

The era of justinian



Justinian was a strong and hard-working emperor who changed the eastern Roman empire tremendously. Justinian lived in an era after the Roman empire had divided into two, the eastern and western empires. A few years before he rose to emperor, the western empire collapsed and was conquered by barbarians. Justinian was born into a peasant family, his uncle, Justin, who had no children of his own, decided to 'adopt' Justinian and take him under his wing. Justin was a stalwart soldier who later rose to command the imperial guard, this inspired Justinian to achieve the same accolade.

Justinian was eager to succeed in the kingdom's ruling bodies, and after his uncle's passing, he was confirmed as emperor. His realm was a successful one but also had its downfalls. He was shortsighted, only looking for quick returns on his own personal agendas. He did not think about the consequences that conquering the west or uniting Christianity will have on the empire. He created economic instability, violence between religions and many border conflicts. However, Justinian's reign was not all negative, He made changes that would benefit the kingdom, changing the law and architectural practices. The era of Justinian is an important part of the Roman empire. As Maashighlights, "The age of Justinian stands at a historical milestone, making a transition from antiquity to the middle ages"[1].

Justinian's reign affected the years afterwards both for the better and for the worst, these changes have stood the test of time and are still present in today's modern world.

Justinian had one main aim when he became emperor, to restore the power and authority of the Roman empire. This caused numerous problems for the kingdom throughout his reign and particularly caused a greater problem for

the emperors that followed. Treadgold explains, He wanted authority over the barbarian kings and recover the west[2]. He was narrow minded thinking that these conquests would quickly reap rewards for the kingdom which was the main reason for disappointment in his realm. With the aim to restore the empire, especially in Italy, he started numerous confrontations on the border which caused a period of economic uncertainty. Davis Highlights, Justinian's dreams were unrealistic and also dangerous. He would not improve the position of Italy, he made it worse.[3] Justinian did not think about the damages that conquering Italy will have on the empire, he was more concerned about it being under his rule.

Justinian may have remembered the fanciful stories he heard about the amazing Empire with the west and he was drawn towards this ultimate goal. As Maas explains, Justinian was eager to reassert Roman authority over these lost territories.[4] Nothing and no one could stop his vision, a strong kingdom including the old western border. When he rose into power the western Empire was fading from memory[5], this concerned Justinian and influenced his decision to reform the empire, along with the desertion of faith in Italy under Barbarians rule. During his era, he began conquering the lands of the old empire and re-establishing the power and might of the Romans. With the aid of Belisarius, he was able to regain a large amount of the old western empire. This was an outstanding accomplishment due to the relatively short amount of time he took to triumph compared to other rulers.

Throughout the years Justinian gained and lost land, especially towards the end of his tenure, Italy and other parts of the old western empire were struggling to stay under the Byzantine rule. Due to his eagerness Justinian

had to conquer the west immediately, without adequate planning the empire will lose the land they had recently captured. This was a major downfall

During his reign, Justinian made a large alteration to the law and legislation. When he rose to the throne there were a whole multitude of law books and rules with most judges and lawyers unable to understand the complexity and jurisdiction of the sentencing process. Not only did remembering the vast array of laws create problems but also many contradicted each other. Each empire wrote laws that would benefit their own ruling bodies at the time without checking that the rule would not be at variance with existing laws. This created deliberation and a heavy workload for the legal system. Gibbon writes, " In the space of ten centuries the infinite variety of laws and legal opinions had filled many thousand volumes books".^[6] Justinian had assigned Tribonian, an important Roman law writer, to take all of these laws and concise them into a new law book.^[7] Tribonian does so and finishes in the year 533 AC, with a new and improved law system. Afterwards he assisted Justinian with other legal matters throughout his ruling.

The law was in order again, as Gledon highlights, without Justinian and Tribonian the Roman law would be lost forever.^[8] Justinian's law would carry on throughout history, enabling people to rely on these new laws to defend themselves whenever necessary. The law put order into the empire, it showed the importance of how a clear and concise legal system could benefit the empire. Justinian knew this and did what no other emperor had done before him, he had solved the long-lasting problem of implementing effective legislation.

This would not be forgotten, with many great rulers afterwards referring to his legal strategy whenever times became difficult. This is a major success for Justinian's ruling, with the law in place he can oversee its virtue. He can create order in his kingdom, less violence and more harmony. With the empire united he could continue focusing on his other goals, expanding territory and establish religious unity.

