Birth of Europe

BIRTH OF EUROPE

ANDREA BOFFA

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PART I

COURSE INFORMATION

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

HIST 113 The Birth of Europe

3 Credits, Writing Enhanced

HIST 113 is designated as a Flexible Core course under Domain A: World Cultures and Global Issues.

Course Catalogue Description

The formation of European civilization from earliest times into the 17th century.

Course Narrative

This course will introduce you to the important events, developments, persons, and ideas in pre-modern European history. We will examine the societies of the Ancient Near East, Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, Medieval Europe, the culture of the Renaissance, and early European exploration. We will talk about gods and goddesses, warriors and peasants, tyrants and kings, and priests and poets. We will compare and contrast spiritual and religious beliefs, identify forms of governance and rule, and explore cultural and intellectual developments. We will also consider the interactions between Europe and other societies. We will analyze texts and works of arts in order to better understand the past. Finally, because history is not just in the past, we will examine and challenge the way in which historical narratives continue to inform our present, in both positive and negative ways.

Learning Outcomes as Designated under Pathways:

In this course, students will be able to:

1. Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.
2. Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.
3. Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.
4. Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of the discipline of History.
5. Analyze the significance of major movements that have shaped the world's societies.
6. Analyze the historical development of non-US societies.
7. Analyze and discuss the role that race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, or belief, plays in world cultures.

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Interpret a wide range of primary sources (texts, visual art, and music) and appreciate them as historical evidence.
2. Employ the analytic, rhetorical, and writing skills developed in this course in avariety of academic and non-academic contexts.
3. Discuss major developments in world history with an appreciation for diversity among cultures, histories, and viewpoints.
4. Understand current events and discuss them with a historically-informed perspective.

Ancillary Learning Outcomes:

In this course students will:

1. Use and evaluate Online sources.
2. Annotate texts
3. Collaborate with classmates

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Course Requirements:

1. Class Participation 10%
2. Text Annotations 5%
3. Reading Journal 10%
4. Collaborative Study Guide 15%
5. Primary Source Study 20%
6. Secondary Source Review 20%
7. Final Exam 20%

Class Participation

Active class participation is a required component of this course. This entails coming to class prepared and ready to engage with the material, as well as contributing to a positive learning environment. Participation points can be earned in a variety of ways including through participating in in-class discussions, completing in class assignments, or taking notes.

Text Annotations

This course will utilize the collaborate reading application Hypothes.is or Perusall. For each module, students are required to submit substantial comments on the assigned readings.

Reading Journal

You will be using the journal tool in Blackboard to discuss selected assigned readings. For each entry in the Reading Journal, you will be given a prompt to discuss using the assigned reading(s). Through these reading entries, you will build skills in historical and critical analysis

Collaborative Study Guide

Over the semester, you will be working within small groups to develop a study guide which will reflect the

course material including the assigned readings, lectures, and class discussions. The Study Guide will consist of a timeline, a glossary, and study questions.

Primary Source Study and Secondary Source Review

You will be writing two short essays for this class. For the Primary Source Study, you will present your own analysis of a set of historical primary sources. For the Secondary Source Review, you will review and critique an article related to the course material.

Final Exam

The final exam for this course will provide you an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the course material.

SECONDARY SOURCE REVIEW

In the context of history, secondary sources are books or articles written after the fact about a historical event or period. Secondary sources use primary sources to offer analysis and draw conclusions. They also respond to or build upon the historical analysis of other scholars. Through books and articles, historians and other scholars of the past shape and frame the sorts of questions asked about the period and available sources. As historians it is important to think critically when reading secondary sources and be attentive to how scholars approach their analysis.

For this assignment you will be writing a critical review of a scholarly article, "Woman, City, State: Theories, Ideologies, and Concepts in the Archaic and Classical Periods" by Madeleine M. Henry and Sharon L. James. We will explore some of the themes discussed in this article in our discussion of Livy's *The Rape of Lucretia* in Module Five.

A review is NOT a book report; you will not simply be summarizing the text, rather it is a critical evaluation of the article. A review is a critical commentary on the article which considers what the authors' thesis is, their methodology and sources used, and how successfully the analysis and argument is presented.

Your essay should include the following:

- The main thesis of the article.
- A summary or description of the main points or themes of the article.
- An explanation of the sources or types of sources that the authors use to support their thesis.
- A discussion of the persuasiveness of Henry and James' thesis and use of evidence. This is not a yes or no statement, but an analysis of the strengths and weakness of how the authors lay out and presents their argument.
- Finally, include your own impression of the article and Henry and James' argument. Did this text enhance your understanding of ancient Greece and Rome? Where did you find it lacking? What questions did it raise?

All of these points are interrelated and so your paper should not be a list of questions and answers but a proper essay with an introduction and conclusion.

Your paper should be three to four pages in length, double-spaced (about 800 – 1000 words). You will be uploading a file in Blackboard. Please review the required format for naming your file.

PRIMARY SOURCE STUDY

Assignment Overview

A primary source is a document or object created or produced during the time-period and place of study. Historical research is based on primary sources; however primary sources cannot be taken at face value. The job of an historian is to interpret and analyze primary sources in order to better understand the historical period in question. The first task when you begin to look at any primary source is to understand the context of the source and determine its historical value. Second, you need to analyze the source: consider what information the source provides and what further questions the source raises.

The purpose of the Primary Source Study is to examine a selection of primary source documents to see what they can tell you about a particular topic or period in history. The point of this assignment is not to reiterate what is said in the textbook or lectures, but to **add something new based on your own analysis of primary texts**.

Sources

For your primary source study you will be using the *Gesta Francorum* which we will read and discussed in Module Ten along with one other primary source from the following options. These texts are all available through our Blackboard site:

- Stephen of Blois, Letter to his Wife
- Godfrey, Raymond and Daimbert to the Pope
- Anna Comena, *The Alexiad*, selections on the First Crusade
- Ibn al-Athir, *The First Crusade*

The majority of your essay should be your own interpretation and analysis of your selected documents. You can use the textbook, class discussions, and letters for background information and to contextualize your sources. You do not need outside sources, however ALL sources must be cited (we will go over how and what to cite in class).

Your essay should include the following:

- An introduction to the primary sources (who wrote them and when; what are the sources about).
- The historical context of the sources (what is happening at the time that is relevant to your reading of the source).
- Your analysis of these texts. Think about how these texts help you understand the experience of individuals who participated or witnessed the First Crusade, how participants and observers perceived the ideol-

ogy of the Crusades, or how they reflected upon the events of the First Crusade.

COLLABORATIVE STUDY GUIDE

Over the semester, you will be working in groups to produce a class study guide that reflects the course material, lectures, and class discussions. You will begin by working individually in the first two modules before being randomly assigned to a group. From Module Three through to Module Thirteen, each group will be responsible for creating one component of the study based on the material for that module. Components include: a timeline, a glossary of important events, developments, terminology, or people, and study questions. Other components might be added depending on class make up and what you as a class decide is essential. Details, including necessary links and registration information for the collaboration platform (such as Teams) is available on Blackboard.

Alternately, students could work as individuals in building a collaborative study guide where student get credit for participating in a variety of ways each module. This model could include students posing questions or asking for clarification and other students answering those questions.

PART II

MODULE ONE: THE STUDY OF HISTORY AND THE BEGINNING OF CIVILIZATION

READING: THE STUDY OF HISTORY

Julianna Wilson

How Do We Write History?

The word *history* comes ultimately from Ancient Greek *historía*, meaning "inquiry," "knowledge from inquiry," or "judge." However, the question of what kind of inquiries historians pose, what knowledge they seek, and how they interpret the evidence that they find remains controversial.

Historians draw conclusions from past approaches to history, but in the end, they always write in the context of their own time, current dominant ideas of how to interpret the past, and even subjective viewpoints. Furthermore, current events and developments often trigger which past events, historical periods, or geographical regions are seen as critical and thus should be investigated. Finally, historical studies are designed to provide specific lessons for societies today. In the words of Benedetto Croce, Italian philosopher and historian, "All history is contemporary history."

All events that are remembered and preserved in some original form constitute the historical record. The task of historians is to identify the sources that can most usefully contribute to the production of accurate accounts of the past. These sources, known are primary sources or evidence, were produced at the time under study and constitute the foundation of historical inquiry. Ideally, a historian will use as many available primary sources as can be accessed, but in practice, sources may have been destroyed or may not be available for research. In some cases, the only eyewitness reports of an event may be memoirs, autobiographies, or oral interviews taken years later. Sometimes, the only evidence relating to an event or person in the distant past was written or copied decades or centuries later. Historians remain cautious when working with evidence recorded years, or even decades or centuries, after an event; this kind of evidence poses the question of to what extent witnesses remember events accurately. However, historians also point out that hardly any historical evidence can be seen as objective, as it is always a product of particular individuals, times, and dominant ideas. This is also why researchers try to find as many records of an event under investigation as possible, and it is not unusual that they find evidence that may present contradictory accounts of the same events. In general, the sources of historical knowledge can be separated into three categories: what is written, what is said, and what is physically preserved. Historians often consult all three.

The Imperfect Historical Record

While some primary sources are considered more reliable or trustworthy than others, hardly any historical evi-

dence can be seen as fully objective since it is always a product of particular individuals, times, and dominant ideas.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Explain the consequences of the imperfect historical record

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- In the study of history as an academic discipline, a primary source is an artifact, document, diary, manuscript, autobiography, recording, or other source of information that was created at the time under study.
- History as an academic discipline is based on primary sources, as evaluated by the community of scholars for whom primary sources are absolutely fundamental to reconstructing the past. Ideally, a historian will use as many primary sources that were created during the time under study as can be accessed. In practice however, some sources have been destroyed, while others are not available for research.
- While some sources are considered more reliable or trustworthy than others, historians point out that hardly any historical evidence can be seen as fully objective since it is always a product of particular individuals, times, and dominant ideas.
- Historical method comprises the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidence (including the evidence of archaeology) to research and write historical accounts of the past.
- Primary sources may remain in private hands or are located in archives, libraries, museums, historical societies, and special collections. Traditionally, historians attempt to answer historical questions through the study of written documents and oral accounts. They also use such sources as monuments, inscriptions, and pictures. In general, the sources of historical knowledge can be separated into three categories: what is written, what is said, and what is physically preserved. Historians often consult all three.
- Historians use various strategies to reconstruct the past when facing a lack of sources, including collaborating with experts from other academic disciplines, most notably archaeol-

ogy.

Key Terms

- **secondary source**: A document or recording that relates or discusses information originally found in a primary source. It contrasts with a primary source, which is an original source of the information being discussed; a primary source can be a person with direct knowledge of a situation, or a document created by such a person. A secondary source involves generalization, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation of the original information.
- **primary source**: In the study of history as an academic discipline, an artifact, document, diary, manuscript, autobiography, recording, or other source of information that was created at the time under study. It serves as an original source of information about the topic.
- **historical method**: A scholarly method that comprises the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidence (including the evidence of archaeology) to research and write historical accounts of the past.

Primary Sources

In the study of history as an academic discipline, a primary source (also called original source or evidence) is an artifact, document, diary, manuscript, autobiography, recording, or other source of information that was created at the time under study. It serves as an original source of information about the topic. Primary sources are distinguished from secondary sources, which cite, comment on, or build upon primary sources. In some cases, a secondary source may also be a primary source, depending on how it is used. For example, a memoir would be considered a primary source in research concerning its author or about his or her friends characterized within it, but the same memoir would be a secondary source if it were used to examine the culture in which its author lived. "Primary" and "secondary" should be understood as relative terms, with sources categorized according to specific historical contexts and what is being studied.

Using Primary Sources: Historical Method

History as an academic discipline is based on primary sources, as evaluated by the community of scholars for whom primary sources are absolutely fundamental to reconstructing the past. Ideally, a historian will use as many primary sources that were created by the people involved at the time under study as can be accessed. In practice however, some sources have been destroyed, while others are not available for research. In some cases, the only eyewitness reports of an event may be memoirs, autobiographies, or oral interviews taken years later.

Sometimes, the only evidence relating to an event or person in the distant past was written or copied decades or centuries later. Manuscripts that are sources for classical texts can be copies or fragments of documents. This is a common problem in classical studies, where sometimes only a summary of a book or letter, but not the actual book or letter, has survived. While some sources are considered more reliable or trustworthy than others (e.g., an original government document containing information about an event vs. a recording of a witness recalling the same event years later), historians point out that hardly any historical evidence can be seen as fully objective as it is always a product of particular individuals, times, and dominant ideas. This is also why researchers try to find as many records of an event under investigation as possible, and attempt to resolve evidence that may present contradictory accounts of the same events.

This wall painting (known as The portrait of Paquius Proculo and currently preserved at the Naples National Archaeological Museum) was found in the Roman city of Pompeii and serves as a complex example of a primary source.

The fresco would not tell much to historians without corresponding textual and archaeological evidence that helps to establish who the portrayed couple might have been. The man wears a toga, the mark of a Roman citizen, and holds a rotulus, suggesting he is involved in public and/or cultural affairs. The woman holds a stylus and wax tablet, emphasizing that she is educated and literate. It is suspected, based on the physical features of the couple, that they are Samnites, which may explain the desire to show off the status they have reached in Roman society.

Historical method comprises the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidence (including the evidence of archaeology) to research and write historical accounts of the past. Historians continue to debate what aspects and practices of investigating primary sources should be considered, and what constitutes a primary source when developing the most effective historical method. The question of the nature, and even the possibility, of a sound historical method is so central that it has been continuously raised in the philosophy of history as a question of epistemology.

Finding Primary Sources

Primary sources may remain in private hands or are located in archives, libraries, museums, historical societies, and special collections. These can be public or private. Some are affiliated with universities and colleges, while others are government entities. Materials relating to one area might be spread over a large number of different institutions. These can be distant from the original source of the document. For example, the Huntington Library in California houses a large number of documents from the United Kingdom. While the development of technology has resulted in an increasing number of digitized sources, most primary source materials are not digitized and may only be represented online with a record or finding aid.

Traditionally, historians attempt to answer historical questions through the study of written documents and oral accounts. They also use such sources as monuments, inscriptions, and pictures. In general, the sources of historical knowledge can be separated into three categories: what is written, what is said, and what is physically preserved. Historians often consult all three. However, writing is the marker that separates history from what comes before

Archaeology is one discipline that is especially helpful to historians. By dealing with buried sites and objects, it contributes to the reconstruction of the past. However, archaeology is constituted by a range of methodologies and approaches that are independent from history. In other words, archaeology does not "fill the gaps" within textual sources but often contrasts its conclusions against those of contemporary textual sources.

Archaeology also provides an illustrative example of how historians can be helped when written records are missing. Unearthing artifacts and working with archaeologists to interpret them based on the expertise of a particular historical era and cultural or geographical area is one effective way to reconstruct the past. If written records are missing, historians often attempt to collect oral accounts of particular events, preferably by eyewitnesses, but sometimes, because of the passage of time, they are forced to work with the following generations. Thus, the question of the reliability of oral history has been widely debated.

When dealing with many government records, historians usually have to wait for a specific period of time before documents are declassified and available to researchers. For political reasons, many sensitive records may be destroyed, withdrawn from collections, or hidden, which may also encourage researchers to rely on oral histories. Missing records of events, or processes that historians believe took place based on very fragmentary evidence, forces historians to seek information in records that may not be a likely sources of information. As archival

research is always time-consuming and labor-intensive, this approach poses the risk of never producing desired results, despite the time and effort invested in finding informative and reliable resources. In some cases, historians are forced to speculate (this should be explicitly noted) or simply admit that we do not have sufficient information to reconstruct particular past events or processes.

Historical Bias

Biases have been part of historical investigation since the ancient beginnings of the discipline. While more recent scholarly practices attempt to remove earlier biases from history, no piece of historical scholarship can be fully free of biases.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Identify some examples of historical bias

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Regardlessof whether they are conscious or learned implicitly within cultural contexts, biases have been part of historical investigation since the ancient beginnings of the discipline. As such, history provides an excellent example of how biases change, evolve, and even disappear.
- Early attempts to make history an empirical, objective discipline (most notably by Voltaire) did not find many followers. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, European historians only strengthened their biases. As Europe gradually dominated the world through the self-

imposed mission to colonize nearly all the other continents, Eurocentrism prevailed in history.

- Even within the Eurocentric perspective, not all Europeans were equal; Western historians largely ignored aspects of history, such as class, gender, or ethnicity. Until the rapid development of social history in the 1960s and 1970s, mainstream Western historical narratives focused on political and military history, while cultural or social history was written mostly from the perspective of the elites.
- The biased approach to history-writing transferred also to history-teaching. From the origins of national mass schooling systems in the 19th century, the teaching of history to promote national sentiment has been a high priority. History textbooks in most countries have been tools to foster nationalism and patriotism and to promote the most favorable version of national history.
- Germany attempts to be an example of how to remove nationalistic narratives from history education. The history curriculum in Germany is characterized by a transnational perspective that emphasizes the all-European heritage, minimizes the idea of national pride, and fosters the notion of civil society centered on democracy, human rights, and peace.
- Despite progress and increased focus on groups that have been traditionally excluded from mainstream historical narratives (people of color, women, the working class, the poor, the disabled, LGBTQI-identified people, etc.), bias remains a component of historical investigation.

Key Terms

- **Eurocentrism**: The practice of viewing the world from a European or generally Western perspective with an implied belief in the pre-eminence of Western culture. It may also be used to describe a view centered on the history or eminence of white people. The term was coined in the 1980s, referring to the notion of European exceptionalism and other Western equivalents, such as American exceptionalism.

Bias in Historical Writing

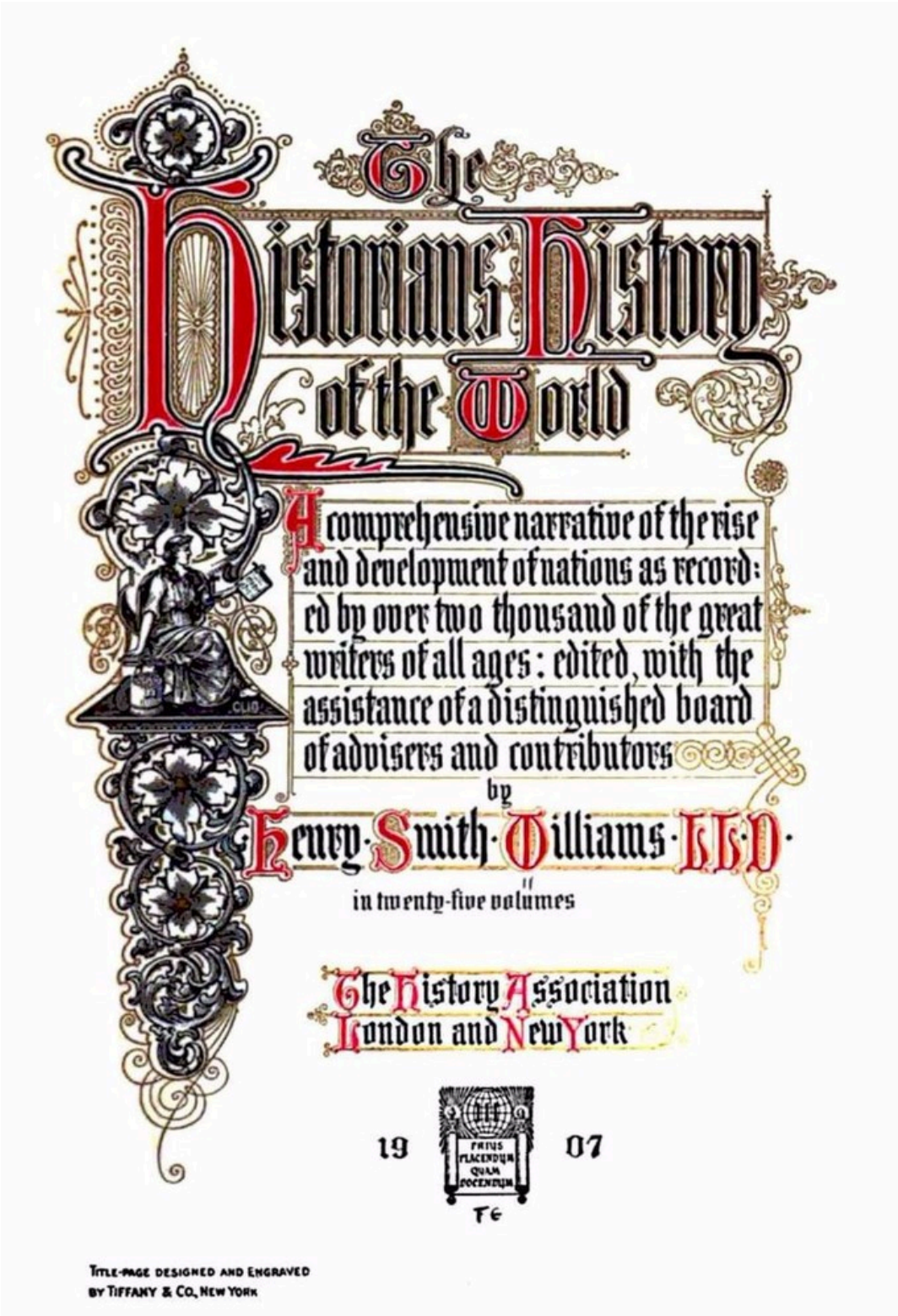
Bias is an inclination or outlook to present or hold a partial perspective, often accompanied by a refusal to consider the possible merits of alternative points of view. Regardless of whether conscious or learned implicitly within cultural contexts, biases have been part of historical investigation since the ancient beginnings of the discipline. As such, history provides an excellent example of how biases change, evolve, and even disappear.

History as a modern academic discipline based on empirical methods (in this case, studying primary sources

in order to reconstruct the past based on available evidence), rose to prominence during the Age of Enlightenment. Voltaire, a French author and thinker, is credited to have developed a fresh outlook on history that broke from the tradition of narrating diplomatic and military events and emphasized customs, social history (the history of ordinary people) and achievements in the arts and sciences. His *Essay on Customs* traced the progress of world civilization in a universal context, thereby rejecting both nationalism and the traditional Christian frame of reference. Voltaire was also the first scholar to make a serious attempt to write the history of the world, eliminating theological frameworks and emphasizing economics, culture, and political history. He was the first to emphasize the debt of medieval culture to Middle Eastern civilization. Although he repeatedly warned against political bias on the part of the historian, he did not miss many opportunities to expose the intolerance and frauds of the Catholic Church over the ages— a topic that was Voltaire's life-long intellectual interest.

Voltaire's early attempts to make history an empirical, objective discipline did not find many followers. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, European historians only strengthened their biases. As Europe gradually benefited from the ongoing scientific progress and dominated the world in the self-imposed mission to colonize nearly all other continents, Eurocentrism prevailed in history. The practice of viewing and presenting the world from a European or generally Western perspective, with an implied belief in the pre-eminence of Western culture, dominated among European historians who contrasted the progressively mechanized character of European culture with traditional hunting, farming and herding societies in many of the areas of the world being newly conquered and colonized. These included the Americas, Asia, Africa and, later, the Pacific and Australasia. Many European writers of this time construed the history of Europe as paradigmatic for the rest of the world. Other cultures were identified as having reached a stage that Europe itself had already passed: primitive hunter-gatherer, farming, early civilization, feudalism and modern liberal-capitalism. Only Europe was considered to have achieved the last stage. With this assumption, Europeans were also presented as racially superior, and European history as a discipline became essentially the history of the dominance of white peoples.

However, even within the Eurocentric perspective, not all Europeans were equal; Western historians largely ignored aspects of history, such as class, gender, or ethnicity. Until relatively recently (particularly the rapid development of social history in the 1960s and 1970s), mainstream Western historical narratives focused on political and military history, while cultural or social history was written mostly from the perspective of the elites. Consequently, what was in fact an experience of a selected few (usually white males of upper classes, with some occasional mentions of their female counterparts), was typically presented as the illustrative experience of the entire society. In the United States, some of the first to break this approach were African American scholars who at the turn of the 20th century wrote histories of black Americans and called for their inclusion in the mainstream historical narrative.



The title page to The Historians' History of the World: A Comprehensive Narrative of the Rise and Development of Nations as Recorded by over two thousand of the Great Writers of all Ages, 1907.

The Historians' History of the World is a 25-volume encyclopedia of world history originally published in Eng-

lish near the beginning of the 20th century. It is quite extensive but its perspective is entirely Western Eurocentric. For example, while four volumes focus on the history of England (with Scotland and Ireland included in one of them), "Poland, the Balkans, Turkey, minor Eastern states, China, Japan" are all described in one volume. It was compiled by Henry Smith Williams, a medical doctor and author, as well as other authorities on history, and published in New York in 1902 by Encyclopædia Britannica and the Outlook Company.

Bias in the Teaching of History

The biased approach to historical writing is present in the teaching of history as well. From the origins of national mass schooling systems in the 19th century, the teaching of history to promote national sentiment has been a high priority. Until today, in most countries history textbook are tools to foster nationalism and patriotism and promote the most favorable version of national history. In the United States, one of the most striking examples of this approach is the continuous narrative of the United States as a state established on the principles of personal liberty and democracy. Although aspects of U.S. history, such as slavery, genocide of American Indians, or disfranchisement of the large segments of the society for decades after the onset of the American statehood, are now taught in most (yet not all) American schools, they are presented as marginal in the larger narrative of liberty and democracy.

