5.1 Eastern Rome -- Byzantine Empire Reading and Q’s

The Byzantine Empire was a vast and powerful civilization with origins that can be traced to 330 A.D./C.E., when the Roman emperor Constantine I dedicated a “New Rome” on the site of the ancient Greek colony of Byzantium. Though the western half of the Roman Empire crumbled and fell in 476 A.D./C.E 😞, the eastern half survived for 1,000 more years, spawning a rich tradition of art, literature and learning and serving as a military buffer between Europe and Asia. The Byzantine Empire finally fell in 1453, after an Ottoman (Muslim) army stormed Constantinople during the reign of Constantine XI.
Byzantium

The site of Byzantium was ideally located to serve as a transit and trade point between Europe and Asia!

In 330 A.D/C.E., Roman Emperor Constantine I chose Byzantium as the site of a “New Rome” with a capital city, Constantinople. Five years earlier, at the Council of Nicaea, Constantine had established Christianity—one an obscure Jewish sect—as Rome’s official religion.

Famous painting of Roman Emperor Constantine converting to Christianity

The citizens of Constantinople and the rest of the Eastern Roman Empire identified strongly as Romans and Christians, though many of them spoke Greek and not Latin.

Did you know? One of the most extraordinary aspects of the Byzantine Empire was its longevity: It was the only organized state west of China to survive without interruption from ancient times until the beginning of the modern age.
The fate of the Eastern and Western Roman empires differed greatly over the hundreds of years after Constantine! In the west, constant attacks from German speaking invaders such as the Visigoths broke the struggling empire down piece by piece until Italy was the only territory left under Roman control. In 476, the barbarian Odoacer overthrew the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustus, and Western Rome had fallen. 😞

**Byzantine Empire Flourishes**

The eastern half of the Roman Empire proved less vulnerable to external attack, thanks in part to its geographic location.

With Constantinople located on a strait, it was extremely difficult to breach the capital’s defenses; in addition, the eastern empire had a much shorter common frontier with Europe.

It also benefited greatly from a stronger administrative center (Centralization) and internal political stability, as well as great wealth compared with other civilizations of the time period. The eastern emperors were able to exert more control over the empire’s economic resources and more effectively muster sufficient manpower to combat invasion.
**Eastern Roman Empire -- Also Known as Byzantine Empire**

As a result of these advantages, the Eastern Roman Empire, variously known as the Byzantine Empire or Byzantium, was able to survive for centuries after the fall of Rome! (Centuries = Hundreds of Years)

Though Byzantium was ruled by Roman law and Roman political ideas, and its official language was Latin, Greek was also widely spoken, and students received education in Greek history, literature and culture.

The Byzantine emperor was the patriarch of Constantinople, and the head of both the Christian church there as well as the government. In the old Western Roman Empire and Western Europe, the head of the Catholic Church, the Pope, eventually became more powerful than kings! However, this never happened in the east! Eastern Roman emperors had almost complete control over Christianity as well as the rest of government and society.
Eastern Roman Emperors had ABSOLUTE Power

Justinian I -- The Greatest of the Eastern Roman Emperors

Justinian I, who took power in 527 A.D/C.E and would rule until his death in 565, was the first great ruler of the Byzantine Empire. During the years of his reign, the empire included most of the land surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, as Justinian’s armies conquered part of the former Western Roman Empire, including North Africa.
Many great monuments of the empire would be built under Justinian, including the spectacular domed Church of Holy Wisdom, or Hagia Sophia. Justinian also reformed and codified Roman law, establishing a Byzantine legal code that would endure for centuries and help shape the modern concept of government and law. This law came to be known as ‘Justinian's Code.’

At the time of Justinian’s death, the Byzantine Empire reigned supreme as the largest and most powerful unified civilization in Europe. Debts incurred through war had left the empire in dire financial straits, however, and his successors were forced to heavily tax Byzantine citizens in order to keep the empire afloat.

**Hagia Sophia Cathedral Built Under Emperor Justinian**
Questions…
1) What was the Eastern Roman empire also called?

2) While the Western Roman Empire collapsed in 476 A.D, what happened to Eastern Roman empire?

3) What was the city of Constantinople’s nickname?

4) What was one major reason the Eastern Roman Empire was harder to attack?

5) How much power did Eastern Roman emperors exercise?

6) What is the Hagia Sophia?