

# JUSTINIAN I

In April 2010 I visited Istanbul, (formerly known as Constantinople), Turkey and came away with a deeper understanding of Emperor Justinian I or Justinian the Great, the namesake of our law society. Justinian's rule from 527 -565 AD constituted a distinct epoch in the history of the Eastern Roman Empire based in Constantinople. His reign was marked by the ambitious but ultimately failed restoration of the Western Roman Empire including the city of Rome. His most noteworthy achievement was the uniform rewriting of Roman law, the Corpus Juris Civilis (Corpus), which is still the basis of civil law in many modern states. His reign also marked a blossoming of Byzantine culture, and his building program yielded such masterpieces as the rebuilt church of Hagia Sophia (which I visited and it has a magnificent dome filled with mosaics), which was to be the center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity for many centuries.

As a ruler, Justinian showed great energy and was a prolific builder; he was known as the Emperor who never sleeps on account of his work habits. He married Theodora, 20 years his junior and a courtesan, who would later become very influential in the politics of the Empire. Later emperors would follow Justinian's precedent in marrying outside of the aristocratic class. When he died he left no children and his body was entombed in a specially built mausoleum in the Church of the Holy Apostles also restored by Justinian (which I also visited).

Justinian achieved lasting fame through his judicial reforms, particularly through the complete revision of all Roman law, something that had not previously been attempted. The Corpus forms the basis of Latin jurisprudence and gathers together laws, other rules, senatorial consults, imperial decrees, case law, and jurist's opinions and interpretations. The only western province where the Justinian code was introduced was Italy shortly after it was recaptured by Justinian from where it was to pass to Western Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and become the basis of much European law code. Later it was to pass to Eastern Europe and Russia.

I was on a wine tour, namely Tours for Wine Lovers, and our private guide showing us the sights of Istanbul seemed to constantly refer to Justinian over and over again in pointing out the sights of this great city. It made me proud to be a Justinian Law Society member as I now have a walked the same steps and seen the accomplishments of our namesake who sought to revive the greatness of the classical Roman Empire.

....compiled by the Hon. William J. Riccitelli,

a past President of the Justinian Law Society