilization in Europe. The Roman Church and the plethora of Germanic and Gaulish tribes transformed the Western half of the Empire to mesh with their *gestalt*, though these tribes also thought of themselves as inheritors of Rome’s cultural grandeur.<sup>312</sup> Whatever the case in the West may be, the Byzantine civilization can be said to begin under Heraclius because he promulgated the official use of Greek as the new language of the “Roman Empire” and because he was coronated under the protection of Mary. These three streams of thought, the Roman legal and political tradition, Greek culture and language, and the Christian religion, fused into a new synthesis to create a new empire, the Byzantine, using old Roman political ideologies, refashioned for a new era. These political, religious, and cultural themes transmitted an old empire’s ideals for centuries to come.

---

<sup>311</sup> Takács, *The Construction of Authority in Ancient Rome and Byzantium*, 129.

<sup>312</sup> Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed & Charlemagne* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), 33.