

Byz·an·tine

adj

\ˈbi-zən-,tēn, ˈbī-, -,tīn; bə-ˈzan-, bī-ˈ\

Definition of BYZANTINE

1. : of, relating to, or characteristic of the ancient city of Byzantium
2. often not capitalized a : of, relating to, or characterized by a devious and usually surreptitious manner of operation <a Byzantine power struggle> b : intricately involved : labyrinthine <rules of Byzantine complexity>

There are other definitions for the term Byzantine, but these are the two that apply to this game. Byzantium, later Constantinople, was a city on a scale unlike that of any other in antiquity in a number of ways. It's walls were impregnable until the Turks brought cannon to rain down on them in 1453 (and even then, had the city had the resources it once had in eras before, it likely still would have prevailed). Historians debate the percentage of world wealth that was ensconced in the city throughout its history, and the figures are astounding for any one place in any period, even the conservative figures. It was the undisputed center of the world for centuries, lying at the crossroads of trade routs from east to west, and north to south.

And one would suppose that any city of such size, especially one along such trade routs in contact with so many cultures, would have a complex society. But such a supposition would likely be an understatement of the truth. This was a city founded by Greek Colonists, which centuries later was made the capitol of the Roman Empire by Constantine, founder of the Christian Church across the empire. After the fall of the western Roman civilization, the city continued as the capitol of the Byzantine Empire for another millennium. During this time, the Byzantines saw the rise of Arabic Islam, followed by Turkish invaders from Central Asia, followed by the Mongols, who left the Turks in power again in their wake. The city also saw the European Crusades come through on their way to conquer or re-conquer the Mideast. Vikings coming down the Novgorod river-road ended up being an important part of their military, as did mercenaries from all over Europe.

Culture wasn't just traded through Constantinople, it came to stay and live there. Yes, the Byzantines could be very insular at times, as were all cultures in antiquity. But given century over century of gradual change, the populace of the city eventually came to be quite a myriad of beliefs and organizations.

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