KEY IDEAS

- The Byzantine Empire was born out of the remains of the Roman Empire, and continued many elements of the Roman classical tradition, but in a Christian framework.
- Byzantine painting specialized in mosaics, icons, and manuscript illumination.
- Byzantine art had two traditions, one reflecting the classical past and a more hieratic style that represented medieval art—often in the same work.
- Byzantine architects invented the pendentive and squinch for buildings known for their mysterious and shadowy interiors.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The term “Byzantine” would have sounded strange to residents of the Empire—they called themselves Romans. The Byzantine Empire was born from a split in the Roman world that occurred in the fifth century, when the size of the Roman Empire became too unwieldy for one ruler to manage effectively. The fortunes of the two halves of the Roman Empire could not have been more different. The western half dissolved into barbarian chaos, succumbing to hordes of migrating peoples. The eastern half, founded by Roman Emperor Constantine the Great at Constantinople
(modern-day Istanbul), flourished for one-thousand years beyond the collapse of its western counterparts. Culturally different from their Roman cousins, the Byzantines spoke Greek rather than Latin, and promoted orthodox Christianity, as opposed to western Christianity, which was centered in Rome.

The porous borders of the Empire expanded and contracted during the Middle Ages, reacting to external pressures from invading armies, seemingly coming from all directions. The Empire had only itself to blame: The capital, with its unparalleled wealth and opulence, was the envy of every other culture. Its buildings and public spaces awe'd ambassadors from around the known world. Constantinople was the trading center of early medieval Europe, directing all traffic in the Mediterranean and controlling the shipment of goods nearly everywhere.

The orthodox Christian faith spread throughout eastern Europe, first to neighboring countries such as Romania and Armenia, then as far afield as Russia and Ethiopia, where it remains active today. The influence of Byzantine art spread everywhere Byzantine missionaries or merchants went. Precious objects with their accompanying iconography were carried across the Mediterranean. Medieval artists had a special reverence for Byzantine works; in contrast, the Byzantines rarely thought western objects were anything other than barbaric. In western Europe, Byzantine ivories were deeply cherished, often set as centerpieces in gem-encrusted book covers.

Icon production was a Byzantine specialty (Figure 9.17). Devout Christians attest that icons are images that act as reminders to the faithful; they are not intended to actually be the sacred persons themselves. However, by the eighth century, Byzantines became embroiled in a heated debate over icons; some even worshipped them as idols. In order to stop this practice, which many considered sacrilegious, the emperor banned all image production, forcing artistic output to grind to a halt. Not content with stopping images from being produced, iconoclasts smashed all religious figural images. Perhaps the iconoclasts were inspired by religions, such as Judaism and Islam, which discouraged images of sacred figures for much the same reasons. The unfortunate result of this activity is that art from the early Byzantine period (500–726) is almost completely lost. The artists themselves fled to parts of Europe where iconoclasm was unknown and Byzantine artists were welcome. This so-called Iconoclastic Controversy serves as a division between the Early and Middle Byzantine art periods.

Despite the early successes of the iconoclasts, it became increasingly hard to suppress images in a Mediterranean culture such as Byzantium that had such a long tradition of creating paintings and sculptures of gods, going back to before the Greeks. In 843, iconoclasm was repealed and images were reinstated. This meant that every church and monastery had to be redecorated, causing a burst of creative energy throughout Byzantium.

Medieval Crusaders, some more interested in the spoils of war than the restoration of the Holy Land, conquered Constantinople in 1204, setting up a Latin kingdom in the east. This political event marks the transition between the Middle and Late Byzantine periods. Eventually the Latin invaders were expelled, but not before they brought untold damage to the capital, carrying off to Europe precious artwork that was simultaneously booty and artistic inspiration. The invaders also succeeded in permanently weakening the Empire, making it ripe for the Ottoman conquest in 1453. Even so, Late Byzantine artists continued to flourish both inside what was left
of the Empire and in areas beyond its borders that accepted orthodoxy. A particularly strong tradition was established in Russia, where it remained until the 1917 Russian Revolution ended most religious activity. Even rival states, like Sicily and Venice, were known for their vibrant schools of Byzantine art, importing artists from the capital itself and setting up their own workshops.

**Patronage and Artistic Life**

The church and state were one in the Byzantine Empire, so that many of the greatest works of art were commissioned, in effect, by both institutions at the same time. Monasteries were influential, commissioning a great number of works for their private spaces. Interiors of Byzantine buildings were crowded with religious works competing with each other for space.