In many countries, history textbooks are sponsored by the national government and are written to put the national heritage in the most favorable light, although academic historians have often fought against the politicization of the textbooks, sometimes with success. Interestingly, the 21st-century Germany attempts to be an example of how to remove nationalistic narratives from history education. As the 20th-century history of Germany is filled with events and processes that are rarely a cause of national pride, the history curriculum in Germany (controlled by the 16 German states) is characterized by a transnational perspective that emphasizes the all-European heritage, minimizes the idea of national pride, and fosters the notion of civil society centered on democracy, human rights, and peace. Yet, even in the rather unusual German case, Eurocentrism continues to dominate.

The challenge to replace national, or even nationalist, perspectives with a more inclusive transnational or global view of human history is also still very present in college-level history curricula. In the United States after World War I, a strong movement emerged at the university level to teach courses in Western Civilization with the aim to give students a common heritage with Europe. After 1980, attention increasingly moved toward teaching world history or requiring students to take courses in non-western cultures. Yet, world history courses still struggle to move beyond the Eurocentric perspective, focusing heavily on the history of Europe and its links to the United States.

Despite all the progress and much more focus on the groups that have been traditionally excluded from mainstream historical narratives (people of color, women, the working class, the poor, the disabled, LGBTQI-identified people, etc.), bias remains a component of historical investigation, whether it is a product of nationalism, author's political views, or an agenda-driven interpretation of sources. It is only appropriate to state that

the present world history book, while written in accordance with the most recent scholarly and educational practices, has been written and edited by authors trained in American universities and published in the United States. As such, it is also not free from both national (U.S.) and individual (authors') biases.

This chapter is derived from Reading: The Study of History in Western Civilization I by Julianna Wilson

READING: THE ORIGINS OF CIVILIZATION

Christopher Brooks

Introduction

What is "civilization"? In English, the word encompasses a wide variety of meanings, often implying a culture possessing some combination of learning, refinement, and political identity. As described in the introductory chapter, it is also a "loaded" term, replete with an implied division between civilization and its opposite, barbarism, with "civilized" people often eager to describe people who are of a different culture as being "uncivilized" in so many words. Fortunately, more practical and value-neutral definitions of the term also exist. Civilization as a historical phenomenon speaks to certain foundational technologies, most significantly agriculture, combined with a high degree of social specialization, technological progress (albeit of a very slow kind in the case of the pre-modern world), and cultural sophistication as expressed in art, learning, and spirituality.

In turn, the study of civilization has been the traditional focus of history, as an academic discipline, since the late nineteenth century. As academic fields became specialized over the course of the 1800s CE, history identified itself as the study of the past based on written artifacts. A sister field, archeology, developed as the study of the past based on non-written artifacts (such as the remains of bodies in grave sites, surviving buildings, and tools). Thus, for practical reasons, the subject of "history" as a field of study begins with the invention of writing, something that began with the earliest civilization itself, that of the Fertile Crescent (described below). That being noted, history and archeology remain closely intertwined, especially since so few written records remain from the remote past that most historians of the ancient world also perform archeological research, and all archeologists are also at least conversant with the relevant histories of their areas of study.

Hominids

Human beings are members of a species of hominid, which is the same biological classification that includes the advanced apes like chimpanzees. The earliest hominid ancestor of humankind was called *Australopithecus*: a biological species of African hominid (note: hominid is the biological "family" that encompasses great apes – Australopithecus, as well as Homo Sapiens, are examples of biological "species" within that family) that evolved about 3.9 million years ago. Australopithecus was similar to present-day chimpanzees, loping across the ground on all fours rather than standing upright, with brains about one-third the size of the modern human brain. They were the first to develop tool-making technology, chipping obsidian (volcanic glass) to

make knives. From Australopithecus, various other hominid species evolved, building on the genetic advantages of having a large brain and being able to craft simple tools.

Homo sapiens emerged in a form biologically identical to present-day humankind by about 300,000 years ago (fossil evidence frequently revises that number – the oldest known specimen was discovered in Morocco in 2017). Armed with their unparalleled craniums, Homo sapiens created sophisticated bone and stone implements, including weapons and tools, and also mastered the use of fire. They were thus able to hunt and protect themselves from animals that had far better natural weapons, and (through cooking) eat meat that would have been indigestible raw. Likewise, animal skins served as clothes and shelter, allowing them to exist in climates that they could not have settled otherwise.

Civilization and Agriculture

Thus, human beings have existed all over the world for many thousands of years. Human *civilization*, however, has not. The word civilization is tied to the Greek word for city, along with words like "civil" and "civic." The key element of the definition is the idea that a large number of people come together in a group that is too large to consist only of an extended family group. Once that occurred other discoveries and developments, from writing to mathematics to organized religion, followed.

Up until that point in history, however, cities had not been possible because there was never enough food to sustain a large group that stayed in a single place for long. Ancient humans were hunter-gatherers. They followed herds of animals on the hunt and they gathered edible plants as well. This way of life fundamentally *worked* for hundreds of thousands of years – it was the basis of life for the very people who populated the world as described above. The problem with the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, however, is that it is extremely precarious: there is never a significant surplus of caloric energy, that is, of food, and thus population levels among hunting-gathering people were generally static. There just was not enough food to sustain significant population growth.

Starting around 9,500 BCE, humans in a handful of regions around the world discovered agriculture, that is, the deliberate cultivation of edible plants. People discovered that certain seeds could be planted and crops could be reliably grown. Sometimes after that, people in the same regions began to domesticate animals, keeping herds of cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats in controlled conditions, defending them from predators, and eating them and using their hides. It is impossible to overstate how important these changes were. Even fairly primitive agriculture can produce fifty times more caloric energy than hunting and gathering does. The very basis of human life is how much energy we can derive from food; with agriculture and animal domestication, it was possible for families to grow much larger and overall population levels to rise dramatically.

One of the noteworthy aspects of this transition is that hunting-gathering people actually had much more leisure time than farmers did (and were also healthier and longer-lived). Archaeologists and anthropologists have determined that hunter-gatherer people generally only "worked" for a few hours a day, and spent the rest of their time in leisure activities. Meanwhile, farmers have always worked incredibly hard for very long

hours; in many places in the ancient world, there were groups of people who remained hunter-gatherers despite knowing about agriculture, and it is quite possible they did that because they saw no particular advantage in adopting agriculture. There were also many areas that practiced both – right up until the modern era, many farmers also foraged in areas of semi-wilderness near their farms.

Agriculture was developed in a few different places completely independently. According to archeological evidence, agriculture did not start in one place and then spread; it started in a few distinct areas and then spread from those areas, sometimes meeting in the middle. For example, agriculture developed independently in China by 5000 BCE, and of course agriculture in the Americas (starting in western South America) had nothing to do with its earlier invention in the Fertile Crescent.

The most important regions for the development of Western Civilization were Mesopotamia and Egypt, because it was from those regions that the different technologies, empires, and ideas that came together in Western Civilization were forged. Thus, it is important to emphasize that the original heartland of Western Civilization was not in Greece or anywhere else in Europe; it was in the Middle East and North Africa. Many of the different elements of Western Civilization, things like scientific inquiry, the religions of the book (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), engineering, and mathematics, were originally conceived in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

The earliest sites of agriculture emerged in the Fertile Crescent, the region encompassing Egypt along the Nile river, the Near East, and Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia, on the eastern end of the Fertile Crescent, was the cradle of Western Civilization. It has the distinction of being the very first place on earth in which the development of agriculture led to the emergence of the essential technologies of civilization. Many of the great scientific advances to follow, including mathematics, astronomy, and engineering, along with political networks and forms of organization like kingdoms, empires, and bureaucracy all originated in Mesopotamia.

Mesopotamia is a region in present-day Iraq. The word Mesopotamia is Greek, meaning "between the

rivers," and it refers to the area between the Tigris and Euphrates, two of the most important waterways in the ancient world. It is no coincidence that it was here that civilization was born: like nearby Egypt and the Nile river, early agriculture relied on a regular supply of water in a highly fertile region. The ancient Mesopotamians had everything they needed for agriculture, they just had to figure out how to cultivate cereals and grains (natural varieties of which naturally occurred in the area, as noted in the last chapter) and how to manage the sudden floods of both rivers.

Mesopotamia's climate was much more temperate and fertile than it is today. There is a great deal of evidence (e.g. in ancient art, in archeological discoveries of ancient settlements, etc.) that Mesopotamia was once a grassland that could support both large herds of animals and abundant crops. Thus, between the water provided by the rivers and their tributaries, the temperate climate, and the prevalence of the plant and animal species in the area that were candidates for domestication, Mesopotamia was better suited to agriculture than practically any other region on the planet.

While the Tigris and Euphrates provided abundant water, they were highly unpredictable and given to periodic flooding. The southern region of Mesopotamia, Sumer, has an elevation decline of only 50 meters over about 500 kilometers of distance, meaning the riverbeds of both rivers would have shifted and spread out over the plains in the annual floods. Over time, the inhabitants of villages realized that they needed to work together to build larger-scale levees, canals, and dikes to protect against the floods. One theory regarding the origins of large-scale settlements is that, when enough villages got together to work on these hydrological systems, they needed some kind of leadership to direct the efforts, leading to systems of governance and administration. Thus, the earliest cities in the world may have been born not just out of agriculture, but out of the need to manage the natural resource of water.

The first settlements that straddled the line between "towns" and real "cities" existed around 4000 BCE, but a truly urban society in Mesopotamia was in place closer 3000 BCE, wherein a few dozen city-states managed the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates. A note on the chronology: the town of Çatal Höyük discussed above existed over four *thousand* years before the first great cities in Mesopotamia. It is important to bear this in mind, because when considering ancient history (in this case, in a short chapter of a textbook), it can seem like it all happened quite rapidly, that people discovered agriculture and soon they were building massive cities and developing advanced technology. That simply was not the case: compared to the hundreds of thousands of years preceding the discovery of agriculture, things moved "quickly," but from a modern perspective, it took a very long time for things to change.

One compelling theory about the period between the invention of agriculture and the emergence of large cities (again, between about 8,000 BCE and 4000 BCE) is that a hybrid lifestyle of farming and gathering appears to have been very common in the large wetlands along the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris. Given the richness of dietary options in the region at the time, people lived in small communities for millenia without feeling compelled to build larger settlements. Somehow, however, a regime eventually emerged that imposed a new form of social organization and hierarchy, introducing taxation, large-scale building projects, and unfree labor (i.e. both slavery and forms of indentured labor). In turn, this appears to have occurred in the areas that

grew cereal grains like wheat and barley extensively, because cereal grains were easy to collect and store, making them easy to tax.

The result of these new hierarchies were the first true cities emerged in the southern region of Sumer. There, the two rivers join in a large delta that flows into the Persian Gulf. Farther up the rivers, the northern region of Mesopotamia was known as Akkad. The division is both geographical and lingual: ancient Sumerian is not related to any modern language, but the Akkadian family of languages was Semitic, related to modern languages like Arabic and Hebrew. Urban civilization eventually flourished in both regions, starting in Sumer but quickly spreading north.

One early Sumerian city was Uruk, which was a large city by 3500 BCE. Uruk had about 50,000 people in the city itself and the surrounding region. It was a major center for long-distance trade, with its trade networks stretching all across the Middle East and as far east as the Indus river valley of India, with merchants relying on caravans of donkeys and the use of wheeled carts. Trade linked Mesopotamia and Anatolia (the region of present-day Turkey) as well. The economy of Uruk was what historians call "redistributive," in which a central authority has the right to control all economic activity, essentially taxing all of it, and then re-distributing it as that authority sees fit. Practically speaking, this entailed the collection of foodstuffs and wealth by each city-state's government, which then used it to "pay" (sometimes in daily allotments of food and beer) workers tasked with constructing walls, roads, temples, and palaces.

The influence of Sumerian civilization was felt all over the Mesopotamian region. The above map depicts the "Urukean expansion," a period in the fourth millennium BCE in which Sumerian material culture (and presumably Sumerian people) spread hundreds of miles from Sumer itself.

Political leaders in ancient Mesopotamia appear to have been drawn from both priesthoods and the warrior elite, with the two classes working closely together in governing the cities. Each Mesopotamian city was believed to be "owned" by a patron god, a deity that watched over it and would respond to prayers if they were properly made and accompanied by rituals and sacrifices. The priests of Uruk predicted the future and explained the present in terms of the will of the gods, and they claimed to be able to influence the gods through their rituals. They claimed all of the economic output of Uruk and its trade network because the city's patron god "owned" the city, which justified the priesthood's control. They did not only tax the wealth, the crops, and the goods of the subjects of Uruk, but they also had a right to demand labor, requiring the common people (i.e. almost everyone) to work on the irrigation systems, the temples, and the other major public buildings.

Meanwhile, the first kings were almost certainly war leaders who led their city-states against rival city-states and against foreign invaders. They soon ascended to positions of political power in their cities, working

with the priesthood to maintain control over the common people. The Mesopotamian priesthood endorsed the idea that the gods had chosen the kings to rule, a belief that quickly bled over into the idea that the kings were at least in part divine themselves. Kings had superseded priests as the rulers by about 3000 BCE, although in all cases kings were closely linked to the power of the priesthood. In fact, one of the earliest terms for "king" was *ensis*, meaning the representative of the god who "really" ruled the city. Thus, the typical early Mesopotamian city-state, right around 2500 BCE, was of a city-state engaged in long-distance trade, ruled by a king who worked closely with the city's priesthood and who frequently made war against his neighbors.

Belief, Thought and Learning

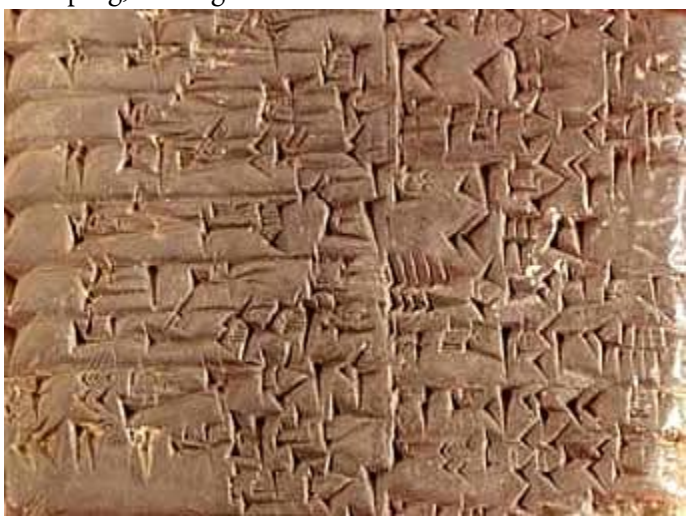
The Mesopotamians believed that the gods were generally cruel, capricious, and easily offended. Humans had been created by the gods not to enjoy life, but to toil, and the gods would inflict pain and suffering on humans whenever they (the gods) were offended. A major element of the power of the priesthood in the Mesopotamian cities was the fact that the priests claimed to be able to soothe and assuage the gods, to prevent the gods from sending yet another devastating flood, epidemic, or plague of locusts. It is not too far off to say that the most important duty of Mesopotamian priests was to beg the gods for mercy.

All of the Mesopotamian cities worshiped the same gods, referred to as the Mesopotamian pantheon (pantheon means "group of gods.") As noted above, each city had its own specific patron deity who "owned" and took particular interest in the affairs of that city. In the center of each city was a huge temple called a ziggurat, or step-pyramid, a few of which still survive today. Unlike the Egyptian pyramids that came later, Mesopotamian ziggurats were not tombs, but temples, and as such they were the centerpieces of the great cities. They were not just the centers of worship, but were also banks and workshops, with the priests overseeing the exchange of wealth and the production of crafts.

Alongside the development of religious belief, science made major strides in Mesopotamian civilization. The Mesopotamians were the first great astronomers, accurately mapping the movement of the stars and recording them in star charts. They invented functional wagons and chariots and, as seen in the case of both ziggurats and irrigation systems, they were excellent engineers. They also invented the 360 degrees used to measure angles in geometry and they were the first to divide a system of timekeeping that used a 60-second minute. Finally, they developed a complex and accurate system of arithmetic that would go on to form the basis of mathematics as it was used and understood throughout the ancient Mediterranean world.

At the same time, however, the Mesopotamians employed "magical" practices. The priests did not just conduct sacrifices to the gods, they practiced the art of divination: the practice of trying to predict the future. To them, magic and science were all aspects of the same pursuit, namely trying to learn about how the universe functioned so that human beings could influence it more effectively. From the perspective of the ancient Mesopotamians, there was little that distinguished religious and magical practices from "real" science in the modern sense. Their goals were the same, and the Mesopotamians actively experimented to develop both systems in tandem.

The Mesopotamians also invented the first systems of writing, first developed in order to keep track of tax records sometime around 3000 BCE. Their style of writing is called *cuneiform*; it started out as a pictographic system in which each word or idea was represented by a symbol, but it eventually changed to include both pictographs and syllabic symbols (i.e. symbols that represent a sound instead of a word). While it was originally used just for record-keeping, writing soon evolved into the creation of true forms of literature.



An example of cuneiform script, carved into a stone tablet, dating from c. 2400 BCE.

The first known author in history whose name and some of whose works survive was a Sumerian high priestess, Enheduanna. Daughter of the great conqueror Sargon of Akkad (described below), Enheduanna served as the high priestess of the goddess Innana and the god of the moon, Nanna, in the city of Ur after its conquest by Sargon's forces. Enheduanna wrote a series of hymns to the gods that established her as the earliest poet in recorded history, praising Innana and, at one point, asking for the aid of the gods during a period of political turmoil.

Enheduanna did not record the first known work of prose, however, whose author or authors remain unknown. Remembered as The Epic of Gilgamesh, the earliest surviving work of literature, it is the best known of the surviving Mesopotamian stories. The Epic describes the adventures of a partly-divine king of the city of Uruk, Gilgamesh, who is joined by his friend Enkidu as they fight monsters, build great works, and celebrate their own power and greatness. Enkidu is punished by the gods for their arrogance and he dies. Gilgamesh, grief-stricken, goes in search of immortality when he realizes that he, too, will someday die. In the end, immortality is taken from him by a serpent, and humbled, he returns to Uruk a wiser, better king.

Like Enheduanna's hymns, which reveal at times her own personality and concerns, The Epic of Gilgamesh is a fascinating story in that it speaks to a very sophisticated and recognizable set of issues: the qualities that make a good leader, human failings and frailty, the power and importance of friendship, and the unfairness of fate. Likewise, a central focus of the epic is Gilgamesh's quest for immortality when he confronts the absurdity of death. Death's seeming unfairness is a distinctly philosophical concern that demonstrates an advanced engagement with human nature and the human condition present in Mesopotamian society.

Along with literature, the other great written accomplishments of the Mesopotamians were their sys-

tems of law. The most substantial surviving law code is that of the Babylonian king Hammurabi, dating from about 1780 BCE. Hammurabi's law code went into great detail about the rights and obligations of Babylonians. It drew legal distinctions between the "free men" or aristocratic citizens, commoners, and slaves, treating the same crimes very differently. The laws speak to a deep concern with fairness – the code tried to protect people from unfair terms on loans, it provided redress for damaged property, it even held city officials responsible for catching criminals. It also included legal protections for women in various ways. While women were unquestionably secondary to men in their legal status, the Code still afforded them more rights and protections than did many codes of law that emerged thousands of years later.

War and Empire

Mesopotamia represents the earliest indications of large-scale warfare. Mesopotamian cities always had walls – some of which were 30 feet high and 60 feet wide, essentially enormous piles of earth strengthened by brick. The evidence (based on pictures and inscriptions) suggests, however, that most soldiers were peasant conscripts with little or no armor and light weapons. In these circumstances, defense almost always won out over offense, making the actual conquest of foreign cities very difficult if not impossible, and hence while cities were around for thousands of years (again, from about 3500 BCE), there were no *empires* yet. Cities warred on one another for territory, captives, and riches, but they rarely succeeded in conquering other cities outright. War was instead primarily about territorial raids and perhaps noble combats meant to demonstrate strength and power.

Over the course of the third millennium BCE, chariots became increasingly important in warfare. Early chariots were four-wheeled carts that were clumsy and hard to maneuver. They were still very effective against hapless peasants with spears, however, so it appears that when rival Mesopotamian city-states fought actual battles, they consisted largely of massed groups of chariots carrying archers who shot at each other. Noble charioteers and archers could win glory for their skill, even though these battles were probably not very lethal (compared to later forms of war, at any rate).

The first time that a single military leader managed to conquer and unite many of the Mesopotamian cities was in about 2340 BCE, when the king Sargon the Great, also known as Sargon of Akkad (father of Enheduanna, described above), conquered almost all of the major Mesopotamian cities and forged the world's first true empire, in the process uniting the regions of Akkad and Sumer. His empire appears to have held together for about another century, until somewhere around 2200 BCE. Sargon also created the world's first standing army, a group of soldiers employed by the state who did not have other jobs or duties. One inscription claims that "5,400 soldiers ate daily in his palace," and there are pictures not only of soldiers, but of siege weapons and mining (digging under the walls of enemy fortifications to cause them to collapse).

The expansion of Sargon's empire, which eventually stretched from present-day Lebanon to Sumer.

Sargon himself was born an illegitimate child and was, at one point, a royal gardener who worked his way up in the palace, eventually seizing power in a coup. He boasted about his lowly origins and claimed to protect and represent the interests of common people and merchants. Sargon appointed governors in his conquered cities, and his whole empire was designed to extract wealth from all of its cities and farmlands and pump it back to the capital of Akkad, which he built somewhere near present-day Baghdad. While his descendents did their best to hold on to power, the resentment of the subject cities eventually resulted in the empire's collapse.

The next major Mesopotamian empire was the "Ur III" dynasty, named after the city-state of Ur which served as its capital and founded in about 2112 BCE. Just as Sargon had, the king Ur-Nammu conquered and united most of the city-states of Mesopotamia. The most important historical legacy of the Ur III dynasty was its complex system of bureaucracy, which was more effective in governing the conquered cities than Sargon's rule had been.

Bureaucracy (which literally means "rule by office") is one of the most underappreciated phenomena in history, probably because the concept is not particularly exciting to most people. The fact remains that there is no more efficient way yet invented to manage large groups of people: it was viable to coordinate small groups through the personal control and influence of a few individuals, but as cities grew and empires formed, it became untenable to have everything boil down to personal relationships. An efficient bureaucracy, one in which the individual people who were part of it were less important than the system itself (i.e. its rules, its records, and its chain of command), was always essential in large political units.

The Ur III dynasty is an example of an early bureaucratic empire. Historians have more records of this

dynasty than any other from this period of ancient Mesopotamia thanks to its focus on codifying its regulations. The kings of Ur III were very adept at playing off their civic and military leaders against each other, appointing generals to direct troops in other cities and making sure that each governor's power relied on his loyalty to the king. The administration of the Ur III dynasty divided the empire into three distinct tax regions, and its tax bureaucracy collected wealth without alienating the conquered peoples as much as Sargon and his descendants had (despite its relative success, Ur III, too, eventually collapsed, although it was due to a foreign invasion rather than an internal revolt).

Finally, there was the great empire of Hammurabi (which lasted from 1792 – 1595 BCE), the author of the code of laws noted above. By about 1780 BCE, Hammurabi conquered many of the city-states near Babylon in the heart of Mesopotamia. He was not only concerned with laws, but also with ensuring the economic prosperity of his empire; while it is impossible to know how sincere he was about it, he wanted to be remembered as a kind of benevolent dictator who looked after his subjects. The Babylonian empire re-centered Mesopotamia as a whole on Babylon. It lasted until 1595 BCE when it was defeated by an empire from Anatolia known as the Hittites.

What all of these ancient empires had in common beyond a common culture was that they were very precarious. Their bureaucracies were not large enough or organized enough to manage large populations easily, and rebellions were frequent. There was also the constant threat of what the surviving texts refer to as "bandits," which in this context means the same thing as "barbarians." To the north of Mesopotamia is the beginning of the great steppes of Central Asia, the source of limitless and almost nonstop invasions throughout ancient history. Nomads from the steppe regions were the first to domesticate horses, and for thousands of years only steppe peoples knew how to fight directly from horseback instead of using chariots. Thus, the rulers of the Mesopotamian city-states and empires all had to contend with policing their borders against a foe they could not pursue, while still maintaining control over their own cities.

This precarity was responsible for the fact that these early empires were not especially long-lasting, and were unable to conquer territory outside of Mesopotamia itself. What came afterwards were the first early empires that, through a combination of governing techniques, beliefs, and technology, were able to grow much larger and more powerful.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Fertile crescent map – NormanEinstein

Sumerian expansion map – Sémhur

Cuneiform – Salvor

Sargon map – Nareklm

Chapter attribution: This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 1: The Origins of Civilizations in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH: THE STORY OF THE FLOOD,

Please use the link of Blackboard to access The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Story of the Flood ca. 2100 BCE.

Source:

Sandars, N. K., trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Penguin Books, 1960.

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Story of the Flood*.

Reading Journal

In order to analyze a primary source text, you need to understand it. In your own words, briefly summarize the story of the flood. Make sure to identify the main figures in this story, as well as who is a god and who is a human.

Study Guide Introduction Activity

For the first two modules, you will begin building the study guide on your own. To start, identify two important dates or events, two important figures, and two important developments that are covered in this week's material. Organize them chronologically. Eventually your work will be collaborative, but for this assignment, use the submission link on Blackboard.

