

C. The Fate of Italy

1. We have yet to discuss the role of Italy in Europe. Although it is both the homeland of the Romans, and thus the center of all Roman history, *and* it is a founding member of today's European Union, Italy does not play as important a role in European history as do France and Germany.
2. Part of the reason is the Italy is a mess during the *Medieval Period (476-1789AD)*.
3. As the Roman empire collapsed, the city of Rome itself was twice sacked as we have seen, and it was replaced as the most important city by Constantinople in the East (see page 12, again).
4. The emperors who lived in Constantinople were able to survive the barbarian invasions of the Roman world unscathed, and their portion of the Roman Empire survived as the "Eastern Roman Empire," or the *Byzantine Empire*.
5. Hoping to regain control of Italy, the Byzantine emperors made a bargain with the Ostrogoths (Eastern Goths) that allowed them to take over Italy on behalf of the Byzantines. However, they found the Ostrogoths unwilling to keep up their end of the bargain.
6. Trying to regain Italy, the Byzantine empire sent a great general named Belisarius, who briefly reconquered it. But the emperor was afraid that Belisarius would use his power to take over the empire, and, having recalled Belisarius, put him on trial and dismissed him. (In one version of the story, he even had Belisarius blinded.)
7. When Belisarius's successor Narses came under similar suspicion, he refused to return to Constantinople, and instead turned over Italy to another Germanic tribe, called the Lombards.
8. With Italy constantly changing hands like this, it was not able to form itself into a kingdom of its own, and the rise of the *nation* of Italy was long delayed.



the Ostrogothic kingdom over Italy at its height



The Byzantine empire was briefly able to regain Italy thanks to the general Belisarius.



Italy ended up split between the Byzantines and Lombards.