The royal court in Constantinople was particularly interested in luxury objects; hence, a strong court atelier was developed. This atelier specialized in extravagant works in ivory, manuscripts, and precious metals.

Individual artists worked with great piety and felt they were executing works for the glory of God. They rarely signed their names, some feeling that pride was a sin. Many artists were monks, priests, or nuns whose artistic production was an expression of their religious devotion and sincerity.

**INNOVATIONS IN BYZANTINE ARCHITECTURE**

Byzantine architecture showed great innovation, beginning with the construction of the **Hagia Sophia** in 532 in Istanbul (Figures 9.4 and 9.5). The architects, Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus (actually a mathematician and a physicist rather than true architects), examined the issue of how a round dome, such as the one built for the Pantheon in Rome (Figure 7.13), could be placed on flat walls. Their solution was the invention of the **pendentive** (Figure 9.1), a triangle-shaped piece of masonry with the dome resting on one long side, and the other two sides channeling the weight down to a pier below. A pendentive allows the dome to be supported by four piers, one in each corner of the building. Since the walls between the piers do not support the dome, they can be opened up for greater window space. Thus the Hagia Sophia has walls of windows that flank the building on each side, unlike the Pantheon, which lacks windows, having only an oculus in the dome.

Middle and late Byzantine architects introduced a variation on the pendentive called the **squinch** (Figure 9.2). Although fulfilling the same function as a pendentive, that is, transitioning the weight of a dome onto a flat rather than a rounded wall, a squinch can take a number of shapes and forms, some corbeling from the wall behind, others arching into the center space, as do the ones at **Hosios Loukas** (Figure 9.8.). Architects designed pendentives and squinches so that artists could later use these broad and protruding surfaces as painted spaces.

The Hagia Sophia's dome is composed of a set of ribs meeting at the top. The spaces between those ribs do not support the dome and are opened for window space. The Hagia Sophia has forty windows around the base of the dome, forming a great circle of light (or halo) over the congregation.
A further innovation in the Hagia Sophia involves its ground plan (Figure 9.3). Churches in the early Christian era concentrated on one of two forms: the circular building containing a centrally planned apse and the longer basilica with an axially planned nave facing an altar. The Hagia Sophia shows a marriage of these two forms, with the dome emphasizing a centrally planned core and the long nave directing focus toward the apse.

**Characteristics of Byzantine Architecture**

Except for the Hagia Sophia, Byzantine architecture is not known for its size. Buildings in the early period (500–726) have plain exteriors made of brick or concrete. In the middle and late periods (843–1453), the exteriors are richly articulated with a provocative use of various colors of brick, stone, and marble, often with contrasting vertical and horizontal elements. The domes are smaller, but there are more of them, sometimes forming a cross shape. The *monastery churches of Hosios Loukas* (Figures 9.7, 9.8, 9.9) are good examples of the Middle Byzantine tradition.

Interiors are marked by extensive use of variously colored marbles on the lower floors and mosaics or frescoes in the elevated portions of the buildings. Domes tend to be low rather than soaring, and have windows around the base. Middle and late buildings, such as those at Hosios Loukas, have a relatively small floor space but possess a strong vertical emphasis. Interior arches seem to reach into space, creating mysterious areas clouded by half-lights and shimmering mosaics. These buildings usually set the domes on more elevated drums.

Greek Orthodox tradition dictates that important parts of the mass take place behind a curtain or screen. In some buildings this screen is composed of a wall of icons called an *iconostasis*, such as the one before the main altar in the eleventh-century cathedral of *Saint Mark's* in Venice (Figures 9.10 and 9.11).

**Major Works of Byzantine Architecture**

*Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, Hagia Sophia, 532–537, Istanbul* (Figures 9.4 and 9.5)

- Combination of centrally planned and axially planned church
- Exterior: plain and massive, little decoration
- Altar at end of nave, but emphasis placed over the area covered by the dome
- Dome supported by pendentives
- Large central dome, with forty windows at base symbolically acting as a halo over the congregation when filled with light
- Cornice unifies space
- Arcade decoration: wall and capitals are flat and thin but richly ornamented
- Large fields for mosaic decoration; at one time had four acres of gold mosaics on walls
- Many windows punctuate wall spaces
- Minarets added in Islamic period
- Patrons were Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora, who commissioned the work after the burning of the original building in the Nike Revolt
San Vitale, 526–547, Ravenna (Figure 9.6)

- Eight-sided church
- Plain exterior except porch added later in Renaissance
- Large windows for illuminating interior designs
- Interior has thin columns and open arched spaces
- Dematerialization of the mass of the structure