Another important action Justinian achieved was trying to reunite the Monotheist, Polytheism and the Christian religions. Justinian fell in love with an actress, named Theodora, who he decided to marry. She was a Polytheist while he was a Monotheist and it became one of Justinian's goal to reunite the Christians into one again, especially after his beloved wife's death. This was not a great success with both sides refusing to relinquish their beliefs, this caused a larger "tear" in the problematic world of the Christians, causing more arguments and dividing the faiths further apart.

Justinian was a religious man, as Moorhead describes, "Justinian's invasions like so many of his activities early in his reign was motivated by religion rather than ideology"[9]. He made his decision through faith which was popular through the medieval period. However, Justinian knew how important it was to unite Christianity. As Croke explain, The Emperor Justinian was an avid builder of churches[10]. Justinian wanted to show his religious persuasion through the churches and monasteries he had constructed throughout the kingdom. A legacy for future generations to adore.

Justinian changed the lives of his citizens in many ways, through religion, new laws and portraying his beliefs through the whole kingdom. As Sarris

describes, Justinian's programme of legal reform and interventions in the development and formation of church doctrine. He broke down barriers between civil society and realms of belief.[11] Justinian changed the church and the relation of the empire with it. As Meyendorff highlights, "In Justinian's legal thinking there is actually no place at all for the church as a society"[12]. Justinian understood the problems of the church and put his religious opinion aside for the benefit of the empire. As Meyendorff continues, "He could not for what him was an obvious obligation, to extend the competence of the law to the sphere of religion"[13]. He knew that this problem could not be avoided any longer, he took the problem and put the law ahead of religion. This was unsuccessful for Justinian with Christians disagreeing with him and saying that no one can be above God.

Throughout the passing years Justinian tried to promote a uniformed understanding, where the law would be above all and only one Christian faith with the same belief would be accepted. This was a failure for Justinian he failed uniting Christianity and caused new problems to erupt in the passing years. Struggles and violence between the Monotheist and Polytheism, disagreeing with one another. As Maas clarifies, "Justinian's tireless efforts for religious unity bore bitter-sweet fruit.[14] This idea of a unified religion was impossible to achieve as much as Justinian tried.

One of Justinian's abilities, which allowed him to succeed, was his skill to employ the right person for the task. He had beside him some powerful people with a large knowledge in their field. This started with his wife, as Baker utters, "A life of Justinian naturally begins with Theodora"[15]. She was a powerful woman pushing her husband to his full ability. Theodora helped

Justinian in many ways, forcing him to stay as emperor when he wanted to flee for his life. Another powerful ally was John, he was assigned to collect taxes in the Byzantine empire. As Baker highlights, “any system from a Byzantine tax office to a modern steel rolling mills would have walked when a man like John held it by the ear” [16]. John was close to Justinian, he helped him gather funds, even if partly gained using illegal actions. John gathered what was needed and did not hesitate for a second to use any method at his disposal. One of the most well-known people to work under Justinian was Belisarius, he was a knowledgeable soldier who was successful in his role. Belisarius knew how to combat the barbarians and conquered many lands. All of these powerful people assisted Justinian to succeed, however Justinian knew their individual strengths and could assign the right individual to reap the highest rewards.

The empire of Justinian was an effective one but ultimately also unsuccessful. He made many decisions that affected the reign for the better, building many architectural buildings and renewing the law to what it is today. He helped create a concise legal system which was easier to implement leading to a more peaceful kingdom. However, during his time there were financial problems, religious difficulties and border conflicts all caused by his overriding belief of re-establishing the old empire. Justinian was a smart emperor knowing who to recruit for the appropriate job, if it was Belisarius who conquered land and granted everything he asked for or Tribonian collating the complicated legislation into a simplified law. However, Justinian was short sighted, not having the prescience of how his decisions would affect every aspect of the kingdom.

In his last years the plague affected a wide area of the Mediterranean, devastating the population which left them open to continual attacks from various barbarian factions, combined with the religious divisions and economic instability, people were elated in his passing and looked forward to a brighter future. Due to Justinian and Teodora having no children his nephew, Justin the second, continued his reign. As Gibbon explains, “Justinian’s nephew proclaimed a new era of happiness and glory”[17]. This opened a new era of relief for the country, people were suffering toward the end of Justinian’s realm. Justinian’s era was an important section in history with success and also failures. But this is an era that will never be forgotten.

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