L-5: The Byzantine Empire (p. 196-199)

After the Western Roman Empire fell in 476 AD., the Eastern part continued. We call it: The Byzantine Empire. The most famous emperor was named Justinian I, who ruled from 527-565 AD. He wanted to re-establish the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean.

Under Justinian I, the Byzantines:
1. Re-gained much territory of the old Roman Empire (most was lost after his death)
2. Codified old Roman Law: The Body of Civil Law was the last product of Eastern Roman culture to be written in Latin. It is often referred to as Justinian's Code - it was the basis of law in the Eastern Roman Empire. It has had great influence on many other legal systems.

However, the Byzantines (like the Romans) had many serious problems:
1. too much territory made it difficult to protect and communicate
2. little in the treasury
3. attacks from Persia in the east and from Slavs in the north
4. conflict between the Roman Catholic Church in the west and the Eastern Orthodox Church in Byzantium. The conflict was mainly due to a disagreement over Papal authority. This caused a SCHISM or break between the two branches of Christianity.
5. The rise of Islam. This was a powerful new force that was threatening the eastern part of the empire.

The Byzantine Empire was a Christian state that spoke Greek. Latin, which had always been spoken in Italy during the Roman Empire, fell into disuse. Greek became the official language. Other characteristics:

1. The Emperor's authority was absolute
2. Constantinople was the largest city in Europe and was the center of trade
3. Justinian initiated incredible building projects like the Haggia Sophia
4. Revival: in the 10th-11th centuries under the Macedonian emperors, the Byzantines increased in prosperity for a while, until power struggles caused decline.