Monastery Churches, tenth to eleventh centuries, Hosios Loukas, Greece (Figures 9.7, 9.8, and 9.9)

- Exterior shows decorative placement of stonework and soft interplay of horizontal and vertical elements
- Large windows areas punctuated by smaller holes, creating a sense of mystery in the interior
- Interior wall areas dissolve into delicate arches
- Octagonal squinches support dome surrounded by windows
- Church has a light interior filled with sparkling mosaics

Saint Mark's Cathedral, 1063 and ff. Venice, Italy (Figures 9.10 and 9.11)

- Five domes placed in a cross pattern
- Windows at base of dome illuminate brilliant mosaics that cover every wall space above the first floor
- Figures are weightless in a field of gold mosaics
- Prominent iconostasis separates apse from nave
- Compartmentalized space of Middle Byzantine architecture, cf. more open and spacious Hagia Sophia
- Contains relics of the Saint Mark, the evangelist
Barma and Postnik, Saint Basil’s Cathedral, 1555–1561, Moscow, Russia (Figure 9.12)

- Commissioned by Ivan the Terrible
- Tall, slender pyramidal central tower crowned by small, onion-shaped dome
- Central spire surrounded by eight smaller domes of various sizes with fanciful decorative surfaces
- Low, flat, rounded arches intermix with triangular forms and tall slender windowlike shallow spaces

**INNOVATIONS IN BYZANTINE PAINTING**

The most characteristic work of Byzantine art is the icon, a religious devotional image usually of portable size and hanging in a place of honor either at home or in a religious institution. An icon has a wooden foundation covered by preparatory undercoats of paint, sometimes composed of such things as fish glue or putty. Cloth is placed over this base, and successive layers of stucco are gently applied. A perforated paper sketch is placed on the surface, so that the image can be traced and then gilded and painted. The artist then applies varnish to make the icon shine, as well as to protect it, because icons are often touched, handled, and embraced. The faithful were encouraged to kiss icons and burn votive candles beneath them; as a result, icons have become blackened by candle soot and incense, their frames singed by flames. Consequently, many icons have been repainted and no longer have their original surface texture.

Icons were paraded in religious processions on feast days, and sometimes exhibited on city walls in times of invasion. Frequently they were believed to possess spiritual powers, and they held a sacred place in the hearts of Byzantine worshippers.

**Characteristics of Byzantine Painting**

Byzantine painting is marked by a combination of the classical heritage of ancient Greece and Rome with a more formal and hieratic medieval style. Artists are trained in one tradition or the other, and it is common to see a single work of art done by a number of artists, some inspired by the classical tradition, and others by medieval formalism. Illustrations from the tenth-century *Paris Psalter* (Figure 9.15) show both styles.

Those artists who were classically trained used a painterly brushstroke and an innovative way of representing a figure—typically from an unusual angle. These artists employed soft transitions between color areas and showed a more relaxed figure stance.

Those trained in the medieval tradition favored frontal poses, symmetry, and almost weightless bodies. The drapery is emphasized, so there is little effort to reveal the body beneath. Perspective is unimportant because figures occupy a timeless space; marked by golden backgrounds and heavily highlighted halos.

Whatever the tradition, Byzantine art, like all medieval art, avoids nudity whenever possible, deeming it debasing. Nudity also had a pagan association, connected with the mythological religions of ancient Greece and Rome.

One of the glories of Byzantine art is its jewel-like treatment of manuscript painting. The manuscript painter had to possess a fine eye for detail, and so was trained
to work with great precision, rendering minute details carefully. Byzantine manuscripts are meticulously executed; most employ the same use of gold seen in icons and mosaics. Because so few people could read, the possession of manuscripts was a status symbol, and libraries were true temples of learning. The *Paris Psalter* is an excellent example of the sophisticated court style of manuscript painting.

Byzantine art continues the ancient traditions of fresco and mosaic painting, bringing the latter to new heights. Interior church walls are covered in shimmering tesserae made of gold, colored stones, and glass. Each piece of tesserae is placed at an odd angle to catch the flickering of candles or the oblique rays of sunlight; the interior then resembles a vast glittering world of floating golden shapes, perhaps echoing what the Byzantines thought heaven itself would resemble.