PART III

MODULE TWO: ANCIENT EGYPTIANS AND ANCIENT HEBREWS

READING: ANCIENT EGYPT

Christopher Brooks

The Mesopotamians regarded the gods as cruel and arbitrary and thought that human existence was not a very pleasant experience. This attitude was not only shaped by all of the things that ancient people did not understand, like disease, weather, and death itself, but by the simple fact that it was often difficult to live next to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which flooded unpredictably and necessitated constant work in order to be useful for irrigation. Likewise, the threat of invasion from both rival cities and from foreigners (both "barbarians" and more organized groups) threatened to disrupt whatever stability existed. Life for most Mesopotamians, especially the vast majority who were common farmers, was not easy.

Things were a bit different in the other great ancient civilization of the eastern Mediterranean: Egypt, whose civilization developed along the banks of the Nile river. The Nile is the world's longest river, stretching over 4,000 miles from its mouth in the Mediterranean to its origin in Lake Victoria in Central Africa. Because of consistent weather patterns, the Nile floods every year at just about the same time (late summer), depositing enormous amounts of mud and silt along its banks and making it one of the most fertile regions in the world. The essential source of energy for the Egyptians was thus something that could be predicted and planned for in a way that was impossible in Mesopotamia. There is a direct connection between this predictability and the incredible stability of Egyptian civilization, which (despite new kings and new dynasties and the occasional foreign invasion) remained remarkably stable and consistent for thousands of years.

The Egyptians themselves called the Nile valley "Kemet," the Black Land, because of the annually-renewed black soil that arrived with the flood. For the most part, this *was* ancient Egypt: a swath of land between 10 and 20 miles wide (and in some places merely 1 or 2 miles wide) made up of incredibly fertile soil that relied on the floods of the Nile. This land was so agriculturally productive that Egyptian peasants could bring in harvests three times as bountiful of those in other regions like Mesopotamia. In turn, this created an enormous surplus of wealth for the royal government, which had the right to tax and redistribute it (as did the Mesopotamian states to the east). Beyond that strip of land were deserts populated by people the Egyptians simply dismissed as "bandits" – meaning nomads and tribal groups, not just robbers.

Ancient Egypt's Old Kingdom came into being with the unification of Lower Egypt, where the Nile empties into the Mediterranean, and Upper Egypt, where the Nile leads into Nubia (present-day Sudan).

There were three major periods in ancient Egyptian history, the time during which Egypt was not subject to foreign powers and during which it developed its distinctive culture and built its spectacular examples of monumental architecture: the Old Kingdom (2680 – 2200 BCE), the Middle Kingdom (2040 – 1720 BCE), and the New Kingdom (1550 – 1150 BCE). There were also two "intermediate periods" between the Old and Middle Kingdoms (The First Intermediate Period, 2200 – 2040 BCE) and Middle and New Kingdoms (The Second Intermediate Period, 1720 – 1550 BCE). These were periods during which the political control of the ruling dynasty broke down and rival groups fought for control. The very large overarching story of ancient Egyptian history is that each of the different major kingdoms was quite stable and relatively peaceful, while the intermediary periods were troubled, violent, and chaotic. The remarkable thing about the history overall is

the simple fact of its longevity; even compared to other ancient cultures (Mesopotamia, for instance), Egyptian politics were incredibly consistent.

The concept of these different periods was created by Manetho, an Egyptian priest who, in about 300 BCE, recorded the "definitive" history of the ancient kings and created the very notion of the old, middle, and new kingdoms. While that periodization overlooks some of the specifics of Egyptian history, it is still the preferred method for dating ancient Egypt to this day because of its simplicity and clarity.

Also, a note on nomenclature: the term "pharaoh" means "great house," the term used for the royal palace and its vast supporting bureaucracy. It came to be used to refer to the king himself starting in the New Kingdom period; it would be as if the American president was called "the White House" in everyday language. This chapter will use the term "king" for the kings of Egypt leading up to the New Kingdom, then "pharaoh" for the New Kingdom rulers to reflect the accurate use of the term.

The Political history of ancient Egypt

Egypt was divided between "Upper Egypt," the southern stretch of the Nile Valley that relied on the Nile floods for irrigation, and "Lower Egypt," the enormous delta region where the Nile meets the Mediterranean. The two regions had been politically distinct for centuries, but (according to both archeology and the dating system created by Manetho) in roughly 3100 BCE Narmer, a king of Upper Egypt, conquered Lower Egypt and united the country for the first time. The date used for the founding of the Old Kingdom of Egypt, 2680 BCE, is when the third royal dynasty to rule all of Egypt established itself. Its king, Djoser, was the first to commission an enormous tomb to house his remains when he died: the first pyramid. The Old Kingdom represented a long, unbroken line of kings that presided over the first full flowering of Egyptian culture, architecture, and prosperity.

The Old Kingdom united Egypt under a single ruling house, developed systems of record-keeping, and formed an all-important caste of scribes, the royal bureaucrats who mastered hieroglyphic writing. Likewise, the essential characteristics of Egyptian religion emerged during the Old Kingdom, especially the idea that the king was actually a god and that his rule ensured that the world itself would continue – the Egyptians thought that if there was no king or the proper prayers were not recited by the priests, terrible chaos and destruction would reign on earth.

The Old Kingdom was stable and powerful, although its kings did not use that power to expand their borders beyond Egypt itself. Instead, all of Old Kingdom society revolved around the production of agricultural surpluses from the Nile, efficiently cataloged and taxed by the royal bureaucracy and "spent" on building enormous temples and, in time, tombs. The pyramids of Egypt were all built during the Old Kingdom, and their purpose was to house the bodies of the kings so that their spirits could travel to the land of the dead and join their fellow gods in the afterlife (thereby maintaining *ma'at* – sacred order and balance).

A present-day picture of the Great Pyramid, outside of Cairo.

The pyramids are justly famous as the ultimate example of Egyptian prosperity and ingenuity. The Great Pyramid of Khufu, the single largest pyramid of the period, contained over 2.5 million stone blocks, each weighing approximately 2.5 tons. The sheer amount of energy expended on the construction of the pyramids is thus staggering; it was only the incredible bounty of the Nile and its harvests that enabled the construction of the pyramids by providing the calories consumed by the workers and draught animals, the wealth used to employ the supporting bureaucracy, and the size of the population that sustained the entire enterprise. Likewise, while the details are now lost, the Old Kingdom's government must have been highly effective at tax collection and the distribution of food, supplies, and work teams. Pyramids on the scale of the Old Kingdom would have been all but impossible anywhere else in the world at the time.

A major factor in the stability of Old Kingdom Egypt was that it was very isolated. Despite its geographical proximity to Mesopotamia and Anatolia, Egypt at the time was largely separated from the civilizations of those regions. The Sinai Peninsula, which divides Egypt from present-day Palestine and Israel, is about 120 miles of desert. With a few violent exceptions, no major incursions were able to cross over Sinai, and contact with the cultures of Mesopotamia and the Near East was limited as a result. Likewise, even though Egypt is on the Mediterranean, sailing technology was so primitive that there was little contact with other cultures via the sea.

Around 2200 BCE, two hundred years after the last pyramids were built, the Old Kingdom collapsed, leading to the First Intermediate Period. The reason for the collapse is not clear, but it probably had to do with the very infrequent occurrence of drought. There are written records from this period of instability, known as

the First Intermediate Period, that make it clear that Egyptians knew very well that things had been fundamentally upset and imbalanced, and they did not know what to do about it. The kings were supposed to oversee the harmony of life and yet the royal dynasty had collapsed without a replacement. This disrupted the entire Egyptian worldview.

In turn, this disruption prompted a development in Egyptian religion. The Egyptian religion of the Old Kingdom had emphasized life on earth; even though the pyramids were tombs built to house the kings and the things they would need on their journey to the afterlife, there are no records with details about how most people would fare after they died. This changed during the First Intermediate Period, when the Egyptians invented the idea that the suffering of the present life might be overcome in a more perfect world to come. After death, the soul would be brought before a judge of the gods, who would weigh the heart on scales against the ideals of harmony and order. At this point, the heart might betray the soul, telling the god all of the sins its owner had committed in life. The lucky and virtuous person, though, would see their heart balance against the ideal of order and the soul would be rewarded with eternal life. Otherwise, their heart would be tossed to a crocodile-headed demon and devoured, the soul perishing in the process.

Monumental building ceased during the Intermediate Period – there were no more pyramids, palaces, or temples being built. A major social change that occurred was that royal officials away from the capital started to inherit titles, and thus it was the first time there was a real noble class with its own inherited power and land. Some historians have argued that a major cause of the collapse of royal authority was the growth in power of the nobility: in other words, royal authority did not fall apart first and lead to elites seizing more power, elites seized power and thereby weakened royal authority. The irony of the period is that the economy of Egypt actually diversified and expanded. It seems to have been a time in which a new elite commissioned royal-inspired goods and hence supported emerging craftspeople.

The Middle Kingdom was the next great Egyptian kingdom of the ancient world. The governor of the city of Thebes reunified the kingdom and established himself as the new king (Mentuhotep II, r. 2060 – 2010 BCE). One major change in Egyptian belief is that the Middle Kingdom rulers still claimed to be at least partly divine, but they also emphasized their humanity. They wrote about themselves as shepherds trying to maintain the balance of harmony in Egypt and to protect their people, rather than just as lords over an immortal kingdom. Their nobles had more power than had the nobility of the Old Kingdom as well, playing important political roles on their lands.

Starting during the Middle Kingdom, the kings made a major effort to extend Egyptian power and influence beyond the traditional "core" of the kingdom in Egypt itself. Egypt exerted military power and extracted wealth from the northern part of the kingdom of Nubia (in present-day Sudan) to the south, and also established at least limited ongoing contact with Mesopotamia as well. The kings actively encouraged immigration from outside of Egypt, but insisted that immigrants settle among Egyptians. They had the same policy with war captives, often settling them as farmers in the midst of Egyptians. This ensured speedy acculturation and helped bring foreign talent into Egypt.

While no more pyramids were ever built – it appears that the nearly obsessive focus on the spirit of the

king after death was confined to the Old Kingdom – the Middle Kingdom was definitely a period of stability and prosperity for Egypt as a whole. A fairly diverse body of literature survived in the form of writings on papyrus, the form of paper made from Nile reeds monopolized by Egypt for centuries, that suggests that commerce was extensive, Egyptian religion celebrated the spiritual importance of ordinary people, and fairness and justice were regarded as major ethical imperatives.

Things spun out of control for the Middle Kingdom starting in about 1720 BCE, roughly 300 years after it had been founded, leading in turn to the Second Intermediate Period. Settlers from Canaan (present-day Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, and parts of Syria) had been streaming into Egypt for generations, initially settling and assimilating into Egyptian society. By about 1650 BCE, however, a group of Canaanites founded what was known as the "Hyksos" dynasty, an Egyptian term which simply means "leaders of foreigners," after they overthrew the king and seized power in Lower Egypt. While they started as "foreigners," the Hyksos quickly adopted the practices of the Egyptian kings they had overthrown, using Egyptian scribes to keep records in hieroglyphics, worshiping the local gods, and generally behaving like Egyptians.

The most significant innovation introduced by the Hyksos was the use of bronze (it should be noted that they introduced horses and chariots as well). There was very limited use of bronze in Egypt until the Second Intermediate Period, with both weapons and tools being crafted from copper or stone. Bronze, an alloy of copper and zinc or nickel, required technical skill and access to its component minerals to craft. The finished product was far harder and more durable than was copper alone, however, and with the advent of large-scale bronze use in Egypt thanks to the Hyksos, the possibilities for the growth of Egyptian power increased greatly. Bronze had already been in use for over a thousand years by the time it became common in Egypt, but when it finally arrived with Canaanite craftsmen it radically altered the balance of power. Up to that point, Egyptian technology, especially in terms of metallurgy, was quite primitive. Egyptian soldiers were often nothing more than peasants armed with copper knives, spears with copper heads, or even just clubs. Egypt's relative isolation meant that it had never needed to develop more advanced weapons, a fact that the Hyksos were able to take advantage of, belatedly bringing the large-scale use of bronze with them.

In 1550 BCE, the Second Intermediate Period ended when another Egyptian king, Ahmose I, expelled the Hyksos from Egypt. Thus began the New Kingdom, the most powerful to date. This was also when the Egyptian kings started calling themselves pharaohs, which means "great house," lord over all things. Using the new bronze military technology, the New Kingdom was (at times) able to expand Egyptian control all the way into Mesopotamia. Bronze was the key factor, but also important was the adoption of composite bows: bows that are made from strips of animal bone and sinew, glued together. A composite bow was much more powerful than a wooden one, and they greatly enhanced the power of the Egyptian military. Likewise, again thanks to the Hyksos, the New Kingdom was able to employ chariots in war for the first time. One in ten men was impressed into military service, supplemented with auxiliaries from conquered lands as well as mercenary forces.

While the Egyptians had always considered themselves to be the favored people of the gods, dwelling in the home of spiritual harmony in the universe, it was really during the New Kingdom that they actively

campaigned to take over foreign lands. The idea was that divine harmony existed only in Egypt and had to be brought to the rest of the world, by force if necessary. By 1500 BCE, only 50 years after the founding of the new kingdom, Egypt had conquered Canaan and much of Syria. It then conquered northern Nubia. The pharaohs dispatched communities of Egyptians to settle conquered lands, both to pacify those lands and to exploit natural resources in order to increase royal revenue.

The New Kingdom pharaohs enlisted the leaders of the lands they had conquered as puppet kings, surrounded by Egyptian advisors. The pharaohs adopted the practice of bringing many foreign princes of the lands they had conquered back to Egypt. There, a prince would be raised as an Egyptian and educated to think of Egyptian civilization as both superior to others and their own. Thus, when they returned to rule after their fathers died, these princes would often be thoroughly assimilated to Egyptian culture and would naturally be more loyal to the pharaoh; using this technique, the New Kingdom was able to create several "puppet states," places with their own rulers who were loyal to Egypt, in the Near and Middle East.

The New Kingdom was also the great bureaucratic empire of Egypt. The pharaohs divided Egypt into two administrative regions: Upper Egypt, up the Nile and governed from the city of Thebes, and Lower Egypt, near the Nile delta where it drained into the Mediterranean and ruled from the city of Memphis. Regional administrators did the important work of drafting laborers, extracting taxation, and making sure that agriculture was on track. A single royal official of vast personal power, the vizier, supervised the whole system and personally decided when to open the locks on the Nile to allow the floodwaters out each year.

While royal officials and the priesthoods of the gods held significant power and influence during the New Kingdom, the king (now known as the pharaoh) still ruled as a living god. The pharaohs were still thought to be divine, but that did not mean they simply bullied their subjects. Many letters have survived between pharaohs and their subordinates, as well as between pharaohs and other kings in foreign lands. They played tax breaks, gifts, and benefits off to encourage loyalty to Egypt rather than simply threatening people with divine power or armies.

In addition to the New Kingdom's expansionism, the governments pursued new forms of monumental architecture. While the construction of pyramids never occurred after the Old Kingdom, Egyptian kings remained focused on the creation of great buildings. They continued to build opulent tombs, but those were usually built into hillsides or in more conventional structures, rather than pyramids. The monumental architecture of the New Kingdom consisted of huge temples and statues, most notably the Great Temple at Abu Simbel in northern Nubia, built under the direction of the pharaoh Ramses II at some point around 1250 BCE. There, gigantic statues of the gods sit, and twice a year, the rising sun shines through the entrance and directly illuminates three of them, while the god of the underworld remains in shadow.

The imposing entrance to the Great Temple of Abu Simbel.

Detailed records of noteworthy pharaohs survive from the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom saw the only known female pharaoh, a woman who ruled from 1479 to 1458 BCE. Her name was Hatshepsut; she originally ruled as a regent (i.e. someone who is supposed to rule until the young king comes of age) for her stepson, but then claimed the title of pharaoh and ruled outright. She ruled for 20 years, waged war, and oversaw a period of ongoing prosperity. There were enormous building projects under her supervision, and it was also under her reign that large quantities of sub-Saharan African goods started to be imported from Nubia: gold, incense, live elephants, panther skins, and other forms of wealth. When she died, however, her stepson Thutmose III took the throne. Decades after he became pharaoh, for reasons that are unclear, he tried to erase the memory of his mother's reign, perhaps driven by simple resentment over how long she had held power.

Another pharaoh of note was Amenhotep IV (r. 1353 – 1336 BCE). Amenhotep was infamous in his own lifetime for attempting an ill-considered full-scale religious revolution. He tried to focus all worship of the Egyptian people on an aspect of the sun god, Ra, called Aten. He went so far as to claim that Aten was the only god, something that seemed absurd to the resolutely polytheistic Egyptians. He renamed himself Akhenaten, which means "the one useful to Aten," moved the capital to a new city he had built, sacked the temples of other gods, and even had agents chisel off references to the other gods from buildings and walls. All the while, he

insisted that he and his queen, Nefertiti, be worshiped as gods themselves as the direct representatives of Aten. Historians do not know why he tried to bring about this religious revolution, but one reasonable theory is that he was trying to reduce the power of the priests, who had steadily become richer and more powerful over the centuries at the expense of the pharaohs themselves.

Akhenaten's attempted revolution was a disaster. In the eyes of common people and of later pharaohs, he had fundamentally undermined the very stability of Egypt. In the eyes of his subjects, the royal person was no longer seen as a reliable spiritual anchor – the pharaoh was supposed to be the great protector of the religious and social order, but instead one had tried to completely destroy it. This was the beginning of the end of the central position the pharaoh had enjoyed in the life of all Egyptians up until that point.

Akhenaten's son restored all of the old religious traditions. This was the young king Tutankhamun ("King Tut") (r. 1336 – 1326), who is important for restoring the religion and, arguably, for the simple fact that his tomb was never looted by grave robbers before it was discovered by a British archaeologist in 1922 CE. It provided the single most significant trove of artifacts from the New Kingdom yet found when it was discovered, sparking an interest in ancient Egyptian history all over the world.

The sarcophagus of King Tutankhamun.

A new dynasty of pharaohs ruled the New Kingdom in the aftermath of Akhenaten's disastrous experiment, the most powerful of which was Ramses II (r. 1279 – 1213). Ramses campaigned against the growing power of an empire in the north called the Hittites, one of the major empires of the Bronze Age period (considered in more detail in the next chapter). He ruled for an astonishingly long time and reputedly sired some 160 children with wives and concubines. He also supervised the construction of the Great Temple of Abu Simbel noted above. Ramses was, however, the last of the great pharaohs, with all of those who followed working to stave off disaster more so than expand Egyptian power.

The New Kingdom collapsed in about 1150 BCE. This collapse was part of a much larger pattern across the ancient Middle East and North Africa: the collapse of the Bronze Age itself. In the case of Egypt, this took the form of the first of a series of foreign invasions, that of the "Sea People," whose origins have never been determined despite concentrated scholarship on the question. Later, invaders referred to as "gangs of bandits"

from what is today Libya, to the west of Egypt, further undermined the kingdom, and it finally fell into a long period of political fragmentation. A long period of civil war and conflict engulfed Egypt, and from that point on Egypt proved vulnerable to foreign conquest. In the course of the centuries that followed Assyria, Persia, the Greeks, and the Romans would, one after the other, add Egypt to their respective empires.

Continuities in Egyptian History

The long-term pattern in Egyptian history is that there were long periods of stability and prosperity disrupted by periodic invasions and disasters. Throughout the entire period, however, there were many cultural, spiritual, and intellectual traditions that stayed the same. In terms of the spiritual beliefs of the ancient Egyptians, those traditions most often focused on the identity and the role of the king in relation to the gods. In prosaic politics and social organization, they revolved around the role of the scribes. In terms of foreign relations, they evolved over time as Egypt developed stronger ongoing contacts with neighboring states and cultures.

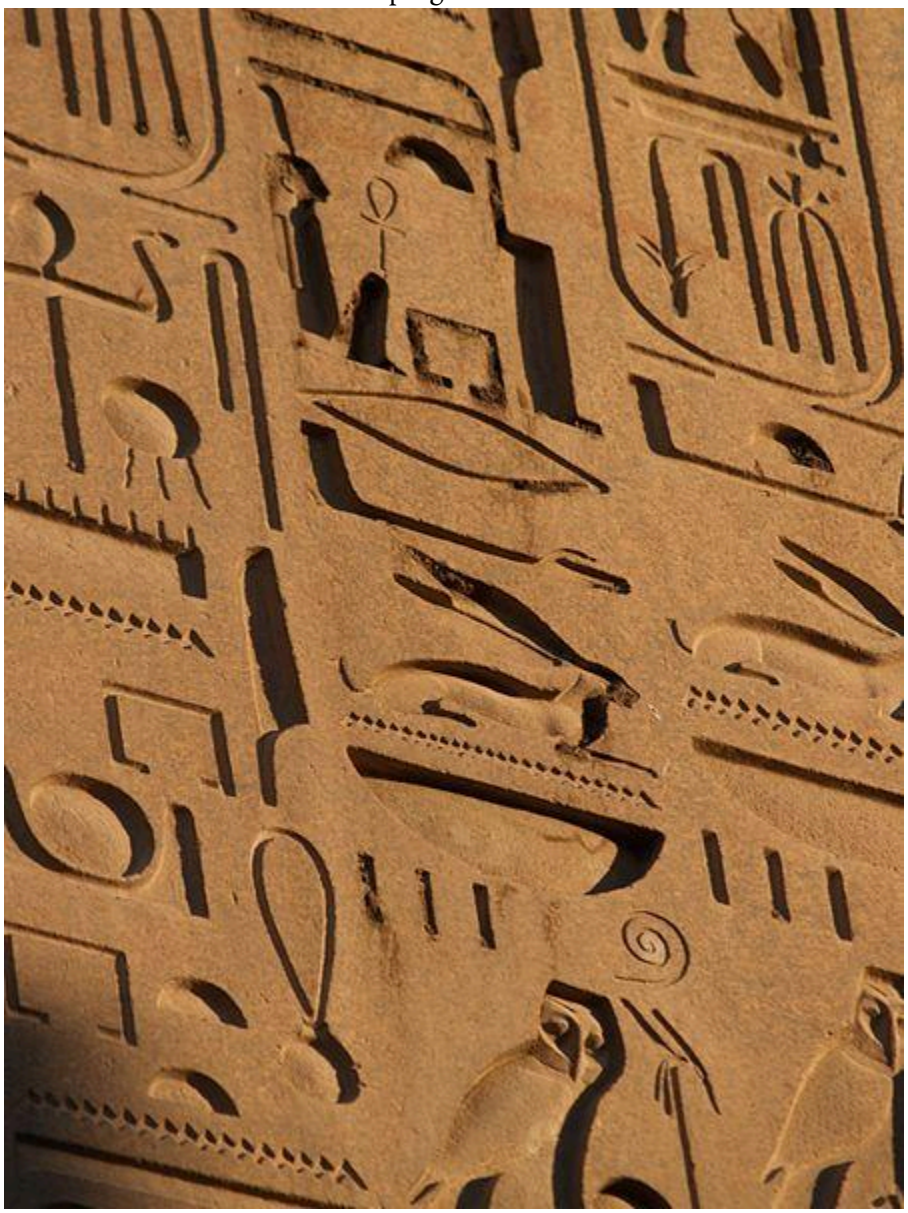
The most important figure in Egyptian spiritual life was the king; he (or sometimes she) was believed to form a direct connection between the gods and the Egyptian people. Each king had five names – his birth name, three having to do with his divine status, and one having to do with rulership of the two unified kingdoms. One of the divine names referred to the divine kingship itself, temporarily linked to the current holder of that title: whoever happened to be king at the time.

The Egyptians had a colorful and memorable set of religious beliefs, one that dominated the lives of the kings, who claimed to be not just reflections of or servants of the gods, but gods themselves on earth. The central theme among the great epic stories of Egyptian religion was that there was a certain order and harmony in the universe that the gods had created, but that it was threatened by forces of destruction and chaos. It was the job of humans, especially Egyptians, to maintain harmony through proper rituals and through making sure that Egyptian society was stable. For Egyptians the world was divided between themselves and everyone else. This was not just a function of arrogance, however, but instead reflected a belief that the gods had designated the Egyptians to be the sacred keepers of order.

One peculiar aspect of the obsessive focus on the person of the king was the fact that the kings often married their sisters and daughters; the idea was that if one was a god, one did not want to pollute the sacred bloodline by having children with mere humans. An unfortunate side effect was, not surprisingly, that there were a lot of fairly deranged and unhealthy Egyptian royalty over the years, since the royal lines were, by definition, inbred. Fortunately for the Egyptian state, however, the backbone of day-to-day politics was the enormous bureaucracy staffed by the scribal class, a class that survived the entire period covered in this chapter.

More writing survives from ancient Egypt than any other ancient civilization of the Mediterranean region. There are two major reasons for that survival. First, Egypt's dry climate ensured that records kept on papyrus had a decent chance of surviving since they were unlikely to rot away. Thousands of papyri documents have been discovered that were simply dumped into holes in the desert and left there; the sand and the climate

conspired to preserve them. Second, Egypt developed an important social class of scribes whose whole vocation was mastering the complex Egyptian writing systems and keeping extensive records of almost every aspect of life, from religious ritual to mundane record-keeping.



An example of hieroglyphics – the above depicts the sacred style used in temple and tomb carvings, as opposed to the "cursive" form used for everyday record keeping.

The writing of ancient Egypt was in hieroglyphics, which are symbols that were adapted over time from pictures. There were several different forms of hieroglyphics, including two distinct alphabets during the period covered in this chapter, all of which were very difficult to master. It took years of training to become literate in hieroglyphics, training that was only afforded to the scribes. Scribes recorded everything from tax records, to mercantile transactions, to the sacred prayers for the dead on the walls of the tombs of kings and nobles. They served as an essential piece of the continuity of Egyptian politics and culture for thousands of years. In other words, because they used the same language and the same alphabets of symbols, and because

they recorded the rituals and transactions of Egyptian society, scribes were a kind of cultural glue that kept things going from generation to generation. In all three of the great dynasties and during the Intermediate Periods, it was the scribes who provided continuity.

