JUSTINIAN

After Constantine died, his sons ruled the empire. They were not as effective as their father. Finally, a man named Justinian came to the throne in 527 CE. He was a strong ruler who is remembered as the greatest Byzantine emperor. Justinian had served in the army. He was a good general. He was also very smart. He studied law, music, architecture, and religion.

Theodora  Justinian’s wife, the empress Theodora, was a great help to him. She did not sit back and let things happen, she was an active member of the government. She made decisions about laws, leaders, and daily happenings in the empire.

Laws and Public Works  Justinian was interested in law and researched laws by other emperors. He fixed what he thought was wrong. He organized and rewrote the legal system. It is called Justinian’s Code. It gave the world ideas such as the right to a trial, innocent until proven guilty, and equality in the eyes of the law. The United States borrowed many of these same ideas.

One of Justinian’s greatest accomplishments was the church called the Hagia Sophia, or “Holy Wisdom.” It was a massive church with giant domes, and gold and silver ornaments, and colorful mosaics. It is a museum today.
Conquests Justinian wanted to return to the greatness of Rome. He conquered lands to the west which had been taken over by barbarians. He also improved the navy. Thanks to a secret weapon known as Greek fire, they controlled the Mediterranean Sea. Greek fire was a chemical mixture that burned upon contact. No one knew the exact formula except the Byzantines.