Byzantine ensembles are arranged in hierarchal order. Jesus is largest, placed at the top of a composition, sometimes in the role of the Pantocrator, or ruler, of the world. Angels either flank or appear beneath him, wearing robes similar to the ones the emperor wore at court. Beneath the angels are people with special religious significance—Mary, Jesus’s mother, being the most prominent. Saints appear next, followed by less august religious figures. This type of program can be seen at Hosios Loukas and Monreale (Figure 9.16).

Court customs play an important role in Byzantine art. Purple, the color usually reserved for Byzantine royalty, can be seen in the mosaics of Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora. However, in an act of transference, purple is sometimes used on the garments of Jesus himself. Custom at court prescribed that courtiers approach the emperor with their hands covered as a sign of respect. As a result, nearly every figure has at least one hand covered before someone of higher station, sometimes even when he or she is holding something. Justinian himself (Figure 9.13), in his famous mosaic in San Vitale, holds a bowl with his covered hand.

Facial types are fairly standardized. There is no attempt at psychological penetration or individual insight: Portraits in the modern sense of the word are unknown. Continuing a tradition from Roman art, eyes are characteristically large and wide open. Noses tend to be long and thin, mouths short and closed. The Christ Child, who is a fixture in Byzantine art, is more like a little man than a child, perhaps showing his wisdom and majesty. Medieval art generally labels the names of figures the viewer is observing, and Byzantine art is no exception.

Typically, most paintings have flattened backgrounds, often with just a single layer of gold to symbolize an eternal space. This becomes increasingly pronounced in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods in which figures stand before a monochromatic of golden opulence, perhaps illustrating a heavenly world.

### Major Works of Byzantine Painting

**Justinian and Attendants, c. 547, mosaic from San Vitale, Ravenna** (Figure 9.13)

- To his left the clergy, to his right the military
- Dressed in royal purple and gold
- Symmetry, frontality
- Holds a paten for the Eucharist
- Slight impression of procession forward; cf. Roman Imperial works
- Figures have no volume, seem to float, and yet step on each other’s feet
- Minimal background: green base at feet, golden background indicates timelessness
- Maximianus identified, patron of San Vitale
- Halo indicates saintliness, a semidivinity as head of church and state
- Justinian and Theodora are actively participating in the Mass—their position over the altar enhances this allusion

_Theodora and Attendants, c. 547, mosaic from San Vitale, Ravenna (Figure 9.14)_

- Slight displacement of absolute symmetry with Theodora—she plays a secondary role to her husband
- Richly robed empress and ladies at court
- She stands in an architectural framework, holding a chalice for the mass, and is about to go behind the curtain
- Figures are flattened and weightless, barely a hint of a body can be detected beneath the drapery
- Three Magi, who bring gifts to the baby Jesus, are depicted on the hem of her dress. This reference draws parallels between Theodora and the Magi.

_David Composing the Psalms from the Paris Psalter, c. 950–970, tempera on vellum, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Figure 9.15)_

- Psalter, book of Psalms from the Old Testament
- Figures and landscape based on classical models
- Brilliant and balanced color
- Dynamic contrast between muscular bodies and stiff drapery
- David playing the harp inspired by Melody (upper body is classical in inspiration, lower body is medieval)
- Personification of Echo(?) behind a loving cup given as a prize for the best singer
- Muscular, classically inspired figure symbolizing Mountains of Bethlehem in lower right
- Curves dominate composition: left foot of Melody to mountain god, circle around Melody and David
- Jewel-like border frames scene

_Pantocrator, 1180–1190, mosaic, Cathedral, Monreale, Sicily (Figure 9.16)_

- Mosaics arranged in an elaborate hierarchy: Jesus at top
- Solidity of figure; monumental scale
- Sternness, severeness, awesome grandeur
- Jesus at the top of a strict hierarchical program of images
• Blessing gesture in his right hand; left hand holds a Bible inscribed in Latin and Greek
• Image suggests a combination of Jesus Christ and God the Father
• Pointed arches suggest the beginnings of the Gothic style
• Largest Byzantine mosaic cycle extant, over one acre of gold mosaic; dazzling recreation of a heavenly realm on earth

Andrei Rublev, *Old Testament Trinity*, c. 1410, tempera on wood, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (Figure 9.17)

• Byzantine affinity for repeating forms from older art
• Heads of angels nearly identical
• Poses are mirror images
• Luminous appeal of colors
• Deep color harmonies of draperies
• Extensive use of gold
• Nearly spaceless background
• Three Old Testament angels who appear to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis; parallel relationship to the Christian Trinity

**CHARACTERISTICS OF BYZANTINE SCULPTURE**

Large-scale sculpture, the kind that graced the plazas and palaces of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were mostly avoided. Byzantine sculptors preferred working in ivory or precious metals, creating works of unparalleled richness and technical virtuosity. Some ivories are marked by deep undercutting so that the figures stand out prominently before the base of the work. The *Saint Michael the Archangel* (Figure 9.18) and *Harbaville Triptych* (Figure 9.19) are excellent examples of ivory carving.