As iconic as hieroglyphic writing, which remains famous because of the sheer amount of it that survived carved in stone in tombs and palaces, was the creation of monumental architecture by the Egyptian state, first exemplified by the pyramids. Sometime around 2660 BCE the first pyramid was built for the king Djoser. Djoser was renowned in the Egyptian sources for his wisdom, and centuries after his death he became a legendary figure to later Egyptians. The architect who designed the pyramid, Imhotep, was later deified as a son of Ptah, the god who created the universe. Unlike Mesopotamian ziggurats, which were always temples, the pyramids were always tombs. The purpose of the pyramids was to house the king with all of the luxuries and equipment he would need in his journey to the afterlife, as well as to celebrate the king's legacy and memory.

The pyramids were constructed over a period of about 250 years, from 2660 to 2400 BCE. For a long time, historians thought that they were built by slaves, but it now seems very likely that they were built by free laborers employed by the king and paid by royal agents. Each building block weighed about 2.5 tons and had to be hauled up ramps with ropes and pulleys. As noted above, only Egypt's unique access to the bounty of the Nile provided enough energy for this to be viable. Egypt was the envy of the ancient world because of its incredible wealth, wealth that was the direct result of its huge surplus of grain, all fed by the Nile's floods. The pyramids were built year-round, but work was most intense in September, when the floods of the Nile were at their height and farmers were not able to work the fields. In short, nowhere else on earth *could* the pyramids have been built. There *had* to be a gigantic surplus of energy in the form of calories available to get it done.

Pyramid building itself was the impetus behind the massive expansion of bureaucracy in the Old Kingdom, since the state became synonymous with the diversion and redistribution of resources needed to keep an enormous labor force mobilized. The king could, in theory, requisition anything, mobilize anyone, and generally exercise total control, although practical limits were respected by the administration. Since there was no currency, "payment" to scribes usually took the form of fiefs (i.e. grants of land) that returned to the royal holdings after the official's death, a practice that atrophied after the fall of the Old Kingdom.

Like their neighbors in Mesopotamia, the Egyptians lived in a redistributive economy, an economy in which crops were taken directly from farmers (i.e. peasants) by the agents of the king and then redistributed. Appropriately enough, many of the surviving documents from ancient Egypt are tax records, carefully recorded in hieroglyphics by scribes. Peasants in Egypt were tied to the land they lived on and were thus serfs rather than free peasants. A serf is a farmer who is legally tied to the land he or she works on – they cannot leave the land to look for a better job elsewhere, living in a state very near to slavery. The peasants lived in "closed" villages in which people were not allowed to move in, nor were existing families supposed to move out.

Interestingly, unlike many other ancient societies, women in Egypt were nearly the legal equals of men. They had the legal right to own property, sue, and essentially exist as independent legal entities. This is all the more striking in that many of the legal rights that Egyptian women possessed were not available to women in Europe (or the United States) until the late 1800s CE, over three thousand years later. Likewise, Egyptian

women enjoyed much more legal autonomy than did women in many other ancient societies, particularly that of the Greeks.

Even though the essential characteristic of Egyptian religion and social structure was continuity, its relationships with neighboring cultures did change over time. One important neighbor of Egypt was the kingdom of Nubia to the south, in present-day Sudan. Nubia was rich in gold, ivory, and slaves, seized from neighboring lands, making it a wealthy and powerful place in its own right. Egypt traded with Nubia, but also suffered from raids by warlike Nubian kingdoms. One of the key political posts in Egypt was the Keeper of the Gateway of the South, a military governor who tried to protect trade from these attacks. At the start of the Middle Kingdom, Mentuhotep II managed to not only reunite Egypt, but to conquer the northern portion of Nubia as well. Kings continued this pattern, holding on to Nubian territory and building a series of forts and garrisons to ensure the speedy extraction of Nubian wealth. (Much later, a Nubian king, Piankhy, returned the favor by conquering Egypt – he claimed to be restoring a purer form of Egyptian rule than had survived in Egypt itself!)

Trade contact was not limited to Nubia, of course. Despite the fact that the Egyptians thought of themselves as being superior to other cultures and civilizations, they actively traded with not only Nubia but the various civilizations and peoples of the Near and Middle East. Starting in earnest with the Middle Kingdom, trade caravans linked Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt (and, later, Greece as well). There was a rich diplomatic exchange between the Egyptian kings and the kings of their neighboring lands – overall, they spent far more time trading with their neighbors and sending one another gifts than waging war. Likewise, as noted above in the section on the New Kingdom, military expansionism did not preclude Egypt's membership in a "brotherhood" of other states during the Bronze Age.

That being said, by the time of the Middle Kingdom, there was an organized and fortified military presence on all of Egypt's borders, with particular attention to Nubia and "Asia" (i.e. everything east of the Sinai Peninsula). One king described himself as the "throat-slitter of Asia," and all the way through the New Kingdom, Egyptians tended to regard themselves as being the most important and "central" civilization in the world.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes its detailed consideration of Egypt with the fall of the New Kingdom not because Egyptian civilization vanished, but because it did not enjoy lasting stability under a native Egyptian dynasty again for most of the rest of ancient history. Instead, after the New Kingdom, Egypt was often torn between rival claimants to the title of pharaoh, and beginning with a civilization discussed in the next chapter, the Assyrians, Egypt itself was often conquered by powerful rivals. It is important to bear in mind, however, that Egypt remained the richest place in the ancient world because of the incredible abundance of the Nile, and whether it was the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, or the Arabs doing the conquering, Egypt was always one of the greatest prizes that could be won in conquest. Likewise, Egypt contributed not

just wealth but its unique culture to the surrounding regions, serving as one of the founding elements of Western Civilization as a whole.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Egypt map – Jeff Dahl

Great Pyramid – Kallerna

Tutankhamun's coffin – D. Denisenkov

Hieroglyphics – Sherif217

This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 2: Egypt in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

READING: THE HEBREWS

Christopher Brooks

Ancient Hebrew History

Of the Bronze and Iron-Age cultures, one played perhaps the most vital role in the history of Western Civilization: the Hebrews. The Hebrews, a people who first created a kingdom in the ancient land of Canaan, were among the most important cultures of the western world, comparable to the ancient Greeks or Romans. Unlike the Greeks and Romans, the ancient Hebrews were not known for being scientists or philosophers or conquerors. It was their religion, Judaism, that proved to be of crucial importance in world history, both for its own sake and for being the religious root of Christianity and Islam. Together, these three religions are referred to as the "Religions of the Book" in Islam, because they share a set of beliefs first written down in the Hebrew holy texts and they all venerate the same God. (Note: it should be emphasized that the approach taken here is that of secular historical scholarship: what is known about the historical origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam based on empirical research carried out by historians and archaeologists).

The history of the ancient Hebrews is a difficult subject. The most important source we have about it is the Hebrew Bible itself, which describes in detail the travails of the Hebrews, their enslavement, battles, triumphs, and accomplishments. The problem with using the Hebrew Bible as a historical source is that it is written in a mythic mode – like the literature of every other Iron Age civilization, many events affecting the Hebrews are explained by direct divine intervention rather than a more prosaic historical approach. Also, the Hebrew Bible was written some 400 – 600 years after the events it describes. Thus, what is known about the ancient Hebrews consists of the stories of the Hebrew Bible supplemented by the archaeological record and the information about the Hebrews available from other historical sources.

According to the Hebrew Bible, the first patriarch (male clan leader) of the Hebrews was Abraham, a man who led the Hebrews away from Mesopotamia in about 1900 BCE. The Hebrews left the Mesopotamian city of Ur and became wandering herders; in fact, the word Hebrew originally meant "wanderer" or "nomad." Abraham had a son, Isaac, and Isaac had a son, Jacob, collectively known as the Patriarchs in the Hebrew Bible. The Mesopotamian origins of the Hebrews are unclear from sources outside of the Hebrew Bible itself; archaeological evidence indicates that the Hebrews may have actually been from the Levant, with trade contact with the Mesopotamians, rather than coming from Mesopotamia.

According to Jewish belief, by far the most important thing Abraham did was agree to the Covenant, the promise made between the God Yahweh (the "name" of God is derived from the Hebrew characters for the phrase "I am who I am," the enigmatic response of God when asked for His name by the prophet Moses) and the Hebrews. The Covenant stated that in return for their devotion and worship, and the circumcision of

all Hebrew males, the Hebrews would receive from Yahweh a "land of milk and honey," a place of peace and prosperity of their own for all time.

Then, in about 1600 BCE, the Hebrews went to Egypt to escape famine and were welcomed by the Hyksos dynasty (during the Second Intermediate Period of ancient Egypt). The Hyksos were fellow Canaanites, after all, and they appear to have encouraged the Hebrews to stay. According to the Hebrew Bible, with the rise of the New Kingdom the Hebrews were enslaved, with their leader Moses leading them away sometime around 1300 – 1200 BCE. There is little archaeological or Egyptian textual evidence to support the story of the complete enslavement of the Hebrews, besides references in Egyptian sources to Canaanite laborers. A pharaoh, Merneptah, makes a passing reference to a people he simply called "Israel" as living in Canaan in 1207 BCE, which is the strongest evidence of the Hebrews' presence in Canaan in the late Bronze Age.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Moses was not only responsible for leading the Hebrews from Egypt, but for modifying the Covenant. In addition to the exclusive worship of Yahweh and the circumcision of all male Hebrews, the Covenant was amended by Yahweh to include specific rules of behavior: the Hebrews had to abide by the 10 Commandments in order for Yahweh to guarantee their prosperity in the promised land. Having agreed to the Commandments, the Hebrews then arrived in the region that was to become their first kingdom, Israel.

As noted above, the tales present in the Hebrew Bible cannot generally be verified with empirical evidence. They also bear the imprint of earlier traditions: many stories in the Hebrew Bible are taken from earlier Mesopotamian legends. The story of Moses is very close to the account of Sargon the Great's rise from obscurity in Akkadian tradition, and the flood legend (described in the Bible's first book, Genesis) is taken directly from the Epic of Gilgamesh, although the motivation of the Mesopotamian gods versus that of Yahweh in those two stories is very different: the Mesopotamian gods are cruel and capricious, while the flood of Yahweh is sent as a punishment for the sins of humankind.

Archeological evidence has established that the Hebrews definitely started settling in Canaan by about 1200 BCE. The Egyptian record from 1207 BCE noted above consists of the pharaoh boasting about his conquests in Canaan, including Israel. The story of Moses leading the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt could also have been based on the events associated with the collapse of the Bronze Age, the great century or so of upheaval in which nomadic raiders joined forces with oppressed peasants and slaves to topple the great empires of the Bronze Age. Some of those people, probably Canaanites who had been subjects of the pharaohs, did seize freedom, and they could well have included the Hebrews.

The Kings and Kingdoms

While the early Hebrews were communalists, meaning they shared most goods in common within their clans (referred to as the twelve "tribes" in the Hebrew Bible), conflicts with the Philistines, another Canaanite people on the coast, led them to appoint a king, Saul, in about 1020 BCE. The Philistines were one of the groups of "Sea People" who had attacked the New Kingdom of Egypt. The Philistines were a small but

powerful kingdom. They were armed with iron and they fought the Hebrews to a standstill initially – at one point they captured the Ark of the Covenant, containing the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. Under the leadership of their kings, however, the Hebrews pushed back the Philistines and eventually defeated them completely.

Saul's successor was David, one of his former lieutenants, and David's was his son Solomon, renowned for his wisdom. The Hebrew kings founded a capital at Jerusalem, which had been a Philistine town. The kings created a professional army, a caste of scribes, and a bureaucracy. All of this being noted, the kingdom itself was not particularly large or powerful; Jerusalem at the time was a hill town of about 5,000 people. Israel emerged as one of the many smaller kingdoms surrounded by powerful neighbors, engaging in trade and waging small-scale wars depending on the circumstances.

Solomon was an effective ruler, forming trade relationships with nearby kingdoms and overseeing the growing wealth of Israel. He also lived in a manner consistent with other Iron Age kings, with many wives and a whole harem of concubines as well. Likewise, he taxed both trade passing through the Hebrew kingdom and his own subjects. His demands for free labor from the Hebrew people amounted to one day in every three spent working on palaces and royal building projects – an enormous amount from a contemporary perspective, but one that was at least comparable to the redistributive economies of nearby kingdoms. Thus, while his subjects came to resent aspects of his rule, neither was it markedly more exploitative than the norm in the region as a whole.

The most important building project under Solomon was the great Temple of Jerusalem, the center of the Yahwist religion. There, a class of priests carried out rituals and worship of Yahweh. Members of the religion believed that God's attention was centered on the Temple. Likewise, the rituals were similar to those practiced among various Middle Eastern religions, focusing on the sacrifice and burning of animals as offerings to God. David and Solomon supported the priesthood, and there was thus a direct link between the growing Yahwist faith and the political structure of Israel.

As noted above, the kingdom itself was fairly rich, thanks to its good spot on trade routes and the existence of gold mines, but Solomon's ongoing taxation and labor demands were such that resentment developed among the Hebrews over time. After his death, fully ten out of the twelve tribes broke off to form their own kingdom, retaining the name Israel, while the smaller remnant of the kingdom took on the name Judah.

Israel and Judah in the ninth century BCE, approximately a century before Israel was invaded and destroyed by the Assyrian Empire.

The northern kingdom of Israel was larger, richer, and more cosmopolitan. Israel's capital was the city of Samaria, and its people became known as Samaritans; they appear to have interacted with neighboring peoples frequently and many of them remained polytheists (people who worship more than one god) despite the growing movement to focus worship exclusively on Yahweh. The southern kingdom of Judah was poorer, smaller, and more conservative; it was in Judah that the Prophetic Movement (see below) came into being. It is from Judah that we get the word Jew: the Jews were the people of Judah.

With its riches, Israel was more attractive to invaders. When the Assyrian Empire expanded beyond Mesopotamia, it first conquered Israel, then eventually destroyed it outright when the Israelites rose up against them (this occurred in 722 BCE). The inhabitants of Israel either fled to Judah or were absorbed into the Assyrian Empire, losing their cultural identity in the process. This tragedy was later remembered as the origin of the

"lost tribes" of Israel – Hebrews who lost their identity and their religion because of the Assyrian enslavement. Judah was overrun by the Assyrians, but Jerusalem withstood a siege long enough to convince the Assyrians to accept bribes to leave, and instead became a satellite kingdom dominated by the Assyrians but still ruled by a Hebrew king. (Judah was saved in part due to a plague that struck the Assyrian army, but it still ended up a tributary of the Assyrians, paying annual tributes and answering to an Assyrian official.)

In Judah, there were two prevailing patterns: vassalage and rebellion. Judah was simply too small to avoid paying tribute to various neighboring powers, but its people were proud and defensive of their independence, so every generation or so there were uprisings. The worst case was in 586 BCE, when the Jews rose up against the Neo-Babylonian Empire that succeeded the Assyrians. The Babylonians burned Jerusalem, along with Solomon's Temple, to the ground, and they enslaved tens of thousands of Jews. The Jews were deported to Babylon, just as the Israelites had been deported to Assyrian territory about 150 years earlier – this event is referred to as the "Babylonian Captivity" of the Jews.

Two generations later, when the Neo-Babylonian empire itself fell to the Persians, the Persian emperor Cyrus the Great allowed all of the enslaved people of the Babylonians to return to their homelands, so the Babylonian Captivity came to an end and the Jews returned to Judah, where they rebuilt the Temple. That being noted, what is referred to as the Jewish "diaspora,"meaning the geographical dispersion of the Jews, really began in 538 BCE, because many Jews chose to remain in Babylon and, soon, other cities in the Persian Empire. Since they continued to practice Judaism and carry on Jewish traditions, the notion of a people scattered across different lands but still united by culture and religion came into being.

After being freed by Cyrus, the Jews were still part of the Persian Empire, ruled by a Persian governor (called a "satrap"). For most of the rest of their history, the Jews were able to maintain their distinct cultural identity and their religion, but rarely their political independence. The Jews went from being ruled by the Persians to the Greeks to the Romans (although they did occasionally seize independence for a time), and were then eventually scattered across the Roman Empire. The real hammer-blow of the Diaspora was in the 130s CE, when the Romans destroyed much of Jerusalem and forced almost all of the Jews into exile – the word diaspora itself means "scattering," and with the destruction of the Jewish kingdom by Rome there would be no Jewish state again until the foundation of the modern nation of Israel in 1948 CE.

The Yahwist Religion and Judaism

The Hebrew Bible claims that the Jews as a people worshipped Yahweh exclusively from the time of the Covenant, albeit with the worship of "false" gods from neighboring lands sometimes undermining their unity (and inviting divine retribution on the part of Yahweh for those transgressions). There is no historical or archeological evidence that suggests a single unified religion in Israel or Judah during the period of the united Hebrew monarchy or post-Solomon split between Israel and Judah, however (the Hebrew Bible itself was written down centuries later). A more likely scenario is that the Hebrews, like every other culture in the ancient world, worshipped a variety of deities, with Yahweh in a place of particular importance and centrality. A com-

parable case would be that of the Assyrians, who emphasized the worship of Ashur but who acknowledged the existence of other gods (including Yahweh).

As the Hebrews became more powerful, however, their religion changed dramatically. A tradition of prophets, later remembered as the Prophetic Movement, arose among certain people who sought to represent the poorer and more beleaguered members of the community, calling for a return to the more communal and egalitarian society of the past. The Prophetic Movement claimed that the Hebrews should worship Yahweh exclusively, and that Yahweh had a special relationship with the Hebrews that set Him apart as a God and them apart as a people. The Prophetic Movement lasted from the period before the Assyrian invasion of Israel through the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews, from about 750 BCE – 550 BCE.

This new set of beliefs, regarding the special relationship of a single God to the Hebrews, is referred to historically as the Yahwist religion. It was not yet "Judaism," since it did not yet disavow the belief that other gods might exist, nor did it include all of the rituals and traditions associated with later Judaism. Initially, most of the Hebrews continued to at least acknowledge the existence of other gods – this phenomenon is called *henotheism*, the term for the worship of only one god in the context of believing in the existence of more than one god (i.e. many gods exist, but we only worship one of them). Over time, this changed into true monotheism: the belief that there *is* only one god, and that all other "gods" are illusory.

The Prophetic Movement attacked both polytheism and the Yahwist establishment centered on the Temple of Jerusalem (they blamed the latter for ignoring the plight of the common people and the poor). The prophets were hostile to both the political power structure and to deviation from the exclusive worship of Yahweh. The prophets were also responsible for enunciating the idea that Yahweh was the only god, in part in reaction to the demands of Assyria that all subjects acknowledge the Assyrian god Ashur as the supreme god. In other words, the claim of the Prophetic Movement was not only that Yahweh was superior to Ashur, but that Ashur was not really a god in the first place.

This is, so far as historians know, the first instance in world history in which the idea of a single all-powerful deity emerged among any people, anywhere (although some scholars consider Akhenaten's attempted religious revolution in Egypt a quasi-monotheism). Up to this point, all religions held that there were many gods or spirits and that they had some kind of direct, concrete connections to specific areas. Likewise, the gods in most religions were largely indifferent to the actions of individuals so long as the proper prayers were recited and rituals performed. Ethical conduct did not have much influence on the gods ("ethical conduct" itself, of course, differing greatly from culture to culture), what mattered was that the gods were adequately appeased.

In contrast, early Judaism developed the belief that Yahweh was deeply invested in the actions of His chosen people both as a group and as individuals, regardless of their social station. There are various stories in which Yahweh judged people, even the kings like David and Solomon, making it clear that all people were known to Yahweh and no one could escape His judgment. The key difference between this belief and the idea of divine anger in other ancient religions was that Yahweh only punished those who deserved it. He was not capricious and cruel like the Mesopotamian gods, for instance, nor flighty and given to bickering like the Greek gods.

The early vision of Yahweh present in the Yahwist faith was of a powerful but not *all*-powerful being whose authority and power was focused on the Hebrew people and the territory of the Hebrew kingdom only. In other words, the priests of Yahweh did not claim that he ruled over all people, everywhere, only that he was the God of the Hebrews and their land. That started to change when the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE. Many of the Hebrews regarded this disaster as proof of the corruption of the rich and powerful and the righteousness of the Prophetic Movement. Even though the loss of Israel was an obvious blow against the Hebrews as a people, the worship of Yahweh as the exclusive god of the Hebrews gained considerable support in Judah. Likewise, as the exclusive worship of Yahweh grew in importance among the Jews (now sundered from the other Hebrews, who had been enslaved), the concept of Yahweh's omnipotence and omnipresence grew as well.

The most important reforms of Hebrew religion occurred in the seventh century BCE. A Judean king, Josiah, insisted on the imposition of strict monotheism and the compilation of the first books of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, in 621 BCE. In the process, the Yahwist priesthood added the book of Deuteronomy to older sacred writings (the priests claimed to have discovered Deuteronomy, but almost all historians of ancient religion believe that it was simply written at the time). When many Jews left the religion after Josiah's death, the prophet Jeremiah warned them that disaster would ensue, and when the Neo-Babylonians conquered Judah in 586 BCE, it seemed to validate his warning. Likewise, during the Babylonian Captivity, the prophet Ezekiel predicted the liberation of the Hebrews if they stuck to their faith, and they were indeed freed thanks to Cyrus (who admired older cultures like the Hebrews, since the Persians were originally semi-nomadic).

The sacred writings compiled during these events were all in the mode of the new monotheism. In these writings, Yahweh had *always* been there as the exclusive god of the Hebrew people and had promised them a land of abundance and peace (i.e. Israel) in return for their exclusive worship of Him. In these histories, the various defeats of the Hebrew people were explained by corruption from within, often the result of Hebrews straying from the Covenant and worshiping other gods.

These reforms were complete when the Neo-Babylonians conquered Judah in 586 BCE and enslaved tens of thousands of the Hebrews. The impact of this event was enormous, because it led to the belief that Yahweh could not be bound to a single place. He was no longer just the god of a single people in a single land, worshiped at a single temple, but instead became a boundless God, omnipotent and omnipresent. The special relationship between Him and the Hebrews remained, as did the promise of a kingdom of peace, but the Hebrews now held that He was available to them wherever they went and no matter what happened to them.

In Babylon itself, the thousands of Hebrews in exile not only arrived at this idea, but developed the strict set of religious customs, of marriage laws and ceremonies, of dietary laws (i.e. keeping a kosher diet), and the duty of all Hebrew men to study the sacred books, all in order to preserve their identity. Once the Torah was compiled as a single sacred text by the prophet Ezra, one of the official duties of the scholarly leaders of the Jewish community, the rabbis, was to carefully re-copy it, character by character, ensuring that it would stay the same no matter where the Jews went. The result was a "mobile tradition" of Judaism in which the Jews could travel anywhere and take their religion with them. This would become important in the future, when

they were forcibly taken from Judah by the Romans and scattered across Europe and North Africa. The ability of the Jews to bring their religious tradition with them would allow them to survive as a distinct people despite ongoing persecution in the absence of a stable homeland.

Another important aspect of Judaism was its egalitarian ethical system. The radical element of Jewish religion, as well as the Jewish legal system that arose from it, the Talmud, was the idea that all Jews were equal before God, rather than certain among them having a closer relationship to God. This is the first time a truly egalitarian element enters into ethics; no other people had proposed the idea of the essential equality of all human beings (although some aspects of Egyptian religion came close). Of all the legacies of Judaism, this may be the most important, although it would take until the modern era for political movements to take up the idea of essential equality and translate them into a concrete social, legal, and political system.

Conclusion

What all of the cultures considered in this chapter have in common is that they were more dynamic and, in the case of the empires, more powerful than earlier Mesopotamian (and even Egyptian) states. In a sense, the empires of the Bronze Age and, especially, the Iron Age represented different experiments in how to build and maintain larger economic systems and political units than had been possible earlier. The other major change is that it now becomes possible to discuss and examine the interactions between the various kingdoms and empires, not just what happened with them internally, since the entire region from Greece to Mesopotamia was now in sustained contact through trade, warfare, and diplomacy.

Likewise, some of the ideas and beliefs that originated in the Bronze and Iron Ages – most obviously Judaism – would go on to play a profound role in shaping the subsequent history of not just Western Civilization, but much of world history. Monotheism and the concept of the essential spiritual equality of human beings began as beliefs among a tiny minority of people in the ancient world, but they would go on to become enormously influential in the long run.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Hittite Empire – Crates

Mask of Agamemnon – Jebulon

Bronze Age collapse – Alexikoua

Assyrian Empire – Nigyou

Israel and Judah – FinnWikiNo

This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from The Hebrews in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: BOOK OF THE DEAD

Please use the link on Blackboard to access: Egyptian Book of the Dead: "Negative Confession," In use ca. 1550-50BCE

Source:

Nels M. Bailkey and Richard Lim, eds. *Readings in Ancient History: Thought and Experience from Gilgamesh to St. Augustine,* 7th ed. Andover: Cengage Learning, 2011, pp. 53-5.

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on the *Book of the Dead*.

Reading Journal

Understanding the content of a primary source is essential, but so is understanding its context. In your own words, explain the format and function of selection assigned from Book of the Dead. What is the original language of the text, where did the text come from, and what was its purpose. You can use the assigned readings or do some research on your own to answer these questions. In either case, you must cite your sources!

