Shaping Byzantium

Three figures, three ways to leave a legacy

9-12.WC.20 "Identify key figures of the Byzantine Empire, including but not limited to Justinian and Theodora, and explain their contributions to its history and culture."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each figure's name, circle one action or work linked to that figure, and box a phrase showing its effect.

Power, Policy, and Memory

1 In 532, riots tore through Constantinople, the Byzantine capital, and fire damaged its great church. Emperor Justinian I responded by ordering a new Hagia Sophia, completed in 537. Its vast dome made imperial wealth and Christian worship visible in the heart of the city. Justinian also directed legal scholars to collect and organize centuries of Roman laws. Their work, later called the Corpus Juris Civilis, gave officials a more orderly body of law to use. Long after his reign, its legal ideas influenced lawmakers in parts of Europe. Buildings and laws gave Justinian's rule two very different kinds of reach.

2 Empress Theodora was more than a ceremonial partner in Justinian's court. During the 532 uprising, the historian Procopius reports, she urged imperial leaders not to abandon the capital. Justinian stayed, and his forces crushed the rebellion. Theodora also used her position to support women facing exploitation. She backed efforts to stop forced prostitution and provided a refuge for women leaving it. These actions did not make Byzantine society equal for women, but they show how an empress could affect political decisions and social policy, not only court rituals.

3 Centuries later, Princess Anna Komnene recorded a different kind of imperial legacy. In the twelfth century, she wrote the Alexiad, a history of her father, Emperor Alexios I. She described his military campaigns, political negotiations, and encounters with the First Crusade. Her detailed account preserves events that might otherwise be harder to study. Yet she praised her father, so readers must consider her viewpoint alongside her evidence. Anna did not build a dome or issue a law. By writing history, she shaped how later generations remember Byzantine leaders and the pressures their empire faced.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Justinian's work with Roman laws affect government in his empire and beyond it?

2. How did Justinian use Hagia Sophia to shape Byzantine culture?

3. Give one example of Theodora's political influence and one example of her influence on social policy.

4. What did Anna Komnene contribute to Byzantine history, and why should readers consider her viewpoint?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

You are curating an exhibit called "How Empires Last." In four or five sentences, choose two figures from the passage, identify one specific work, action, or policy for each, and explain how their different contributions shaped Byzantine life or its memory.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.20

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each figure's name, circle one action or work linked to that figure, and box a phrase showing its effect. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Justinian's work with Roman laws affect government in his empire and beyond it?	**He directed scholars to organize Roman laws, giving Byzantine officials a more orderly body of law. Its ideas later influenced lawmakers in parts of Europe.**
2	How did Justinian use Hagia Sophia to shape Byzantine culture?	**He ordered the church rebuilt. Its vast dome displayed imperial wealth and made Christian worship prominent in the capital.**
3	Give one example of Theodora's political influence and one example of her influence on social policy.	**Procopius reports that she urged leaders to stay in Constantinople during the uprising. She also backed efforts to stop forced prostitution and provided a refuge for women leaving it.**
4	What did Anna Komnene contribute to Byzantine history, and why should readers consider her viewpoint?	**Her Alexiad preserved an account of Alexios I's reign. Readers should consider her viewpoint because she praised her father.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Justinian directed scholars to organize Roman laws into the Corpus Juris Civilis. This collection gave Byzantine officials a more orderly body of law and later influenced lawmakers elsewhere in Europe. Anna Komnene wrote the Alexiad about her father, Alexios I, preserving accounts of his campaigns and dealings with the First Crusade. One ruler shaped how people governed, while one writer shaped how later generations remembered the empire.

Accept any two figures if the response identifies a passage-supported work, action, or policy for each and explains their distinct effects. Do not require students to choose the figures used in the sample.