*Saint Michael the Archangel*, early sixth century, ivory, British Museum, London (Figure 9.18)

• One leaf of an ivory diptych
• Roman coiffure, classical drapery, facial type
• Subtle relief folds
• Delicately detailed classical architecture
• Imperial imagery in the orb and the scepter
• Saint Michael hovers in front of arch, with wings before the columns
• Spatial ambiguity: feet placed on steps behind the columns
• Body articulated beneath drapery
Harbaville Triptych, c. 950, ivory, Louvre, Paris (Figure 9.19)

- Individualized heads
- Frontality broken up by slight turns of body
- Sharp crisp lines
- Very hieratic composition
- Angels appear in medallions
- Jewel-like delicacy of carving
- Many have their hands covered, a symbol of respect in Byzantine art; also a symbol of approaching someone of higher rank
- Medieval interest in labeling names of figures in works of art
- Figures are the same size, many dressed alike and symmetrically arranged

VOCABULARY

Cathedral: the principal church of a diocese, where a bishop sits (Figure 9.10)

Codex (plural: codices): a manuscript book (Figure 9.15)

Icon: a devotional panel depicting a sacred image (Figure 9.17)

Iconostasis: a screen decorated with icons, which separates the apse from the transept of a church (Figure 9.11)

Mosaic: a decoration using pieces of stone, marble or colored glass, called tesserae, that are cemented to a wall or a floor (Figure 9.13)

Pantocrator: literally, “ruler of the world,” a term that alludes to a figure of Christ placed above the altar or in the center of a dome in a Byzantine church (Figure 9.16)

Pendentive: a construction shaped like a triangle that transitions the space between square walls and the base of a round dome (Figure 9.1)

Psalter: a book of the Psalms from the Hebrew scriptures (Figure 9.15)

Squinch: the polygonal base of a dome that makes a transition from the round dome to a flat wall (Figure 9.2)

Triptych: a three-paneled painting or sculpture (Figure 9.19)
Summary

The Eastern half of the Roman Empire lived for another one thousand years beyond the fall of Rome under a name we today call Byzantine. The Empire produced lavish works of art for a splendid court that resided in Constantinople—one of the most resplendent cities in history.

Byzantine art specialized in a number of diverse art forms. Walls were covered in shimmering gold mosaic that reflected a heavenly world of great opulence. Icons that were sometimes thought to have spiritual powers were painted of religious figures. Ivories were carved with consummate precision and skill.

Byzantine builders invented the pendentive, first seen at the Hagia Sophia. However, in later buildings the squinch was preferred.

The death of the Empire in 1453 did not mean the end of Byzantine art. Indeed, a second life developed in Russia, eastern Europe, and in occupied Greece lasting into the twentieth century.

Practice Exercises

1. All of the following are architectural innovations at the Hagia Sophia EXCEPT:
   (A) a circle of windows appears at the base of the dome
   (B) pendentives are used to support the dome
   (C) the ground plan is a mix of the axial and centrally planned church
   (D) frescoes cover the wall spaces

2. Fears of idolatry caused the Byzantines to
   (A) stop the production of icons
   (B) invade surrounding countries they considered heathen
   (C) decorate the interior of their churches with abstract symbols
   (D) turn to ivory as a principal source of carving

3. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, artistic production continued in
   (A) France
   (B) Egypt
   (C) Russia
   (D) England

4. An iconostasis was used to
   (A) allow artists to paint icons in place
   (B) separate the apse from the transept and the nave of a church
   (C) offer support for a squinchn
   (D) allow light into a church
5. Characteristically, icons
(A) were handled and kissed by the faithful
(B) were used by the Byzantine emperor to deliver messages
(C) had images of the emperor or members of his court on them
(D) symbolized Byzantium's link to its classical past

Questions 6 and 7 refer to Figure 9.20.

6. This Byzantine panel shows the influence of classical art in its
(A) spatial placement of the angel on the steps and in the arch
(B) modeling of the body
(C) Christian symbolism
(D) relationship of the figure to the architectural setting

7. This Byzantine panel is made of
(A) terra-cotta
(B) marble
(C) limestone
(D) ivory

8. Byzantine churches have artistic programs that feature Jesus as the central figure in the role of Pantocrator, meaning he is the
(A) savior
(B) son of God
(C) ruler of the world
(D) unifier of all

9. The Hagia Sophia was built under the patronage of
(A) Emperor Trajan
(B) Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora
(C) Emperor Basil I
(D) Constantine the Great

Question 10 refers to Figure 9.21.