Study Guide Introduction Activity

Create a timeline that indicates the periodization of ancient Egyptian history. Pick two or three important developments or events from either ancient Mesopotamian and Hebrew history and show where they fall on your ancient Egyptian timeline. Check out the submission link on Blackboard for ideas of how to present your timeline.

PART IV

MODULE THREE: ARCHAIC GREECE AND THE PERSIAN WARS

READING: THE ARCHAIC AGE OF GREECE

Christopher Brooks

Overview

Many Western Civilization textbooks begin with the ancient Greeks. However, there are some problems with taking that approach, most importantly the fact that starting with the Greeks overlooks the fact that the Greeks did not invent the essential elements of civilization itself.

That being noted, the Greeks were unquestionably historically important and influential. They can be justly credited with creating forms of political organization and approaches to learning that were and remain hugely influential. Among other things, the Greeks carried out the first experiments in democratic government, invented a form of philosophy and learning concerned with empirical observation and rationality, created forms of drama like comedy and tragedy, and devised the method of researching and writing history itself. It is thus useful and productive to consider the history of ancient Greece even if the conceit that other forms of ancient history are less important is abandoned.

The Greek Dark Age

During the Bronze Age the Minoans and Mycenaeans were two of the civilizations that were part of the international trade and diplomacy network of the Mediterranean and Middle East. The Minoans were a major seafaring civilization based on the island of Crete. They created huge palace complexes, magnificent artwork, and great wealth. They eventually vanished as a distinct culture, most likely after they were conquered and absorbed by the Mycenaeans, their neighbors to the north.

The Mycenaeans developed as a civilization after the Minoans were already established in Crete. The Mycenaeans lived on the Greek mainland and the islands of the Aegean Sea and were known primarily as sea-going merchants and raiders. They were extremely warlike, attacking each other, their neighbors, and the people they also traded with whenever the opportunity existed to loot and sack. The Mycenaeans were the protagonists of the famous epic poems written by the (possibly mythical) Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

The Mycenaeans vanished as a civilization at the end of the Bronze Age. The cause was probably a combination of foreign invasions and local rebellions and wars. One strong possibility is that there was a sustained civil war among the Mycenaean palace-settlements that resulted in a fatal disruption to the economic setting that was essential to their very existence. A bad enough war in Greece itself could have easily undermined harvests, already near a subsistence level, and when they were destroyed by these conflicts, towns, fortresses and

palaces could not be rebuilt. Whatever the cause, the decline of the Mycenaeans occurred around 1100 BCE, marking the beginning of what historians refer to as the Dark Age in Greek history.

Of all the regions and cultures affected by the collapse of the Bronze Age, Greece was among those hit hardest. First and foremost, foreign trade declined dramatically. Whereas the Mycenaeans had been seafaring traders, their descendants were largely limited to local production and trade. Agriculture reverted to subsistence levels, and trade with neighboring areas all but vanished. In turn, this reversion to local subsistence economies cut them off from important sources of nutrition and materials for daily life, as well as foreign ideas and cultural influences. The Greeks went from being a great traveling and trading culture to one largely isolated from its neighbors. The results were devastating: some scholarly estimates are that the population of Greece declined by as much as 90% in the centuries following the Bronze Age collapse.

The Archaic Age and Greek Values

The Greek Dark Age started to end around 800 BCE. The subsequent period of Greek history, from around 800 BCE – 490 BCE, is referred to as the "Archaic" (meaning "old") Age. The Archaic Age saw the re-emergence of sustained contact with foreign cultures, starting with the development of Greek colonies on the Greek islands and on the western coast of Anatolia; this region is called Ionia, with its Greek inhabitants speaking a dialect of Greek called Ionian. These Greeks reestablished long-distance trade routes, most importantly with the Phoenicians, the great traders and merchants of the Iron Age. Eventually, foreign-made goods and cultural contacts started to flow back to Greece once again.

Of the various influences the Ionian Greeks received from the Phoenicians, none was more important than their alphabet. Working from the Phoenician version, the Ionian Greeks developed their own syllabic alphabet (the earlier Greek writing system, Linear B, vanished during the Greek Dark Age). This system of writing proved flexible, nuanced, and relatively easy to learn. Soon, the Greeks started recording not just tax records and mercantile transactions, but their own literature, poetry, and drama. The earliest surviving Greek literature dates from around 800 – 750 BCE thanks to the use of this new alphabet (which, in turn, served as the basis of the Roman alphabet and from there to the alphabets used in all Latinate European languages, including English).

Homer's epic poems – *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* – were written down in this period after being recited in oral form by traveling singers for centuries. They purported to recount the deeds of great heroes from the Mycenaean age, in the process providing a rich tapestry of information about ancient Greek values, beliefs, and practices to later cultures. Both poems celebrated *arete* – a Greek virtue which can be translated in English as "excellence" and "success," but must be understood as a moral characteristic as much as a physical or mental one. Arete meant, among other things, fulfilling one's potential, which was almost always the highest goal espoused in Greek philosophy. Throughout the epics, men and women struggle to overcome both one another and their own limitations, while grappling with the limitations imposed by nature, chance, and the will of the gods.

The values on display in the Homeric poems spoke to the Greeks of the Archaic Age in how they determined what was good and desirable in human behavior in general. The focus of the Greeks was on the two ways that a man (and it was always a man in Greek philosophy – a theme that will be explored in detail in a subsequent chapter) could dominate other men: through strength of arms and through skill at words. The two major areas a man had to master were thus war and rhetoric: the ability to defeat enemies in battle and the ability to persuade potential allies in the political arena.

What was important to the Greeks was the public performance of excellence, not private virtue or good intentions. What mattered was how a man performed publicly, in battle, in athletic competitions, or in the public forums of debate that emerged in the growing city-states of Archaic Greece. The fear of shame was a built-in part of the pursuit of excellence; Greek competitions (in everything from athletics to poetry) had no second-place winners, and the losers were openly mocked in the aftermath of the contests. This idea of public debate and competition was to have an enormous influence on the development of Greek culture, one that would subsequently spread around the entire Mediterranean region.

Greek values translated directly into Greece's unique political order. The Archaic Age was the era when major Greek political innovations took place. Of these, the most important was the creation of the *polis* (plural: *poleis*): a political unit centered on a city and including the surrounding lands. The English word "political" derives from "polis" – the polis was the center of Greek politics in each city-state, and Greek innovations in the realm of political theory would have an enormous historical legacy. From the Greek poleis of the Archaic and subsequent Classical Age, the notion of legal citizenship and equality, the practice of voting on laws, and a particular concept of political pride now referred to as patriotism all first took shape.

In the Archaic Age, Greek city-states shared similar institutions. Greek citizens could only be members of a single polis, and citizens had some kind of role in political decision-making. Citizens would gather in the *agora*, an open area that was used as a market and a public square, and discuss matters of importance to the polis as a whole. The richest and most powerful citizens became known as "aristocrats" – the "best people." Eventually, aristocracy became hereditary. Other free citizens could vote in many cases on either electing officials or approving laws, the latter of which were usually created by a council of elders (all of whom were aristocrats) – the elders were called *archons*. At this early stage, commoners had little real political power; the importance was the precedent of meeting to discuss politics.

Even in poleis in which citizens did not directly vote on laws, however, there was a strong sense of community, out of which developed the concept of *civic virtue*: the idea that the highest moral calling was to place the good of the community above one's own selfish desires. This concept was almost unparalleled elsewhere in the ancient world. While other ancient peoples certainly identified with their places of origin, they linked themselves to lineages of kings rather than the abstract idea of a community in most cases. Also, all Greek citizens were equal before the law, which was a radical break since most other civilizations had different sets of laws based on class identity (there were considerable ironies in Greek notions of "equality" however – see the later chapter on classical Greece). Civic virtue, very closely related to the modern concept of patriotism, was power and influential idea because it would continue through the Greek Classical Age, be transmitted by Alexander

the Great's conquests, and eventually become one of, if not the single most important ethical standards of the Roman Republic and Empire. It would ultimately go on to influence thinkers and politicians up to the present.

One area of Archaic Greek culture bears additional focus: gender. Greek society was explicitly patriarchal, with men holding all official positions of political power. Likewise, both the Greek myths and epic tales are both rife with hostility and suspicion of assertive, intelligent women, celebrating instead women who dutifully served their husbands or fathers (Penelope, wife of the Greek hero Odysseus, is described as waiting faithfully for twenty years for Odysseus to return from the invasion of Troy despite a legion of suitors trying to win her and Odysseus's lands). Women were expected to be sexually monogamous with their husbands while men's sexual liaisons with female slaves as well as other men of their own social rank were perfectly acceptable behaviors.

That being noted, it is clear that women in the Archaic Age did enjoy both social influence and some access to economic power, being able to inherit property and receiving social approval for the skillful management of households. Likewise, women were not generally secluded from men in normal social discourse, with various Greek tales including moments of casual interaction between men and women. Practically speaking, women were invaluable to the Greek economy, providing almost all of the domestic labor and contributing to farming and commerce as well. Their status, however, would grow more fraught over time: as the Archaic Age evolved into the Classical Age (considered in a following chapter,) restrictions on women's lives and freedoms would increase, especially in key poleis like Athens, culminating in some of the most misogynistic gender standards in the ancient world.

Greek Culture and Trade

The Greek poleis were each distinct, fiercely proud of their own identity and independence, and they frequently fought small-scale wars against one another. Even as they did so, they recognized each other as fellow Greeks and therefore as cultural equals. All Greeks spoke mutually intelligible dialects of the Greek language. All Greeks worshiped the same pantheon of gods. All Greeks shared political traditions of citizenship. Finally, the Greeks took part in a range of cultural practices, from listening to traveling storytellers who recited the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from memory to holding drawn-out drinking parties called *symposia*.

Depiction of a symposium dating from c. 475 BCE.

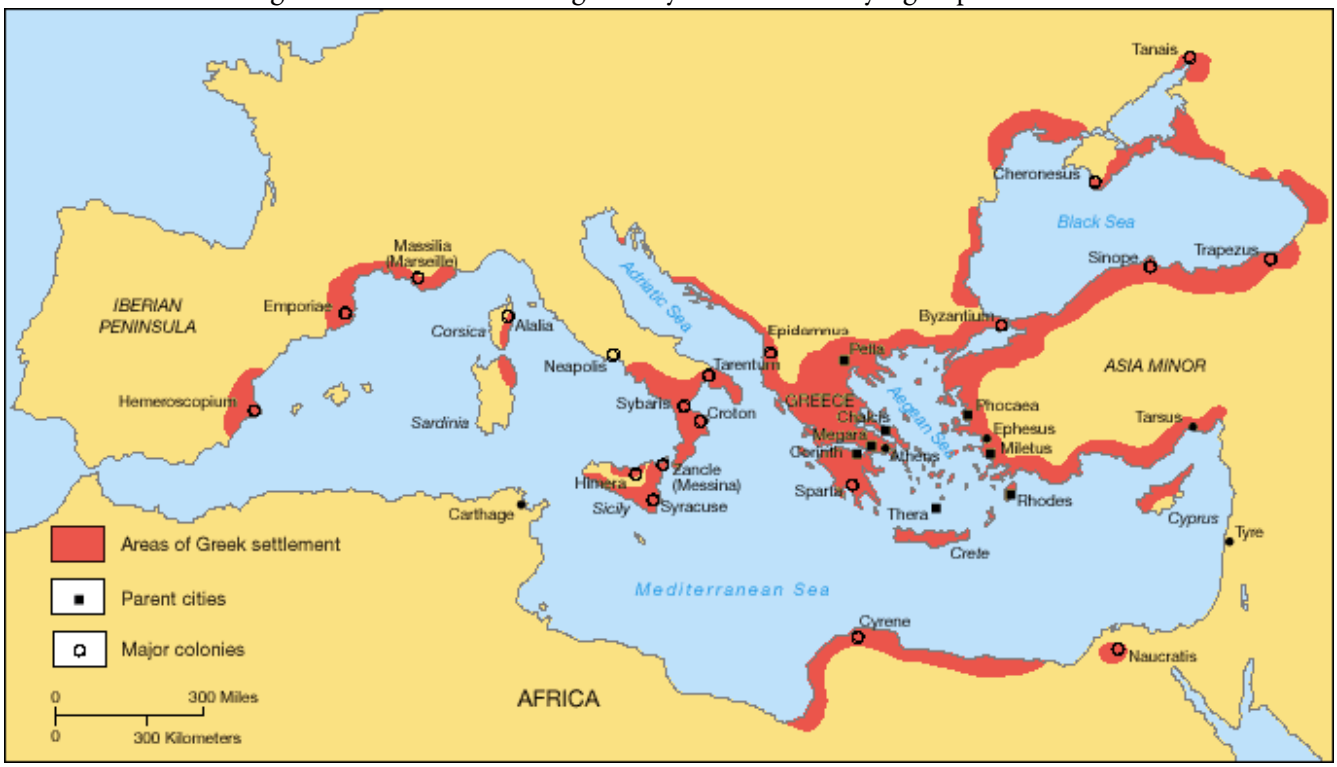
The poleis also invented institutions that united the cities culturally, despite their political independence, the most important of which was the Panhellenic games. "Panhellenic" literally means "all Greece," and the games were meant to unite all of the Greek poleis, including those founded by colonists and located far from Greece itself. The games were a combination of religious festival and competition in which aristocrats from each city competed in various sports, including javelin, discus, footraces, and a brutal form of unarmed combat called *pankration*.

The most significant of these games was the Olympics, named after Olympia, the site in southern Greece where they were held every four years. They started in 776 BCE and ended in 393 CE – in other words, they lasted for over 1,000 years. Thanks to the Olympics, the date 776 BCE is usually used as the definitive break between the Dark and Archaic ages of Greek civilization. The Olympics were extraordinary not just in their longevity, but because Greeks from the entire world of Greek settlements came to them, traveling from as far away as Sicily and the Black Sea. Wars were temporarily suspended and all Greek poleis agreed to let athletes travel with safe passage to take part in the games, in part because the Olympics were dedicated to Zeus, the chief Greek god. As noted above, there were no second prizes. Greek culture was hugely competitive; the defeated were humiliated and the winners totally triumphant. In the games, they sought, in the words of one Greek poet, "either the wreath of victory or death" (granted, that poet was indulging in some hyperbole, as there is no evidence that defeated athletes actually committed suicide).

With the end of the Dark Age, population levels in Greece recovered. This led to emigration as the population outstripped the poor, rocky soil of Greece itself and forced people to move elsewhere. Eventually, Greek colonies stretched across the Mediterranean as far as Spain in the west and the coasts of the Black Sea in the north. Greeks founded colonies on the North African coast and on the islands of the Mediterranean, most importantly on Sicily. Greeks set up trading posts in the areas they settled, even in Egypt. The colonies continued the mainland practice of growing olives and grapes for oil and wine, but they also took advantage of much more fertile areas away from Greece to cultivate other crops.

Greek colonists sometimes intermarried with local peoples on arrival, an unsurprising practice given that many expeditions of colonists were almost all young men. In other cases, however, colonists found relatively isolated areas appropriate for shipping and set up shop, maintaining close connections with their home

polis as an economic outpost. The one factor that was common to all Greek colonies was that they were rarely far from the sea. They were so closely tied to the idea of a shared Greek civilization and the need for the sea for trade routes was so strong that colonists were not generally interested in trying to push inland.



Greek colonization during the Archaic period – note how Greek colonies were always near the sea.

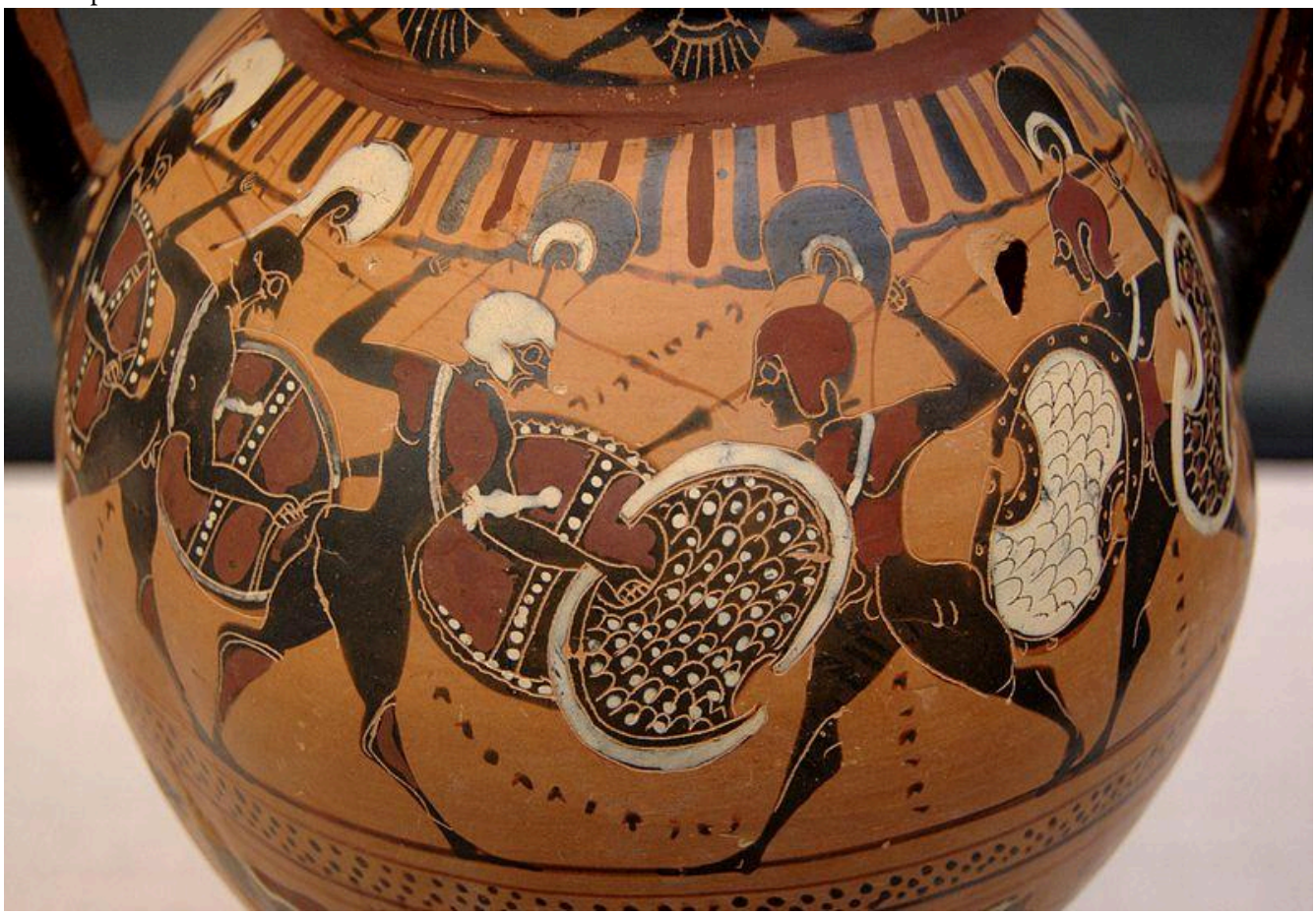
As trade recovered following the end of the Dark Age, the Greeks re-established their commercial shipping network across the Mediterranean, with their colonies soon playing a vital role. Greek merchants eagerly traded with everyone from the Celts of Western Europe to the Egyptians, Lydians, and Babylonians. When Julius Caesar was busy conquering Gaul about 700 years later, he found the Celts there writing in the Greek alphabet, long since learned from the Greek colonies along the coast. Likewise, archaeologists have discovered beautiful examples of Greek metalwork as far from Greece as northern France.

Greek colonies far from Greece were as important as the older poleis in Greece itself, since they created a common Greek civilization across the entire Mediterranean world. Greek civilization was not an empire united by a single ruler or government. Instead, it was united by culture rather than a common leadership structure. That culture would go on to influence all of the cultures to follow in a vast swath of territory throughout the Mediterranean region and the Middle East.

Military Organization and Politics

A key military development unique to Greece was the *phalanx*: a unit of spearmen standing in a dense formation, with each using his shield to protect the man to his left. Each soldier in a phalanx was called a *hoplite*. Each hoplite had to be a free Greek citizen of his polis and had to be able to pay for his own weapons

and armor. He also had to be able to train and drill regularly with his fellow hoplites, since maneuvering in the densely-packed phalanx required a great deal of practice and coordination. The hoplites were significant politically because they were not always aristocrats, despite the fact that they had to be free citizens capable of paying for their own arms. Because they defended the poleis and proved extremely effective on the battlefield, the hoplites would go on to demand better political representation, something that would have a major impact on Greek politics as a whole.



Depiction of a battle between phalanxes of hoplites from rival poleis, dating from c. 560 BCE. The clay vessel is an amphora, a container used for wine or olive oil.

The most noteworthy military innovation represented by the hoplites was that their form of organization provided one solution to the age-old problem of how to pay for highly-trained and motivated soldiers: rather than a state paying for a standing army, the hoplites paid for themselves and were motivated by civic virtue. When rival poleis fought, the phalanxes of each side would square off and stab away at each other until one side broke, threw down their shields, and ran away (by far the deadliest part of the confrontation). The victors would then allow the losers time to gather their dead for a proper burial and peace terms would be negotiated.

By the seventh century BCE, the hoplites in many poleis were clamoring for better political representation, since they were excluded by the traditional aristocrats from meaningful political power. In many cases, the result was the rise of tyrannies: a government led by a man, the tyrant, who had no legal right to power, but had

been appointed by the citizens of a polis in order to stave off civil conflict (tyrants were generally aristocrats, but they answered to the needs of the hoplites as well). To the Greeks, the term tyrant did not originally mean an unjust or cruel ruler, since many tyrants succeeded in solving major political crises on behalf of the hoplites while still managing to placate the aristocrats.

The tyrants, lacking official political status, had to play to the interests of the people to stay in power as popular dictators. They sometimes seized lands of aristocrats outright and distributed them to free citizens. Many of them built public works and provided jobs, while others went out of their way to promote trade. The period between 650 – 500 BCE is sometimes called the "Age of Tyrants" in Greek history because many poleis instituted tyrants to stave off civil war between aristocrats and less wealthy citizens during this period. After 500 BCE, a compromise government called oligarchy tended to replace both aristocracies and tyrannies. In an oligarchy, anyone with enough money could hold office, the laws were written down and known to all free citizens, and even poorer citizens could vote (albeit only yes or no) on the laws passed by councils.

Sparta and Athens

Two of the most memorable poleis of the Archaic Age were Sparta and Athens. The two poleis were in many ways a study in contrasts: an obsessively militaristic and inward-looking society of "equals" who controlled the largest slave society in Greece, and a cosmopolitan naval power at the forefront of political innovation.

Sparta

One scholarly work on Greek history, Frank Frost's *Greek Society*, describes the Spartans as "an experiment in elitist communism." From approximately 600 BCE – 450 BCE, the Spartans were unique in the ancient world in placing total emphasis on a super-elite, and very small, citizenship of warriors. Starting in about 700 BCE, the Spartans conquered a large swath of territory in their home region of Greece, the southern Greek peninsula called the Peloponnesus. Sparta at the time was an aristocratic monarchy, with two kings ruling over councils of citizens. Under the two kings were a smaller council that issued laws and a large council made up of all Spartan males over 30 who approved or rejected the laws proposed by the council. Over time, citizenship was limited to men who had undergone the arduous military training for which the Spartans are best remembered.

Spartan culture was among the most extreme forms of militarism the world has ever seen. Spartan boys were taken from their parents when they were seven to live in barracks. They were regularly beaten, both as a form of discipline and to make them unafraid of pain. Children with deformities of any kind were left in the elements to die, as were children maimed by the training regimen. Spartan boys were trained constantly in combat, maneuvering, and physical endurance. Spartan girls were allowed to stay with their parents, but were trained in martial skills as children as well, along with the knowledge they would need to run a household.

When a man reached the age of twenty, assuming he was judged worthy, he would be elevated to the rank of "Equal" – a full Spartan citizen – and receive a land grant that ensured that he could concentrate on military discipline for the rest of his life without having to worry about making a living.

Even activities like courtship and acquiring nourishment were designed to test Spartans. When it was time for young Spartan to marry, the young man would brawl his way into the family home of his bride-to-be, fighting her relatives until he could "kidnap" her – this was as close to courtship as the Spartans got. Married couples were not allowed to live together before the age of 30; up till then, the man was expected to sneak out of his bunker to see his wife, then sneak back in again before morning. In addition, Spartans in training were often forced to steal food (from their own slave-run farms); they were punished if caught, but the infraction was being caught, not the theft – the idea was that the future warrior had failed to live up to the required level of skill at stealth.

The reason for all of this militaristic mania was simple: Sparta was a slave society. Approximately 90% of the population of the area under Sparta's control were *helots*, serfs descended from the population conquered by Sparta in the eighth century. Early Spartan conquests of their region of Greece had resulted in a very large area under their control, populated by people who were not Spartan. Rather than extend any kind of political representation to these subjects, the Spartans instead maintained absolute control over them, up to the right of killing them at will with no legal consequence.

Every year, the Spartans would "declare war" on the helots, rampaging through their river valley, and part of the training of young Spartans was serving on the *Krypteia*, the Spartan secret police that infiltrated Helot villages to watch for signs of rebellion. Adolescent Spartans in training would even be dispatched to simply murder any helots they encountered. All of this was to ensure that the helots would be too terrified and broken-spirited to resist Spartan domination. There were never more than 8,000 Spartan soldiers, along with another 20,000 or so of free noncitizens (inhabitants of towns near Sparta who were not considered helots, but instead free but subservient subjects), overseeing a much larger population of helots. Simply put, Spartan society was a military hierarchy that arose out of the fear a massive slave uprising.

