broke off its alliance with the Arabs, entered imperial service, and ceded its principality to Byzantium. Reorganized as the theme of Mesopotamia, it was the first of a series of new themes that Leo created in an area that had been largely a no-man’s-land between the Islamic and Byzantine worlds.

The rise of the tagmata eventually had the unanticipated consequence of downgrading the themes. The soldiers of the themes got the “grunt work”—the inglorious job of skirmish warfare—without the honor and (probably) extra pay. The tagmata were the professionals, gradually taking over most of the fighting, especially as the need to defend the interior of Anatolia receded. By the same token, the troops of the themes became increasingly inactive.

Christianity and the Rise of East Central Europe

To the north of Byzantium was a huge swathe of territory stretching to the Baltic Sea. Once states coalesced there, it would become East Central Europe. But while states (in this case under the aegis of Germanic leaders) were forming in Europe’s west, the east-central region remained in flux as new groups, mainly of Slavic and Turkic origins, entered, created ephemeral political entities, and then disappeared. The Slavs made up the majority of these immigrants. As farmers (on the whole), however, they were normally subject to others, such as the Avars, Turkic-speaking warrior nomads who created a great empire on