10. The subject of this painting draws a parallel between
(A) the Bible and Greek mythology
(B) Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*
(C) Early and Late Byzantine art
(D) the Hebrew and Christian scriptures
Short Essay

Identify the central figure in Figure 9.22. What pictorial and stylistic devices are used to communicate this person's majesty and importance? Use one side of a sheet of lined paper to write your essay.

Answer Key

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Answers Explained

Multiple-Choice

1. (D) All of the following are innovations first seen in the Hagia Sophia: the circle of windows at the base of the dome, the pendentives supporting the dome, and the combination of the centrally planned and axially planned nave. There are no frescoes on the walls of the Hagia Sophia; they are covered with mosaics and marble.

2. (A) The Byzantines stopped the production of icons for fear of idolatry. This movement is called the Iconoclastic Controversy.

3. (C) While western Europe did continue to be influenced by Byzantine art, it did not adopt this style. The Egyptians were Islamic at this point, and were producing non-figural compositions. The Russians assumed Byzantine culture wholeheartedly.

4. (B) The very purpose of the iconostasis is to separate the apse from the transept and the nave with a wall of icons. In this way orthodox Christian priests can remove themselves from the congregation during important parts of the Christian ceremony.

5. (A) Icons have a long history of being adored by the faithful, and that includes handling and kissing.
6. (B) The modeling of the angel is brilliantly rendered in the classical tradition.

7. (D) This Byzantine panel is made of ivory.

8. (C) Pantocrator is Greek for "ruler of the world."

9. (B) Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora were the patrons of the Hagia Sophia.

10. (D) The *Old Testament Trinity* shows an episode from Genesis in the Hebrew sculptures in which Abraham and Sarah entertain three angels. A parallel with the Christian Trinity is implied.

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### Rubric for Short Essay

4: The student identifies the central figure in the mosaic as Emperor Justinian I. At least three pictorial and stylistic devices that communicate Justinian's importance are mentioned. The discussion of these devices is full. There are no major errors.

3: The student identifies the central figure, but only two characteristics are discussed, OR the student does not identify the figure, but three characteristics are discussed. There may be minor errors.

2: The student identifies the central figure, but discusses only one characteristic, OR the student does not identify the central figure, but two characteristics are discussed. There may be major errors.

1: The student identifies the central figure, but there is no discussion of merit, OR the central figure is misidentified or unidentified, but one stylistic device is discussed. The discussion may be superficial. There may be major errors.

0: The student makes an attempt, but the response is without merit.
Short Essay Model Response

The central figure here is Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. He stands out as the most important presence in the mosaic, as he is centrally located, crowned, haloed, and wearing the purple robes of royalty. The dark, commanding color of this robe sets him apart from the relatively white attire of the flanking attendants and clergy. Additionally, the pattern delineating the perimeter of the mosaic breaks down above Justinian's head, an indication that his majesty extends beyond his person. This majestic aura, highlighted by a halo, is so powerful that it cannot be contained by the same patterns that define the space of others. The keystone insertion in the pattern also suggests that Justinian is the sine qua non of the group, the unifying part of the whole. This distinction is confirmed by the presence of military and clergy on either side of him, portraying Justinian as the unifier of secular and religious realms. The vertical emphasis in this mosaic, resulting from the lines on the robe, the cross, shield-pattern, and spears also affirms the rigidity and strength of the group, while the gilded Byzantine background confers spiritual authority to complement its hegemony. The placement of the mosaic in the apse also indicates the interrelatedness of church and state—representing Justinian as a divinely appointed ruler whose presence is always felt. This mixing of church and state, of religiosity and military prowess, is most prevalent in the haloed figure of Justinian, central nexus between both worlds, rightful leader of men.

—Gabriel Sl.

Analysis of Model Response

The model response correctly identifies Emperor Justinian I as the central figure. The discussion then goes on to reveal an intimate knowledge of this mosaic through a listing of various stylistic components that indicate Justinian's majesty and importance. Gabriel conveys a convincing argument by integrating the various stylistic elements with their relevance to the artistic structure of the piece as well as an understanding of the interrelatedness of the mosaic and the political and religious interconnections the artist makes. This essay merits a 4.