Likewise, despite the famous, and accurate, accounts of key battles in which the Spartans were victorious, or at least symbolically victorious, they were loathe to be drawn into wars, especially ones that involved going more than a few days' march from Sparta. They were so preoccupied with maintaining control over the helots that they were very hesitant to engage in military campaigns of any kind, and hence rarely engaged in battles against other poleis before the outbreak of war against Athens in the fourth century BCE.

The only area in which Spartan society was actually *less* repressive than the rest of the Greek poleis was in gender roles. According to Greeks from outside of Sparta, free Spartan women were much less restricted than women elsewhere in Greece. They were trained in war, they could speak publicly, and they could own land. They scandalized other Greeks by participating in athletics and appear to have benefited from a greater degree of personal freedom than women anywhere else in Greece – of course, this would have been a social necessity since the men of Sparta lived in barracks until they were 30, leaving the women to run household estates.

Athens

In many ways, Athens was the opposite of Sparta. Whereas the Spartans were militaristic and austere (the word "spartan" in English today means "severe and unadorned"), the Athenians celebrated art, music, and drama. While it still controlled a large slave population, Athens is also remembered as the birthplace of democracy. In turn, Sparta and Athens were, especially in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, rivals for the position of the most powerful polis in Greece.

Athens was rich and populous – the population of Attica, its 1,000-square-mile region of Greece, was about 600,000 by 600 BCE, and Athens was a major force in Mediterranean trade. That wealth led to conflicts over its distribution among the citizens, in turn prompting some unprecedented political experiments. Starting early in the Archaic Age, Athens witnessed a series of struggles and compromises between the aristocrats – wealthy land-owning families who controlled most of the land and most of the political power – and everyone else, particularly the free citizens and farmers of Athens who were not aristocrats. One key development in Athenian politics arose from the fact that merchants and prosperous farmers could afford arms and armor but were shut out of political decision-making. This was a classic case of hoplites becoming increasingly angry with the political domination of the aristocracy.

The crisis of representation reached a boiling point in about 600 BCE when there was a real possibility of civil war between the common citizens and the aristocrats. The major problem was that the aristocrats owned most of the land that other farmers worked on, many of those farmers were increasingly indebted to the aristocrats, and by Athenian law anyone who could not pay off his or her debts could be legally enslaved. An increasing number of formerly-free Athenian citizens thus found themselves enslaved to pay off their debts to an aristocrat.

To prevent civil war, the Athenians appointed Solon (638 – 558 BCE), an aristocratic but fair-minded politician, to serve as a tyrant and to reform institutions. His most important step in restoring order was to cancel debts and to eliminate debt-slavery itself. He used public money to buy Athenian slaves who had been enslaved abroad and bring them back to Athens. He enacted other legal reforms that reduced the overall power of the aristocracy, and in a savvy move, he had the laws written down on wooden panels and posted around the city so that anyone who could read could examine them (up to that point, the only people who actually knew the laws were the aristocratic judges, which made it all too easy for them to abuse their power).

Solon was not some kind of rabble-rouser or proto-communist, however. He mitigated the worst of the social divides between rich and poor in Athens, but he still reserved the highest offices for members of the richest families. On the other hand, the poorer free citizens were completely exempt from taxes, which made it easier for them to stay out of debt and to contribute to Athenian society (and the military). Perhaps the most innovative and important of Solon's innovations was the concept of an impersonal state, one in which the politicians come and go but which continues on as an institution obeying written laws; this is in contrast to "the state" as just the ruling cabal of elite men, which Athens had been prior to Solon's intervention.

This pattern continued for about a century. Solon's successors were a collection of new tyrants, some

of whom seized more land from aristocrats and distributed it to farmers, most of whom sponsored new building projects, but none of whom definitively broke the power of the old families. Social divides and tension continued to be the essential reality of Athenian society.

In 508 BCE, however, a new tyrant named Cleisthenes was appointed by the Athenian assembly who finally took the radical step of allowing all male citizens to have a vote in public matters and to be eligible to serve in public office. This included free but poor citizens, the ones too poor to afford weapons and serve as hoplites. He had lawmakers chosen by lot (i.e. randomly) and created new "tribes" mixing men of different backgrounds together to force them to start to think of themselves as fellow Athenians, not just jealous protectors of their own families' interests. Thus, under Cleisthenes, Athens became the first "real" democracy in history.

That being noted, by modern standards Athens was still highly unequal and unrepresentative. Women were completely excluded from political life, as were free non-citizens (including many prosperous Greeks who had not been born in Athens) and, of course, slaves. The voting age was set at 20. Overall, about 40% of the population were native-born Athenians, of which half were men, and half were under 20, so only 10% of the actual population had political rights. This is still a very large percentage by the standards of the ancient world, but it should be considered as an antidote to the idea that the Greeks believed in "equality" in a modern sense.

Conclusion

Greece managed to develop its unique political institutions and culture as part of a larger Mediterranean "world," trading with, raiding, and settling alongside many of the other civilizations of the Iron Age. For centuries, Greece itself was too remote, geographically, and too poor, in terms of natural resources, to tempt foreign invaders to try to seize control. Starting in the sixth century BCE, however, some Greek colonies fell under the sway of the greatest empire the world had seen to date, and a series of events culminated in a full-scale war between the Greeks and that empire: Persia.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Symposium – PD-1923

Greek colonies – Regaliorum

Phalanxes – Bibi Saint-Pol

This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 4: The Archaic Age of Greece in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

READING: THE PERSIAN WARS

Christopher Brooks

Persia was one of the most significant ancient civilizations, a vast empire that was at the time the largest the world had ever seen. It incorporated all of the ancient civilizations of the Middle East, and at its height it even included Egypt. In other words, the entire expanse of land stretching from the borders of India to Greece, including nearly all of the cultures described in the chapters above, were all conquered and controlled by the Persians.

Persia itself corresponds with present-day Iran (the language of Iran today, Farsi, is a direct linguistic descendent of ancient Persian). Most of its landmass is an arid plateau crossed by mountain ranges. In the ancient world, it was dominated by warriors on horseback who were generally perceived as "barbarians" by the settled people of Mesopotamia to the west. By the seventh century BCE, a powerful collection of clans, the Medes, dominated Persia, forming a loosely-governed empire. In turn, the Medes ruled over a closely-related set of clans known as the Persians, who would go on to rule territories far beyond the Iranian heartland.

Historians divide Persian history into periods defined by the founding clan of a given royal dynasty. The empire described in this chapter is referred to as the Achaemenid Persian Empire after its first ruling clan. Later periods of ancient Persian history, most importantly the Parthian and Sasanian empires, are described in the chapters on ancient Rome.

Persian Expansion

The Medes were allies of Babylon, and in 612 BCE they took part in the huge rebellion that resulted in the downfall of the Assyrian Empire. For just over fifty years, the Medes continued to dominate the Iranian plateau. Then, in 550 BCE a Persian leader, Cyrus II the Great, led the Persians against the Medes and conquered them (practically speaking, there was little distinction between the two groups since they were so closely related and similar; the Greeks regularly confused the two when writing about them). He assimilated the Medes into his own military force and then embarked on an incredible campaign of conquest that lasted twenty years, forging Persia into a gigantic empire.

Cyrus began his conquests by invading Anatolia in 546 BCE, conquering the kingdom of Lydia in the process. His principal further west were the Greek colonies of Ionia, along the coast of the Aegean Sea. Cyrus swiftly defeated the Greek poleis, but instead of punishing the Greeks for opposing him he allowed them to keep their language, religion, and culture, simply insisting they give him loyal warriors and offer tribute. He found Greek leaders willing to work with the Persians and he appointed them as governors of the colonies.

Thus, even though they had been beaten, most of the Greeks in the colonies did not experience Persian rule as particularly oppressive.

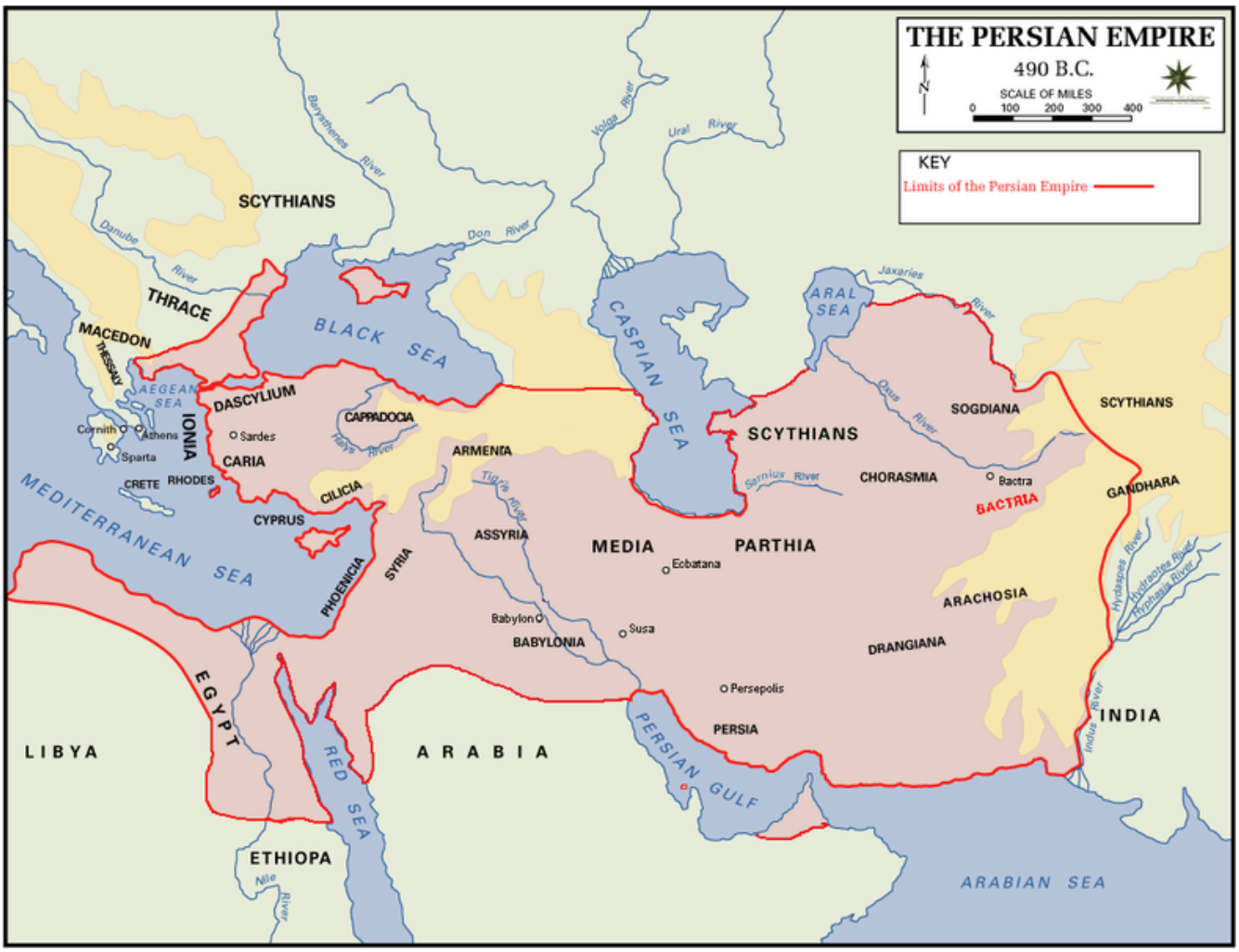
Cyrus next turned south and conquered the city-states and kingdoms of Mesopotamia, culminating with his conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE. This conquest was surprisingly peaceful; Babylon was torn between the priests of Marduk (the patron deity of the city) and the king, who was trying to favor the worship of a different goddess. After he defeated the forces of the king in one battle, Cyrus was welcomed as a liberator by the Babylonians and he made a point of venerating Marduk to help ensure their ongoing loyalty.

Cyrus continued the practice of finding loyal leaders and treating his conquered enemies fairly, which kept uprisings against him to a minimum. He then pushed into Central Asia, in present-day Afghanistan, conquering all of what constituted the "known world" in that region. To the northeast were the steppes, home of a steppe-dwelling nomadic people called the Scythians, whom the Persians would go on to fight for centuries (Cyrus himself died in battle against the Scythians in 530 BCE – he was 70 years old at the time).

Cyrus was followed by his son Cambyses II. Cambyses led the Persian armies west, conquering both the rich Phoenician cities of the eastern Mediterranean coast and Egypt. He was installed as pharaoh in Egypt, again demonstrating Persian respect for local traditions. Thus, in less than thirty years, Persia had gone from an obscure kingdom in the middle of the Iranian plateau to the largest land empire in the entire world, bigger even than China (under the Eastern Zhou dynasty) at the time. Cambyses died not long after, in 522 BCE, under somewhat mysterious circumstances – he supposedly fell on his sword while getting off of his horse.

In 522, following Cambyses' death, Darius I became king (r. 521 – 486 BCE). Darius came to power after leading a conspiracy that may have assassinated Cambyses' younger brother Bardiya, who had briefly ruled. In the midst of the political chaos at the top, a series of revolts briefly shook the empire, but Darius swiftly crushed the uprisings and reasserted Persian rule. He captured his moment of triumph in a huge carved image on a rock wall (the "Bisitun Inscription") which depicts his victory over lesser kings and traces his royal lineage back to a shared ancestor with Cyrus the Great.

By the time Darius came to power, the Persian Empire was already too large to rule effectively; it was bigger than any empire in the world to date but there was no infrastructure or government sufficient to rule it consistently. Darius worked to change that. He expanded the empire further and, more importantly, consolidated royal power. He improved infrastructure, established a postal service, and standardized weights, measures, and coinage. He set up a uniform bureaucracy and system of rule over the entire empire to standardize taxation and make it clear what was expected of the subject areas.



The Persian Empire at its territorial height under Darius I.

Darius inherited the conquests of his predecessors, and he personally oversaw the conquest of the northern part of the Indus river valley in northwestern India, thus marking the first time in world history when one state ruled over three of the major river systems of ancient history (i.e. the Nile, Mesopotamia, and the Indus). In 513 BCE he led a gigantic invasion of Central Asia to try to end the raids of the Scythians once and for all; he was forced to retreat without winning a decisive victory, but his army was still intact and he had added Thrace (present-day Bulgaria) to the empire.

Darius was also interested in seizing more territory to the west, conquering the remaining Greek colonies on the coast of Anatolia. In 499 BCE several Ionian Greek poleis rose against the Persians and successfully secured Athenian aid. Several years of fighting followed, with the Persians eventually crushing the rebellion in 494 BCE (the Persians deported many of the Greek rebels to India as punishment). Athens' decision to support the rebellion angered the Persians, however, and Darius began to plan a full-fledged invasion of Greece.

The Persian War

When the Greek cities of Ionia rose up against Persian rule, Darius vowed to make an example not just of them, but of the Greek poleis that had aided them, including Athens. This led to the Persian War, one of the most famous conflicts in ancient history. It is remembered in part because it pitted an underdog, Greece, against a massive empire, Persia. It is remembered because the underdog won, at least initially. It is also remembered, unfortunately, for how the conflict was appropriated by proto-racist beliefs in the superiority of "The West." Because the Greeks saw the conflict in terms of the triumph of true, Greek, civilization over barbaric tyranny, and the surviving historical sources are told exclusively from the Greek perspective, this bias has managed to last down until the present – consider the recent movie adaptations of the most famous battles of the Persian War, *300* and *300: Rise of an Empire*, in which the Persians are depicted as being literally monstrous, ruled over by a comically evil, eight-foot-tall king. The fact that both Sparta and Athens were slave-based societies is *not* part of those movies' narratives.

The war began in 490 BCE, when the Persians, with about 25,000 men, landed at Marathon, a town 26 miles from Athens. The Athenians sent a renowned runner, Pheidippides, to Sparta (about 140 miles from Athens) to ask for help. The Spartans agreed, but said that they could only send reinforcements when their religious ceremonies were completed in a few days. Pheidippides ran back to Athens with the bad news, but by then the Athenians were already engaged with the Persians.

There were about 25,000 Persian troops – this was an "expeditionary force," not a large army, against which the Athenians fielded 10,000 hoplites. The Athenians marched out to confront the Persians. The two armies camped out and watched each other for a few days, then the Persians dispatched about 10,000 of their troops in naval transports to attack Athens directly; this prompted a gamble on the part of the leading Athenian general (named Miltiades) to attack the remaining Persians, rather than running back to Athens to defend it. The ensuing battle was a decisive show of force for the Greeks: the citizen-soldier hoplites proved far more effective than the conscript infantry of the Persian forces. The core of the Persian army, its Median and Persian cavalry, fought effectively against the Athenians, but once the Athenian wings closed in and forced back the infantry, the Persians were routed.

The Greeks were especially good at inflicting casualties without taking very many – the Persians supposedly lost 33 men to every Athenian lost in the battle (6,400 Persian dead to 192 Athenians). There is also a questionable statistic from Greek sources that it was more than that – as many as 60 Persians per Athenian. Whatever the real number, it was a crushing victory for the Athenians. A later (almost certainly fabricated) account of the aftermath of the battle claimed that Pheidippides was then sent back to Athens, still running, to report the victory. He dropped dead of exhaustion, but in the process he ran the first "marathon."

It is entirely possible that, despite this victory, the Greeks would have still been overwhelmed by the Persians if not for setbacks in Persia and its empire. A major revolt broke out in Egypt against Persian rule, drawing attention away from Greece until the revolt was put down. Likewise, it took years to fully "activate" the Persian military machine; preparation for a full-scale invasion took a full decade to reach completion. Dar-

ius died in 486 BCE, in the middle of the preparations, which disrupted them further while his son Xerxes consolidated his power.

In the meantime, the Greeks were well aware that the Persians would eventually return. A new Athenian general, Themistocles, convinced his countrymen to spend the proceeds of a silver mine they had discovered on a navy. Athens went into a naval-building frenzy, ending up with hundreds of warships called triremes, rowed by those free Athenians too poor to afford armor and weapons and serve as hoplites, but who now had an opportunity to directly aid in battle as sailors. This was perhaps the first time in world history that a fairly minor power transformed itself into a major power simply by having the foresight to build an effective navy.

The Persians had finally regrouped by 480 BCE, ten years after their first attempt to invade. Xerxes I, the new king, dispatched a huge army (as many as 200,000 soldiers and 1,200 ships) against Greece, supported by a navy over twice as large as that of the Athenians. The Greek poleis were, for the most part, terrified into submission, with only about 6% of the Greek cities joining into the defensive coalition created by Athens and Sparta (that being said, within that 6% were some of the most powerful poleis in Greece). The Spartans took leadership of the land army that would block the Persians in the north while the Athenians attacked the Persian navy in the south.

Route of the Persian invasion under Xerxes.

The Spartan-led force was very small compared to the Persian army, but for several days they held the Persians back at the Battle of Thermopylae, a narrow pass in which the Persians were unable to deploy the full might of their (much larger) army against the Greeks. The Spartan king, Leonidas, and his troops held the Persian forces in place until the Spartans were betrayed by a Greek hired by the Persians into revealing a path that allowed the Persians to surround the Greeks and, finally, overwhelm them. Despite the ultimate defeat of the Spartan force, this delay gave the Athenians enough time to get their navy into position, and they crushed the Persian navy in a single day.

Despite the Persian naval loss, Xerxes' army was easily able to march across Greece and ransack various poleis and farmlands; it even sacked Athens itself, which had been evacuated earlier. Xerxes then personally withdrew along with a significant portion of his army, while claiming victory over the Greeks. Here, simple logistics were the issue: the Greek naval victory made supply of the whole Persian army impractical.

The next year, in 479 BCE, a decisive battle was fought in central Greece by a Greek coalition led by the Spartans, followed by a Greek naval battle led by the Athenians. The latter then led an invasion of Ionia that defeated the Persian army. Each time the Greeks were victorious, and the Persians finally decided to abandon the attempt to conquer Greece as being too costly. The remaining Greek colonies in Anatolia rose up against the Persians, and sporadic fighting continued for almost 20 years.

While there is obviously a pro-Greek bias to the Greek sources that describe the Persian War, they do identify an essential reason for Greek victories: thanks to the viability of the phalanx, each Greek soldier (from any polis, not just Sparta) was a real, viable soldier. The immense majority of the Persian forces were relatively ineffective peasant conscripts, unwillingly recruited from their homes and forced to fight for a king for whom they had little personal loyalty. The core of the Persian army were excellent cavalry from the Iranian plateau and Bactria (present-day Afghanistan), but those were always a small minority of the total force.

479 BCE was the end of the Persian war and the beginning of the "classical age" of Greece, the period during which the Greeks exhibited the most remarkable flowering of their ideas and accomplishments, as well as perhaps their most selfish and misguided political blunders in the form of a costly and ultimately pointless war between Sparta and Athens: the Peloponnesian War.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Map of Persia – Sumerophile

Persian invasion – GNU Free Documentation License

This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 5: Persia and the Greek Wars in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: HESIOD, WORKS AND DAYS

Please use the link on Blackboard to access HESIOD, *WORKS AND DAYS*, LAST THIRD OF 8TH CENTURY BCE.

Source:

Backman, Clifford R. *Sources for Cultures of the West Volume I: to 1750*. 3rd Edition. Oxford University Press: 2019. 41-43.

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *Hesiod, Works and Days*.

Reading Journal

Primary sources don't just tell us what happened in the past; they can also tell us about the values of past societies, or how individuals saw themselves in relation to their present and their past. How does Hesiod characterize the period in which he lives? Is he optimistic or pessimistic? Use examples (quotes) from the primary source text to support your analysis.

Study Guide Collaboration

Once you have been assigned a group, you will now be working with your group to contribute to the class study guide. Each group will be assigned a specific responsibility which will rotate each module.

PART V

MODULE FOUR: CLASSICAL GREECE

READING: THE CLASSICAL AGE OF GREECE

Christopher Brooks

Introduction

The most frequently studied period of Greek history is the "Classical Age," the time between the triumph of the Greek coalition against Persia in 479 BCE and the conquest of Greece by the Macedonian king Philip II (the father of Alexander the Great) in 338 BCE. This was the era in which the Greek poleis were at their most powerful economically and militarily and their most innovative and productive artistically and intellectually. While opinions will vary, perhaps the single most memorable achievement of the Classical Age was in philosophy, first and foremost because of the thought of the most significant Greek philosophers of all time: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The Classical Age (like the European Renaissance about two thousand years later) is best remembered for its artistic and intellectual achievements rather than the political events of the time.

The Peloponnesian War

When the Spartans and Athenians led the Greek poleis to victory against the Persians in the Persian War, it was a shock to the entire region of the Mediterranean and Middle East. Persia was the regional "superpower" at the time, while the Greeks were just a group of disunited city-states on a rocky peninsula to the northwest. After their success, the Greeks were filled with confidence about the superiority of their own form of civilization and their taste for inquiry and innovation. Greeks in this period, the Classical Age, produced many of their most memorable cultural and intellectual achievements.

The great contrast in the Classical Age was between the power and splendor of the Greek poleis, especially Athens and Sparta, and the wars and conflicts that broke out as they tried to expand their power and control. After the defeat of the Persians, the Athenians created the Delian League, in theory a defensive coalition that existed to defend against Persia and to liberate the Ionian colonies still under Persian control, but in reality a political tool eventually used by Athens to create its own empire.

Each year, the members of the Delian League contributed money to build and support a large navy, meant to protect all of Greece from any further Persian interference. Athens, however, quickly became the dominant player in the Delian League. Athens was able to control the League due to its powerful navy; no other polis had a navy anywhere near as large or effective, so the other members of the League had to contribute funds and supplies while the Athenians fielded the ships. Thus, it was all too easy for Athens to simply use

the League to drain the other poleis of wealth while building up its own power. The last remnants of Persian troops were driven from the Greek islands by 469 BCE, about ten years after the great Greek victories of the Persian War, but Athens refused to allow any of the League members to resign from the League after the victory.

Soon, Athens moved from simply extracting money to actually imposing political control in other poleis. Athens stationed troops in garrisons in other cities and forced the cities to adopt new laws, regulations, and taxes, all designed to keep the flow of money going to Athens. Some of the members of the League rose up in armed revolts, but the Athenians were able to crush the revolts with little difficulty. The final event that eliminated any pretense that the League was anything but an Athenian empire was the failure of a naval expedition sent in 460 BCE by Athens to help an Egyptian revolt against the Persians. The Greek expedition was crushed, and the Athenians responded by moving the treasury of the League, formerly kept on the Greek island of Delos (hence "Delian League"), to Athens itself, arguing that the treasury was too vulnerable if it remained on Delos. At this point, no other member of the League could do anything about it – the League existed as an Athenian-controlled empire, pumping money into Athenian coffers and allowing Athens to build some of its most famous and beautiful buildings. Thus, the great irony is that the most glorious age of Athenian democracy and philosophy was funded by the extraction of wealth from its fellow Greek cities. In the end, the Persians simply made peace with Athens in 448 BCE, giving up the claim to the Greek colonies entirely and in turn eliminating the very reason the League had come into being.

Meanwhile, Sparta was the head of a different association, the Peloponnesian League, which was originally founded before the Persian War as a mutual protection league of the Greek cities of Corinth, Sparta, and Thebes. Like Athens, Sparta dominated its allies, although it did not take advantage of them in quite the same ways that Athens did. Sparta was resentful and, in a way, fearful of Athenian power. Open war finally broke out between the two cities in 431 BCE after two of their respective allied poleis started a conflict and Athens tried to influence the political decisions of Spartan allies. The war lasted from 431 – 404 BCE.

