Byzantine Emperor Justinian I launched an ambitious building program to develop holy sites to restore the glory of the Roman Empire.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Provide an overview of Justinian's accomplishments during the 6th century BCE.

**KEY POINTS**

- One of Justinian's major contributions to history was the codification of Byzantine laws.
- Christian architecture was a significant component of Justinian's project of imperial renovation.
- The church building program of Justinian was composed of glorious churches constructed to aid the Emperor in his religious unification undertaking.
- Justinian hoped to recreate the former Roman Empire as a Christian empire.

**TERMS**

- **Hagia Sophia**
  a former patriarchal basilica, later a mosque, now a museum in Istanbul, Turkey.
- **Byzantine**
  Belonging to the civilization of the Eastern-Roman empire between 331 A.D. when the capital was moved to Constantinople (now Istanbul), and 1453 when it was conquered by the Turks.

The history of the architecture of the western world, from 3500 BCE to the present, is the story of a slow, steady advancement in building methods, materials, and styles, punctuated by a few short bursts of terrific activity that produce both monuments and techniques that have had a lasting impact on future generations. The great age of Justinian, during the sixth century, is one of the most extraordinary of these creative explosions. Justinian devoted much of his reign (527-565 CE) to
reconquering Italy, North Africa, and Spain. He also laid the foundations of the imperial absolutism of the Byzantine state, codifying its laws and imposing his religious views on all his subjects by law.
If the outstanding contribution of Rome to the development of civilization was the rule of law, Justinian's codifying of the laws alone would justify his notable place in world history. In addition to the laws, he reconstructed the flagging fortresses of the Roman Empire providing cisterns, ramparts, civic buildings, residences, waterways, churches, and indeed whole cities, an achievement that dwarfs any other architectural accomplishment by a single individual in the Roman or any other empire. Finally, he was responsible for the supreme creation of Byzantine architecture, the Hagia Sophia. Justinian's aim was to restore the Roman empire to its former glory within a Christian context.
Justinian renovated, rebuilt, and founded countless churches within Constantinople, including Hagia Sophia, which had been destroyed during the Nika riots, the Church of the Holy Apostles, and the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus. Justinian also built a number of churches and fortifications outside of the imperial capital, including the Monastery of St. Catherine on the Sinai Peninsula and the Basilica of St. John in Ephesus. The manifestation of the church as a focal point of the community was solidified by Justinian in all of his city and town reconstructions.

Several major churches of this period were built in the provinces by local bishops in imitation
of the new Constantinopolitan foundations. One such church, the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, was built by Bishop Maximianus. The decoration of San Vitale includes important mosaics of Justinian and his empress, Theodora, although neither ever visited the church. The Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč is another example of churches built to imitate the new Constantinopolitan foundations.