The Spartans were unquestionably superior in land warfare, while the Athenians had a seemingly unstoppable navy. The Spartans and their allies repeatedly invaded Athenian territory, but the Athenians were smart enough to have built strong fortifications that held the Spartans off. The Athenians, in turn, attacked Spartan settlements and positions overseas and used their navy to bring in supplies. While Sparta could not take Athens itself, Athens was essentially under siege for decades; life went on, but it was usually impossible for the Athenians to travel over land in Greece outside of their home region of Attica.

Athens and its allies, including the poleis it dominated in the Delian League, are depicted in orange, Sparta and its allies in green.

Truces came and went, but the war continued for almost thirty years. In 415 BCE Athens suffered a disaster when a young general convinced the Athenians to send thousands of troops against the city of Syracuse (a Spartan ally) in southern Sicily, hundreds of miles from Greece itself, in hopes of looting it. The invasion turned into a nightmare for the Athenians, with every ship captured or sunk and almost every soldier killed or captured and sold into slavery; this dramatically weakened the Athenian military.

At that point, the Athenians were on the defensive. The Spartans established a permanent garrison within sight of Athens itself. Close to 20,000 slaves escaped from the Athenian silver mines that had originally paid for the navy before the Persian War and were welcomed by the Spartans as recruits (thus bolstering Spartan forces and cutting off Athens' main source of revenue). Sparta finally struck a decisive blow in 405 BCE by surprising the Athenian fleet in Anatolia and destroying it. Athens had to sue for peace. Sparta destroyed the

Athenian defenses it had used during the war, but did not destroy the city itself, and within a year the Athenians had created a new government.

The Aftermath

Greece itself was transformed by the Peloponnesian War. Both sides had sought out allies outside of Greece, with the Spartans ultimately allying with the Persians – formerly their hated enemies – in the final stages of the war. The Greeks as a whole were less isolated and more cosmopolitan by the time the war ended, meaning that at least some of their prejudices about Greek superiority were muted. Likewise, the war had inadvertently undermined the hoplite-based social and political order of the prior centuries.

Nowhere was this more true than in Sparta. Sparta had been greatly altered by the war, out of necessity becoming both a naval power and a diplomatic "player" and losing much of its former identity; some Spartans had gotten rich and were buying their sons out of the formerly-obligatory life in the barracks, while others were too poor to train. Likewise, the war had weakened Sparta's cultural xenophobia and obsession with austerity, since controlling diplomatic alliances was as important as sheer military strength. Diplomacy required skill, culture, and education, not just force of arms. Subsequently, the Greeks as a whole were shocked in 371 BCE when the polis of Thebes defeated the Spartans three times in open battle, symbolically marching to within sight of Sparta itself and destroying the myth of Spartan invincibility.

Across Greece, the Poleis all adopted the practice of state-financed standing armies for the first time, rather than volunteer citizen-soldiers. Likewise, the poleis came to rely on mercenaries, many of whom (ironically) went on to serve the Persians after the war wound down. Thus, between 405 BCE – 338 BCE, the old order of the hoplites and republics atrophied, replaced by oligarchic councils or tyrants in the poleis and stronger, tax-supported states. The period of the war itself was thus both the high point and the beginning of the end of "classical" Greece. Meanwhile, Persia re-captured and exerted control over the Anatolian Greek cities by 387 BCE as Greece itself was divided and weakened. Thus, even though the Persians had "lost" the Persian War, they were as strong as ever as an empire.

Despite the importance of the Peloponnesian War in transforming ancient Greece, however, it should be emphasized that not all of the poleis were involved in the war, and there were years of truce and skirmishing during which even the major antagonists were not actively campaigning. The reason that this part of Greek history is referred to as the Classical Age is that its lasting achievements had to do with culture and learning, not warfare. The Peloponnesian War ultimately resulted in checking Athens' imperial ambitions and causing the Greeks to broaden their outlook toward non-Greeks; its effects were as much cultural as political.

Athens and the Ironies of Democracy

Just as the Classical Age is nearly synonymous with "ancient Greece" itself, "ancient Greece" in the

Classical Age is often conflated with what happened in Athens specifically. Athens was the richest and most influential of all of the Greek poleis during this period, although its power waned once it plunged into the Peloponnesian War against Sparta starting in 431 BCE. The most famous Greek philosophers – Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle – were either native Athenians (Socrates and Plato) or studied and taught in Athens (Aristotle). Likewise, the Athenian democracy that had crystallized under Cleisthenes, with about 10% of the overall population having a vote in public affairs, was at its height during this period.

The irony was not just that Athens reached its peak during the period of the Delian League and the wealth it extracted from other poleis, it was that Athenian democracy itself was at its strongest: even as it was forging an empire on top of the other city-states, Athens was becoming the first great experiment in democratic government in world history. The Athenian leader in charge during the transition to this phase was Pericles (495 – 429 BCE), an aristocrat who dominated Athenian politics but did not actually seize power as had the earlier tyrants.

When Pericles rose to be a dominant voice in Athenian politics, the system remained in place that had been set up by Cleisthenes. All adult male citizens had a vote in the public assembly, while a smaller council handled day-to-day business. Athenian citizens continued to pride themselves on their rhetorical skill, since everything hinged on the ability of public speakers to convince their fellows through strength of argumentative skill. The assembly also voted every year to appoint ten generals, who were in charge of both the military and foreign relations.

As the Delian League grew, which is to say as Athens took over control of its "allied" poleis, it increased the size of its bureaucracy accordingly. Under Pericles, there were about 1,500 officials who managed the taxation of the league's cities, ran courts and administrative bodies, and managed the League's activities. Pericles instituted the policy of paying public servants, who had worked for free in the past, a move that dramatically decreased the potential for corruption through bribes and opened the possibility of poorer citizens to serve in public office (i.e. before, a citizen had to be wealthy enough to volunteer in the city government – this meant that almost all farmers and small merchants were cut off from direct political power). He also issued a new law decreeing that only the children of Athenian parents could be Athenian citizens, a move that elevated the importance of Athenian women but also further entrenched the conceit of the Athenians in relation to the other Greek cities; the Athenians wanted citizenship to be their own, carefully protected, commodity. All of this suggests that Athens enjoyed a tremendous period of growth and prosperity, along with what was among the fairest and most impartial government in the ancient world at the time, but that it did so on the backs of its Greek "allies."

There were further ironies present in the seeming egalitarianism of Greek society during the Classical Age. The Greeks were the first to carry out experiments in rationalistic philosophy and in democratic government. At the same time, Greek society itself was profoundly divided and unequal. First and foremost, women were held in a subservient position. Women, by definition, could not be citizens, even though in certain cases like the Athens of Pericles, they could assume an honored social role as mothers of citizens. Women could not hold public office, nor could they legally own property or defend themselves independently in court. They

were, in short, legal minors (like children are in American society today) under the legal control and guardianship of their fathers or husbands.

For elite Greek women, social restrictions were stark: they were normally confined to the inner sanctums of homes, interacting only with family members or close female friends from families of the same social rank, and when they did go out in public they had to do so in the company of chaperones. There was never a time in which it was socially acceptable for an elite woman to be alone in public. Just about the only social position in which elite women had real, direct power was in the priesthoods of some of the Greek gods, where women could serve as priestesses. These were a very small minority, however.

Non-elite women had more freedom in the sense that they had to work, so they often sold goods in the marketplace or helped to run shops. Since the large majority of the Greek population outside of the cities themselves were farmers, women naturally worked alongside men on farms. Regardless, they did not have legal control over their own livelihoods, even if they did much of the actual work, with their husbands (or fathers or brothers) retaining complete legal ownership.

In almost all cases, Greek women were married off while extremely young, usually soon after puberty, and almost always to men significantly older than they were. Legal power over a woman passed from the father to the husband, and in cases of divorce it passed back to the father. Even in the case of widows, Greek tradition held that the husband's will should dictate who his widow marry – most often another male member of his family, to keep the family property intact. One important exception to the absence of legal rights for women was that Greek women could initiate divorce, although the divorce would be recognized only after a legal process proved that the husband's behavior was truly reprehensible to Greek sensibilities, and it was a rare occurrence either way: there is only one known case from classical Athens of a woman attempting to initiate divorce.

In the domestic sphere, there were physical divides between the front, public part of the house where men entertained their friends, and the back part of the house where women cared for the children and carried on domestic tasks like sewing. There was little tradition of mixed-sex socializing, outside of the all-male drinking parties called *symposia* that featured female "entertainers" – slaves and servants who carried on conversation, danced and sang, and had sex with the guests. In these cases, the female "company" was present solely for entertainment and sexual slavery.

Depiction of a symposium from c. 420 BCE, featuring a female entertainer – most likely a slave and obliged to provide sex as well as musical entertainment to the male guests.

In turn, prostitution was very common, with the bulk of prostitutes being slaves. Elite prostitutes were known as *hetairai*, who served as female companions for elite men and were supposed to be able to contribute to witty, learned discussion. One such hetairai, Aspasia, was the companion of Pericles and was a full member of the elite circle of philosophers, scientists, and politicians at the top of Athenian society. The difficulty in considering these special cases, however, is that they can gloss over the fact that the vast majority of women were in a disempowered social space, regarded as a social necessity that existed to bear children. An Athenian politician, Demosthenes, once said "we have hetairai for the sake of pleasure, regular prostitutes to care for our physical needs, and wives to bear legitimate children and be loyal custodians of our households."

It is difficult to know the degree to which female seclusion was truly practiced, since all of the commentary that refers to it was written by elite men, almost all of whom supported the idea of female subservience and the separation of the sexes in public. What we know for sure is that almost no written works survive by women authors – the outstanding exception being Sappho, a poet of the Archaic period whose works suggests that lesbianism may have been relatively common (her home, the Greek island of Lesbos, is the root of the English word lesbian itself). Likewise, Greek legal codes certainly enforced a stark gender divide, and Greek homes were definitely divided into male-dominated public spaces and the private sphere of the family. There is at least some evidence, however, that gender divisions might not have been quite as stark as the male commentators

would have it – as noted below, at least one Greek playwright celebrated the wit and fortitude of women in his work. Finally, we should note that major differences in gender roles were definitely present in different regions and between different poleis; regimented Sparta was far more progressive in its empowerment of women than was democratic Athens.

One product of the divide between men and women was the prevalence of bisexuality among elite Greek men (and, as suggested by Sappho's work, also apparently among women). There was no concept of "heterosexual" versus "homosexual" in Greek culture; sexual attraction was assumed to exist, in potential, between men as easily as between men and women, although bisexuality appears to have been most common among men in the upper social ranks. One common practice was for an adult man of the elite classes to "adopt" a male adolescent of his social class and both mentor him in politics, social conduct, and war, and carry on what we would now regard as a statutory sexual relationship with him – this practice was especially common in the barracks society of Sparta.

Building on the prevalence of male relationships was the Greek tradition of male homosexual warriorhood, homosexual bonds between soldiers that helped them be more effective fighters. To cite a literary example, in Homer's *Iliad*, the one event that rouses the mighty warrior Achilles to battle when he is busy sulking is the death of his (male) lover. In addition to the Spartan case noted above, another renowned historical example of homosexual warriorhood was the Sacred Band of the polis of Thebes, 150 male couples who led the army of Thebes and held the reputation of being completely fearless. Homosexual love in this case was linked directly to the Greek virtues of honor and skill in battle, as the Sacred Band were believed to fight all the harder in order to both honor and defend their lovers. This certainly seemed to be true at times, as when the Theban army, led by the Sacred Band, was the city that first defeated Sparta in open battle (this occurred after the Peloponnesian War, when Sparta found itself warring with its former allies like Thebes).

In addition to the dramatic gender disparities in Greek society, there was the case of slavery. Slaves in Greece were in a legal position just about as dire as any in history. Their masters could legally kill them, rape them, or maim them if they saw fit. Normally, slaves were not murdered outright, but this was because murder was seen as offensive to the gods, not because there were any legal consequences. As Greece became more wealthy and powerful, the demand for slaves increased dramatically as each poleis found itself in need of more labor power, so a major goal for warfare became the capturing of slaves. By 450 BCE, one-third of the population of Athens and its territories consisted of slaves.

Slaves in Greece came from many sources. While the practice was outlawed in Athens by Solon, most poleis still allowed the enslavement of their own people who were unable to pay debts. More common was the practice of taking slaves in war, and one of the effects of the Greek victories in the Persian War was that thousands of Persian captives were taken as slaves. There was also a thriving slave trade between all of the major civilizations of the ancient world; African slaves were captured and sold in Egypt, Greek slaves to Persia (despite its nominal ban on slavery, it is clear that at least some slavery existed in Persia), nomadic people from the steppes in Black Sea ports, and so on. With demand so high, any neighboring settlement was a potential source of slaves, and slavery was an integral part of the Mediterranean economy as a result.

Slavery was so prevalent that what the slaves actually did varied considerably. Some very lucky slaves who were educated ran businesses or served as bureaucrats, teachers, or accountants. In a small number of cases, such elite slaves were able to keep some of the money they made, save it, and buy their freedom. Much more common, however, were laborers or craftsmen of all kinds, who made things and then sold them on behalf of their masters. Slaves even served as clerks in the public bureaucracies, as well as police and guard forces in the cities. One exceptional case was a force of archers used as city guards in Athens who were slaves from Scythia (present-day Ukraine).

The worst positions for slaves were the jobs involving manual labor, especially in mines. As noted in the last chapter, one of the events that lost the Peloponnesian War for Athens was the fact that 20,000 of its publicly-owned slaves were liberated by the Spartans from the horrendous conditions in the Athenian silver mines. Likewise, there was no worse fate than being a slave in a salt mine (one of the areas containing a natural underground salt deposit). Salt is corrosive to human tissue in large amounts, and exposure meant that a slave would die horribly over time. The historical evidence suggests that slaves in mines were routinely worked to death, not unlike the plantation slaves of Brazil and the Caribbean thousands of years later.

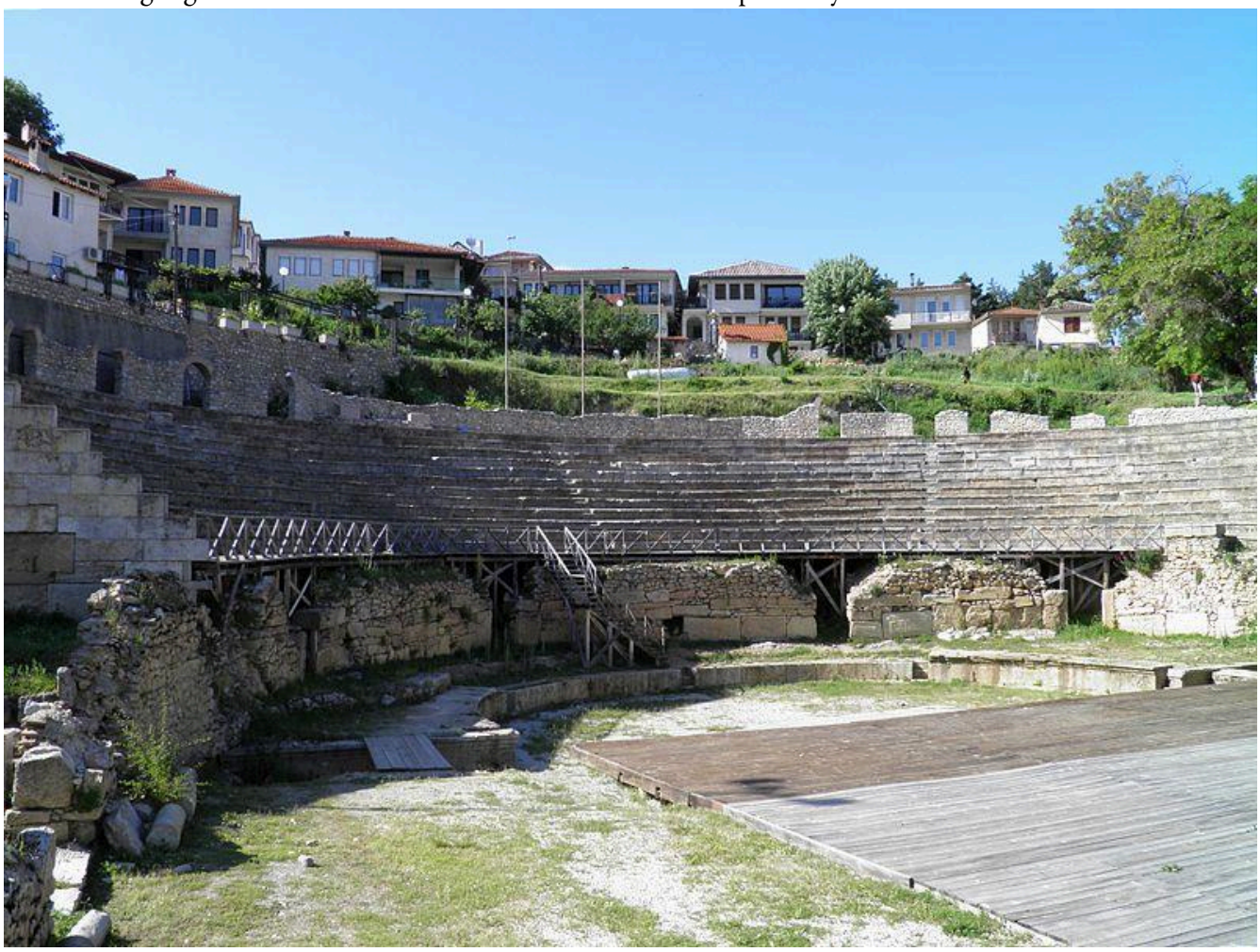
Culture

If Greek society was thus nothing like present-day concepts of fairness or equality, what about it led to this era being regarded as "classical"? The answer is that it was during the Classical Age that the Greeks arrived at some of their great intellectual and cultural achievements. The Athenian democratic experiment is, of course, of great historical importance, but it was relatively short-lived, with democratic government not returning to the western world until the end of the eighteenth century CE. In contrast, the Greek approach to philosophy, drama, history, scientific thought, and art remained living legacies even after the Classical Age itself was at an end.

The fundamental concept of Greek thought, as reflected in drama, literature, and philosophy, was *humanism*. This was an overarching theme and phenomenon common to all of the most important Greek cultural achievements in literature, religion, drama, history-writing, and art. Humanism is the idea that, first and foremost, humankind is inherently beautiful, capable, and creative. To the Greek humanists, human beings were not put on the earth to suffer by cruel gods, but instead carried within the spark of godlike creativity. Likewise, a major theme of humanism was a pragmatic indifference to the gods and fate – one Greek philosopher, Xenophanes, dismissed the very idea of human-like gods who intervened in daily life. The basic humanistic attitude is that if there are any gods, they do not seem particularly interested in what humans do or say, so it is better to simply focus on the tangible world of human life. The Greeks thus offered sacrifices to keep the gods appeased, and sought out oracles for hints of what the future held, but did not normally pursue a deeply spiritual connection with their deities.

That being noted, one of the major cultural innovations of the Greeks, the creation of drama, emerged from the worship of the gods. Specifically, the celebrations of the god Dionysus, god of wine and revelry,

brought about the first recognizable "plays" and "actors." Not surprisingly, religious festivals devoted to Dionysus involved a lot of celebrating, and part of that celebration was choruses of singing and chanting. Greek writers started scripting these performances, eventually creating what we now recognize as plays. A prominent feature of Greek drama left over from the Dionysian rituals remained the *chorus*, a group of performers who chanted or sang together and served as the narrator to the stories depicted by the main characters.



Contemporary view of the remnants of the Greek theater of Lychnidos in present-day Macedonia. The upper tiers are still marked with the names of the wealthy individuals who purchased their own reserved seats.

Greek drama depicted life in human terms, even when using mythological or ancient settings. Playwrights would set their plays in the past or among the gods, but the experiences of the characters in the plays were recognizable critiques of the playwrights' contemporary society. Among the most powerful were the *tragedies*: stories in which the frailty of humanity, most importantly the problem of pride, served to undermine the happiness of otherwise powerful individuals. Typically, in a Greek tragedy, the main character is a powerful male leader, a king or a military captain, who enjoys great success in his endeavors until a fatal flaw of his own personality and psyche causes him to do something foolish and self-destructive. Very often this took the form of *hubris*, overweening pride and lack of self-control, which the Greeks believed was offensive to the gods and

could bring about divine retribution. Other tragedies emphasized the power of fate, when cruel circumstances conspired to lead even great heroes to failure.

In addition to tragedy, the Greeks invented *comedy*. The essential difference is that tragedy revolves around *pathos,* or suffering, from which the English word "pathetic" derives. Pathos is meant to inspire sympathy and understanding in the viewer. Watching a Greek tragedy should, the playwrights hoped, lead the audience to relate to and sympathize with the tragic hero. Comedy, however, is meant to inspire mockery and gleeful contempt of the failings of others, rather than sympathy. The most prominent comic playwright (whose works survive) was Aristophanes, a brilliant writer whose plays are full of lying, hypocritical Athenian politicians and merchants who reveal themselves as the frauds they are to the delight of audiences.

One famous play by Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, was set in the Peloponnesian War. The women of Athens are fed up with the pointless conflict and use the one thing they have some power over, their bodies, to force the men to stop the fighting by withholding sex. A Spartan contingent appears begging to open peace negotiations because, it turns out, the Spartan women have done the same thing. Here, Aristophanes not only indulged in the ribald humor that was popular with the Greeks (even by present-day standards, *Lysistrata* is full of "dirty" jokes) but showed a remarkable awareness of, and sympathy for, the social position of Greek women. In fact, in plays like *Lysistrata* we see evidence that Greek women were *not* in fact always secluded and rendered mute by male-dominated society, even though (male) Greek commentators generally argued that they should be.

Greek drama, both tragedy and comedy, is of enormous historical importance because even when it used the gods as characters or fate as an explanation for problems, it put human beings front and center in being responsible for their own errors. It depicted human choice as being the centerpiece of life against a backdrop of often uncontrollable circumstances. Tragedy gave the Greeks the option of lamenting that condition, while comedy offered the chance of laughing at it. In the surviving plays of the ancient Greeks, there were very few happy endings, but plenty of opportunities to relate to the fate of, or make fun of, the protagonists. In turn, almost every present-day movie and television show is deeply indebted to Greek drama. Greek drama was the first time human beings acted out stories that were meant to entertain, and sometimes to inform, their audiences.

Science

The idea that there is a difference between "science" and "philosophy" is a very recent one, in many ways dating to the eighteenth century CE (i.e. only about 300 years ago). The word "philosophy" literally means "love of knowledge," and in the ancient world the people we might identify as Greek "scientists" were simply regarded as philosophers by their fellow Greeks, ones who happened to be especially interested in how the world worked and what things were made of. Unlike earlier thinkers, the Greek scientists sought to understand the operation of the universe on its own terms, without simply writing off the details to the will of the gods.

The importance of Greek scientific work is not primarily in the conclusions that Greek scientists

reached, which ended up being factually wrong most of the time. Instead, its importance is in its spirit of rational inquiry, in the idea that the human mind can discover new things about the world through examination and consideration. The world, thought the Greek scientists, was not some sacred or impenetrable thing that could never be understood; they sought to explain it without recourse to supernatural forces. To that end, Greek scientists claimed that things like wind, fire, lightning, and other natural forces, were not necessarily spirits or gods (or at least tools of spirits and gods), but might just be natural forces that did not have personalities of their own.

The first known Greek scientist was Thales of Miletus (i.e. Thales, and the students of his who went on to be important scientific thinkers as well, were from the polis of Miletus in Ionia), who during the Archaic Age set out to understand natural forces without recourse to references to the gods. Thales explained earthquakes not as punishments inflicted by the gods arbitrarily on humanity, but as a result of the earth floating in a gigantic ocean that occasionally sloshed it around. He traveled to Egypt and was able to measure the height of the pyramids (already thousands of years old) by the length of their shadows. He became so skilled at astronomy that he (reputedly) successfully predicted a solar eclipse in 585 BCE.

Thales had a student, Anaximander, who posited that rather than floating on water as his teacher had suggested, the earth was held suspended in space by a perfectly symmetrical balance of forces. He created the first known map of the world that attempted to accurately depict distances and relationships between places. Following Anaximander, a third scientist, Anaximenes, created the theory of the four elements that, he argued, comprise all things – earth, air, fire, and water. Many centuries later, Galen of Pergamon, a Greek physician living under Roman rule, would explain human health in terms of the balance of those four forces (the four "humors" of the body), ultimately crafting a medical theory that would persist until the modern era.

In all three cases, the significance of the Greek scientists is that they tried to create theories to explain natural phenomena based on what they observed in nature itself. They were employing a form of what is referred to as inductive reason, of starting with observation and moving toward explanation. Even though it was (at it turns out) inaccurate, the idea of the four elements as the essential building-blocks of nature and health remained the leading explanation for many centuries. Other Greek scientists came along to refine these ideas, most importantly when two of them (Leucippus and Democritus) came up with the idea that tiny particles they called atoms formed the elements that, in turn, formed everything else. It would take until the development of modern chemistry for that theory to be proved correct through empirical research, however.

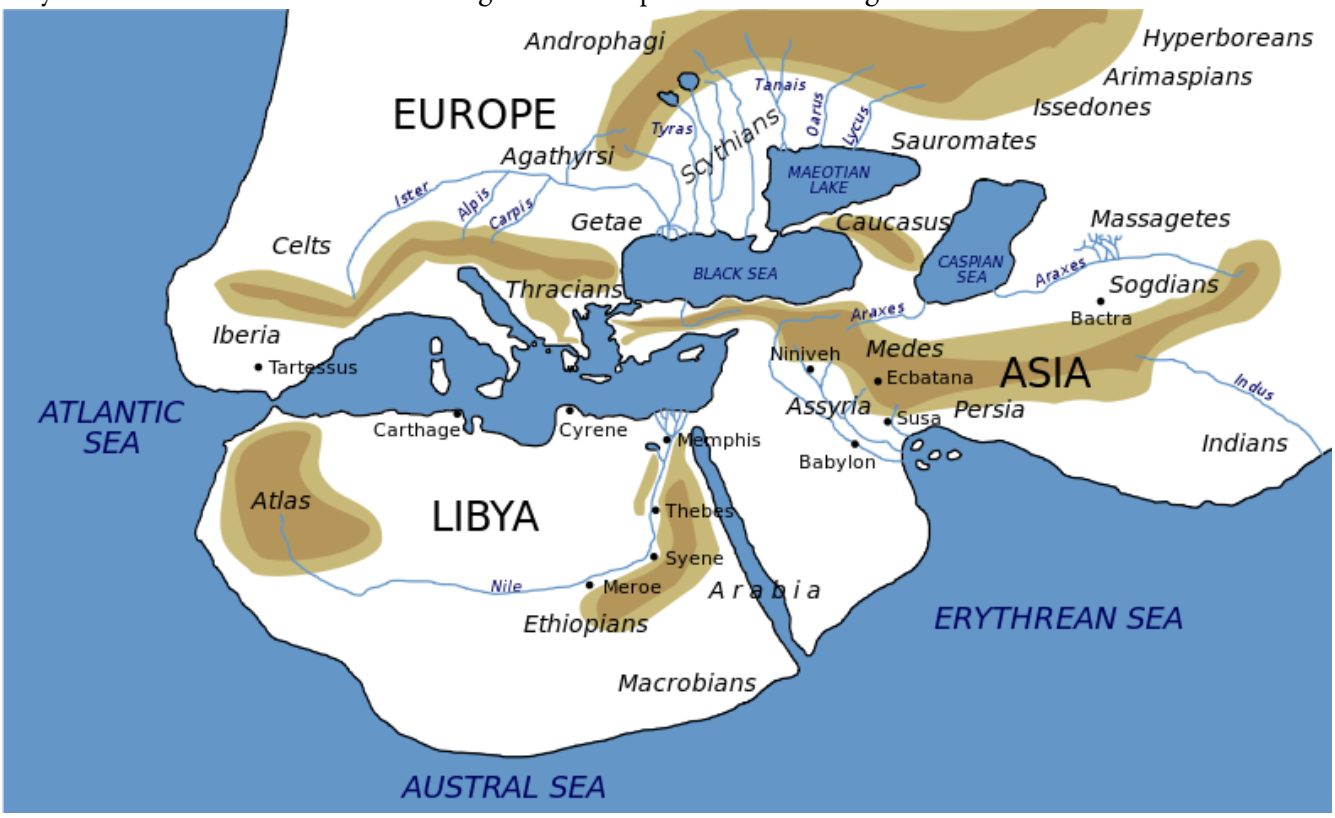
History

It was the Greeks that came up with history in the same sense that the term is used today, namely of a story (a narrative) based on historical events that tries to explain what happened and why it happened the way it did. In other words, history as it was first written by the Greeks is not just about listing facts, it is about explaining the human motivations at work in historical events and phenomena. Likewise, the Greeks were the

first to systematically employ the essential historical method of using primary sources written or experienced at the time as the basis of historical research.

The founding figure of Greek history-writing was Herodotus (484 – 420 BCE), who wrote a history of the Persian War that was acclaimed by his fellow Greeks. Herodotus sought to explain human actions in terms of how people tend to react to the political and social pressures they experienced. He applied his theory to various events in the ancient past, like the Trojan War, as well as those of Greece's recent past. Most importantly, Herodotus traveled and read sources to serve as the basis of his conclusions. He did not simply sit in his home city and theorize about things; he gathered a huge amount of information about foreign lands and cultures and he examined contemporary accounts of events. This use of primary sources is still the defining characteristic of history as an academic discipline: professional historians must seek out writings and artifacts from their areas of study and use them as the basis for their own interpretations.

Herodotus also raised issues of ongoing relevance about the encounter of different cultures; despite the greatness of his own civilization, he was genuinely vexed by the issue of whether one set of beliefs and practices (i.e. culture) could be "better" than another. He knew enough about other cultures, especially Persia, to recognize that other societies could be as complex, and military more powerful, than was Greece. Nevertheless, his history of the Persian War continued the age-old Greek practice of referring to the Persians as "barbarians."



The world as described by Herodotus (the map is a contemporary image based on Herodotus's work). Note the central position of Greece, just south of the region marked "Thracians."

The other great Greek historian of the classical period was the Athenian writer Thucydides (460 – 404 BCE), sometimes considered the real "father" of history-writing. Thucydides wrote a history of the Pelopon-

nesian War that remains the single most significant account of the war to this day. The work meticulously follows the events of the war while investigating the human motivations and subsequent decisions that caused events. The war had been a terrible tragedy, he wrote, because Athens became so power-hungry that it sacrificed its own greatness in the quest for more power and wealth. Thus, he deliberately crafted an argument (a thesis) and defended it with historical evidence, precisely the same thing historians and history students alike are expected to do in their written work. Thanks in part to the work of Herodotus and Thucydides, history became such an important discipline to the Greeks that they believed that Clio, one of the divine muses, the sources of inspiration for thought and artistic creation, was the patron of history specifically.

Philosophy

Perhaps the single greatest achievement of Greek thought was in philosophy. It was in philosophy that the Greeks most radically broke with supernatural explanations for life and thought and instead sought to establish moral and ethical codes, investigate political theory, and understand human motivations all in terms of the human mind and human capacities. As noted above, the word "philosophy" literally means "love of knowledge," and Greek philosophers did much more than just contemplate the meaning of life; they were often mathematicians, physicists, and literary critics *as well as* "philosophers" in the sense that that the word is used in the present.

Among the important questions that most Greek philosophers dealt were those concerning politics and ethics. The key question that arose among the early Greek philosophers was whether standards of ethics and political institutions as they existed in Greece – including everything from the polis, democracy, tyranny, Greek standards of behavior, and so on – were somehow dictated by nature or were instead merely social customs that had arisen over time. The Classical Age saw the full flowering of Greek engagement with those questions.

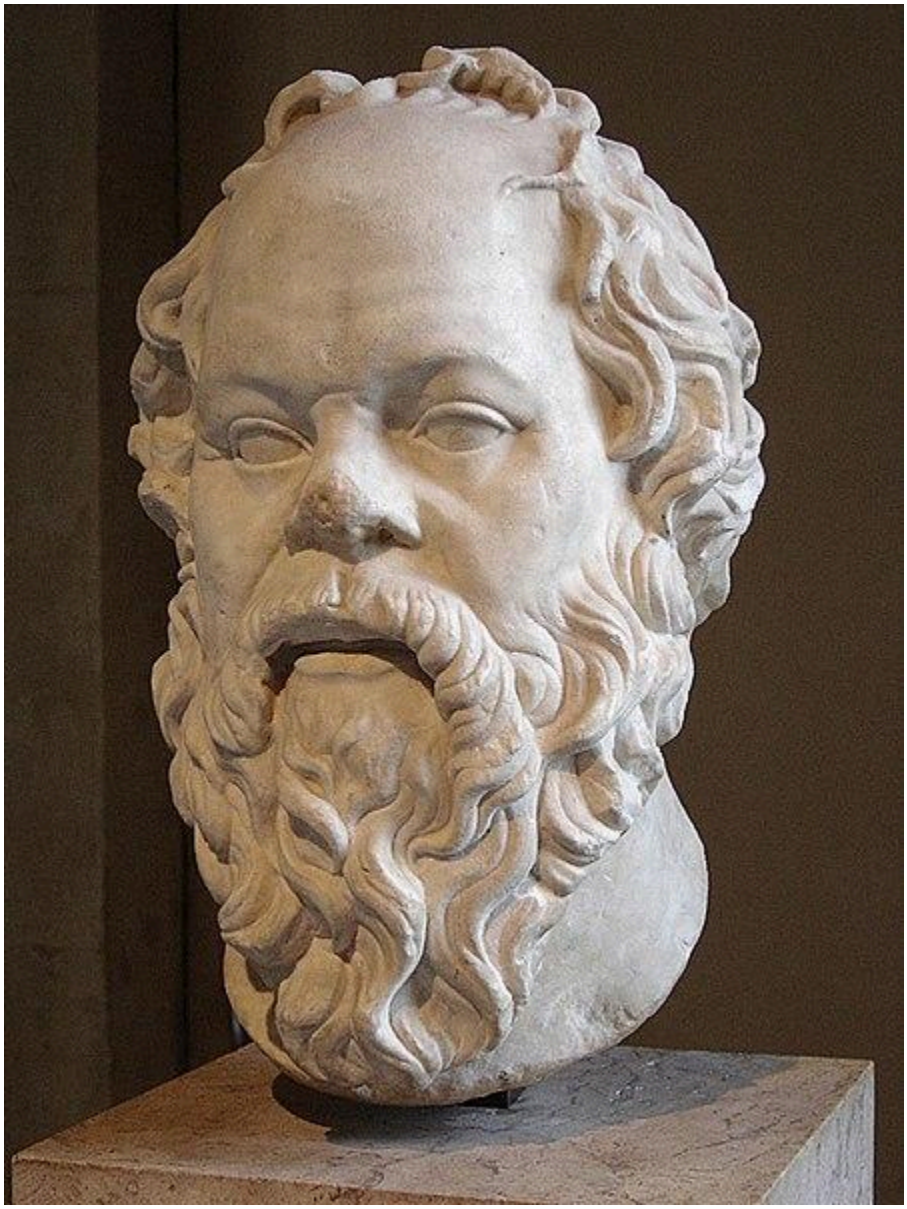
Some of the early philosophers of the Greek classical age were the Sophists: traveling teachers who tutored students on all aspects of thought. While they did not represented a truly unified body of thought, the one common sophistic doctrine was that all human beliefs and customs were just habits of a society, that there were no absolute truths, and that it was thus vitally important for an educated man to be able to argue both sides of an issue with equal skill and rhetorical ability. Their focus was on training elite Greeks to be *successful* – the Greek term for "virtue" was synonymous with "success." Thus, the sophists were in the business of educating Greeks to be more successful, especially in the law courts and the public assemblies. They did not have a shared philosophical doctrine besides this idea that truth was relative and that the focus in life ought to be on individual achievement.

The men who became the most famous Greek philosophers of all time strongly disagreed with this view. These were a three-person line of teachers and students. Socrates (469 – 399 BCE) taught Plato (428 – 347 BCE), who taught Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE), who went on to be the personal tutor of Alexander the Great for a time. It is one of the most remarkable intellectual lineages in history – three of the greatest thinkers

of Greek civilization and one of the greatest military and political leaders, all linked together as teachers and students.

Socrates never wrote anything down; like most of his contemporaries, he believed that writing destroyed the memory and undermined meaning, preferring spoken discourses and memorization. Instead, his beliefs and arguments were recorded by his student Plato, who committed them to prose despite sharing Socrates' disdain for the written word. Socrates challenged the sophists and insisted that there *are* essential truths about morality and ethical conduct, but that to arrive at those truths one must be willing to relentlessly question oneself. He took issue with the fact that the sophists were largely unconcerned with ethical behavior, focusing entirely on worldly success; according to Socrates, there were higher truths and meanings to human conduct than mere wealth and political power.

Socrates used what later became known as the "Socratic Method" to seek out these fixed, unchanging rules of truth and ethics. In the Socratic Method, the teacher asks a series of questions of the student, forcing the student to examine her own biases and gaps in logic, until finally arriving at a more satisfying and reasonable belief than she started with. In Socrates's case, his questions were meant to lead his interlocutors to arrive at real, stable truths about justice, truth, and virtuous politics. Unlike with the sophists' mastery of rhetoric, the point of the question-and-answer sessions was not to prove that nothing was true, but instead to force one to arrive at truths through the most rigorous application of human reason.



A Roman copy of an original Greek bust of Socrates – as with many Greek sculptures, only the Roman copy survives. Most Greek statues were made of bronze, and over the centuries almost all were melted down for the metal.

Plato agreed with his teacher that there are essential truths, but he went further: because the senses can be deceived and because our insight is imperfect, only through the most serious contemplation and discussion can we arrive at truth. Truth could only be apprehended with the mind, not with the eye or ear, and it required rigorous discussion and contemplation. To Plato, ideas (which he called "Forms") were more "real" than actual objects. The idea of a table, for instance, is fixed, permanent, and invulnerable, while "real" tables are fragile, flawed, and impermanent. Plato claimed that politics and ethics were like this as well, with the Form of Justice superseding "real" laws and courts, but existing in the intellectual realm as something philosophers ought to contemplate.

In Plato's work *The Republic* he wrote of an imaginary polis in which political leaders were raised from

childhood to become "philosopher-kings," combining practical knowledge with a deep understanding of intellectual concepts. Plato believed that the education of a future leader was of paramount importance, perhaps even more important than that leader's skill in leading armies. Of all his ideas, this concept of a philosopher-king was one of the most influential; various kings, emperors, and generals influenced by Greek philosophy would try to model their rule on Plato's concepts right up to the modern era.

Plato founded a school, the Academy, in Athens, which remained in existence until the early Middle Ages as one of the greatest centers of thought in the world. Philosophers would travel from across the Greek world to learn and debate at the Academy, and it was a mark of tremendous intellectual prestige to study there. It prospered through the entire period of Classical Greece, the Hellenistic Age that followed, and the Roman Empire, only to be disbanded by the Byzantine (eastern Roman) emperor Justinian in the sixth century CE. It was, in short, both one of the most significant and one of the longest-lasting schools in history.

Plato's most gifted student was Aristotle, who founded his own institution of learning, the Lyceum, after he was passed over to lead the Academy following Plato's death. Aristotle broke sharply with his teacher over the essential doctrine of his teaching. Aristotle argued that the senses, while imperfect, are still reliable enough to provide genuine insights into the workings of the world, and furthermore that the duty of the philosopher was to try to understand the world in as great detail as possible. One of his major areas of focus was an analysis of the real-life politics of the polis; his conclusion was that humans are "political animals" and that it was possible to improve politics through human understanding and invention, not just contemplation.

Aristotle was the ancient world's greatest intellectual overachiever. He single-handedly founded the disciplines of biology, literary criticism, political science, and logical philosophy. He wrote about everything from physics to astronomy and from mathematics to drama. His work was so influential that philosophers continued to believe in the essential validity of his findings well into the period of the Renaissance (thousands of years later) even though many of his scientific conclusions turned out to be factually inaccurate. Despite those inaccuracies, he unquestionably deserves to be remembered as one of the greatest thinkers of all time.

Art

The great legacy of Greek art is in its celebration of perfection and balance: the human body in its perfect state, perfect symmetry in buildings, and balance in geometric forms. One well known instance of this was in architecture, with the use of a mathematical concept known as the "golden ratio" (also known as the "golden mean") which, when applied to building, creates forms that the Greeks, and many others afterwards, believed was inherently pleasing to the eye. The most prominent surviving piece of Greek architecture, the Parthenon of Athens dedicated to the polis's patron goddess Athena, was built to embody the golden ratio in terms of its height and width. Likewise, in its use of symmetrical columns and beautiful carvings, it is widely believed to strike a perfect balance between elegance and grandeur.

Contemporary view of the Parthenon.

In turn, Greek sculpture is renowned for its unflinching commitment to perfection in the human form. The classical period saw a transition away from symbolic statuary, most of which was used in grave decorations in the Archaic period, toward lifelike depictions of real human beings. In turn, classical statues often celebrated the human potential for beauty, most prominently in nude sculptures of male warriors and athletes at the height of physical strength and development. Greek sculptors would often use several live models for their inspiration, combining the most attractive features of each subject to create the "perfected" version present in the finished sculpture – this was artistic humanism in its purest form.

One of the few original Greek bronze statues to survive, depicting either Zeus or Poseidon (Zeus would have held a lightning bolt, Poseidon a trident).

Most Greek art was destroyed over time, not least because the dominant medium for sculpture was bronze, which had allowed sculptors great flexibility in crafting their work. As Greece fell under the domination of other civilizations and empires in the centuries that followed, almost all of those bronzes were melted down for their metal. Fortunately, the Romans so appreciated Greek art that they frequently made marble copies of Greek originals. We thus have a fair number of examples of what Greek sculpture looked like, albeit in the form of the Roman facsimiles. Likewise, the Romans copied the Greek architectural style and, along with the Greek buildings like the Parthenon that did survive, we are still able to appreciate the Greek architectural aesthetic.

Exploration

Greek knowledge of the outside world was heavily based on hearsay; Greeks loved fantastical stories about lands beyond their immediate knowledge, and so even great historians like Herodotus reported that India was populated by magical beasts and by men with multiple heads. In turn, the immediate knowledge Greeks actually had of the world extended to the coasts of the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, Egypt, and Persia, since those were the areas they had colonized or were in contact with through trade. Through the Classical Age, a strong naval garrison was maintained by the Carthaginians, Phoenician naval rivals of the Greeks, at the straits of Gibraltar (the narrow gap between North Africa and southern Spain between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean), which prevented Greek sailors from reaching the Atlantic and thereby limiting their direct knowledge of the world beyond.

One exception to these limited horizons was a Greek explorer named Pytheas. A sailor from the small Greek polis Massalia that was well-known for producing ship captains and navigators, Pytheas undertook one of the most improbable voyages in ancient history, alongside the famous (albeit anonymous) Phoenician voyage around Africa earlier. Greek sailors already knew the world was round and had devised a system for determining latitude that was surprisingly accurate; Pytheas' own calculation of the latitude of Massalia was only off by eight miles. Driven by a sense of how large the world must be, he set off to sail past the Carthaginian sentries and reach the ocean beyond.

Sometime around 330 BCE, roughly the same time Alexander the Great was heading off to conquer the Persian Empire, Pytheas evaded the Carthaginian blockade and sailed into Atlantic waters. He went on to sail up the coast of France, trading with and noting the cultures of the people he encountered. He then sailed across the English Channel, ultimately circumnavigating England and Scotland, then sailing east to (probably) Denmark, and ultimately returning home to Massalia. He subsequently wrote a book about his account titled *On the Ocean* that was met with scorn from most of its Greek audience since it did not have any fantastical creatures and mixed in genuine empirical observation (about distances and conditions along the way) with its narrative. Armchair critics claimed that it was impossible that he had gone as far as north as he said, because north of Greece it was quite cold enough and there was no way humans could live any farther north than that. Practically speaking, despite Pytheas's voyage, the Greek world would remain defined by the shores of the Mediterranean.

Conclusion

"Classical Greece" is important historically because of what people *thought* as much as what they *did*. What the Greeks of the Classical Age deserve credit for is an intellectual culture that resulted in remarkable innovations: humanistic art, literature, and a new focus on the rational mind's ability to learn about nature and to improve politics and social organization. What the Greeks had never done, however, was spread that culture and those beliefs to non-Greeks, both because of the Greek belief in their own superiority and their relative

weakness in the face of great empires like Persia. That would change with the rise of a dynasty from the most northern part of Greece itself: Macedonia, and its king: Alexander.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Peloponnesian War – Public Domain

Symposium – Marie-Lan Nguyen

Theater – Carole Raddato

Herodotus map – Bibi Saint-Pol

Socrates – Eric Gaba

Parthenon – Harrieta171

Statue – Usuario Barcex

Quote:

Demosthenes: Victor Bers, *Demosthenes, Speeches 50–59*, University of Texas Press (2003)

This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 6 The Classical Age of Greece in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: PERICLES' FUNERAL ORATION

Please use the link on Blackboard to access THUCYDIDES, *PELOPONNESIAN WAR,* EARLY 5TH CENTURY BCE

Source:

Backman, Clifford R. *Sources for Cultures of the West Volume I: to 1750.* 3rd Edition. Oxford University Press: 2019. 51-53.

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *Pericles' Funeral Oration*

Reading Journal

Thucydides was a Greek historian who sought to present a history of the Greek past that was based on historical sources and did not explain or attribute past events to the workings of deities. For this entry, think about how you as an historian should use his history of the Peloponnesian Wars with specific reference to the account of Pericles' speech. What does this text tell us about Pericles or Athens at the time? What are the sources limitations?

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART VI

MODULE FIVE: THE HELLENISTIC WORLD AND THE REPUBLIC OF ROME

READING: THE HELLENISTIC AGE

Christopher Brooks

Introduction

The ancient Greek word for Greece is *Hellas*. The period after the Classical Age is referred to as the Hellenistic Age because it saw Greek civilization spread across the entire Middle East, thanks to the tactical genius and driving ambition of one man, Alexander the Great. Hellenistic history at its simplest is easy to summarize: a Macedonian king named Alexander conquered all of the lands of the Persian Empire during twelve years of almost non-stop campaigning. Shortly afterward, he died without naming an heir. His top generals fell to bickering and ultimately carved up Alexander's empire between themselves, founding several new dynasties in the process. Those dynasties would war and trade with each other for about three hundred years before being conquered by the Romans (the rise of Rome happened against the backdrop of the Hellenistic kingdoms). Thanks to the legacy of Alexander's conquests, Greek culture went from relative insignificance to become a major influence on the entire region.

Macedon and Philip II

The story starts in Macedon, a kingdom to the north of Greece. The Macedonians were warriors and traders. They lived in villages instead of poleis and, while they were recognized as Greeks because of their language and culture, they were also thought of as being a bit like country bumpkins by the more "civilized" Greeks of the south. Macedon was a kingdom ruled by a single monarch, but that monarch had to constantly deal with both his conniving relatives and his disloyal nobles, all of whom frequently conspired to get more power for themselves. Macedon was also bordered by nomadic peoples to the north, particularly the Thracians (from present-day Bulgaria), who repeatedly invaded and had to be repelled. The Macedonian army was comprised of free citizens who demanded payment after every campaign, payment that could only be secured by looting from defeated enemies. In short, Macedon bred some of the toughest and most wily fighters and political operators in Greece out of sheer necessity.

By the fifth century BCE, some of the larger villages of Macedon grew big enough to be considered cities, and elite Macedonians made efforts to civilize their country in the style of the southern Greeks. They competed in the Olympics and patronized the arts and literature. They tended to stay out of the political affairs of the other Greeks, however; they did not invade the Greek peninsula itself in their constant wars, nor did they take sides in conflicts like the Peloponnesian War. This did nothing to improve the situation in Macedon itself,

of course, which remained split between the royal family and the nobility. In 399 BCE, Macedon slid into an ongoing civil war, with the nobles openly rejecting the authority of the king and the country sliding into anarchy. The war lasted for forty years.

In 359 BCE, the Macedonian king, Philip II, re-unified the country. Philip was the classic Macedonian leader: shrewd, clever, skilled in battle, and quick to reward loyalty or punish sedition. He started a campaign across Macedonia and the surrounding areas to the north, defeating and usually killing his noble rivals as well as hostile tribes. When men joined with him, he rewarded them with looted wealth, and his army grew.

Philip was a tactical innovator as well. He found a way to secure the loyalty of his nobles by organizing them into elite cavalry units who swore loyalty to him, and he proudly led his troops personally into battle. He also reorganized the infantry into a new kind of phalanx that used longer spears than did traditional hoplites; these new spearmen would hold the enemy in place and then the cavalry would charge them, a tactic that proved effective against both "barbarian" tribes and traditional Greek phalanxes. Philip was the first Macedonian king to insist on the drilling and training of his infantry, and the combination of his updated phalanx and the cavalry proved unstoppable. Philip attacked neighboring Greek settlements and seized gold mines in the north of Greece, which paid his soldiers and paid to equip them as well. He hired mercenaries to supplement his Macedonian troops, ending up with the largest army Macedon had ever seen.

The expansion of Macedon under Philip II, from the small region marked in the red border to the larger blue region, along with the dependent regions surrounding it.

The Greek poleis were understandably worried about these developments. Under the leadership of Athens, they organized into a defensive league to resist Macedonian aggression. For about ten years, the Macedonians bribed potential Greek allies, threatened those that opposed them, and launched attacks in northern Greece while the larger poleis to the south prepared for war. In 338 BCE, following a full-scale Macedonian invasion, the Macedonian army crushed the coalition armies. The key point of the battle was when Philip's eighteen-year-old son Alexander led the noble cavalry unit in a charge that smashed the Greek forces.

In the aftermath of the invasion, Philip set up a new league of Greek cities under his control and stationed troops throughout Greece. As of 338 BCE, Greece was no longer the collection of independent city-states it had been for over a thousand years; it was now united under an invader from the north. The Greeks deeply resented this occupation. They only grudgingly accepted the Macedonians as fellow Greeks and had celebrated the independence of the Greek poleis as one of the defining characteristics of Greek civilization for centuries. Philip thus had his job cut out for him in managing his new conquest.

The more immediate problem facing Philip in the aftermath of the Greek conquest was that his men

demanded more loot – the only way he could pay them was to find new places to invade and sack. Thus, Philip ruled Greece but he could not afford to sit idle with troops aching for more victories. Cleverly, having just defeated the Greek poleis, Philip began behaving like a Greek statesman and assuming a kind of symbolic leadership role for Greek culture itself, not just Greek politics. He began agitating for a Greek invasion of Persia under his leadership to "avenge" the Persian invasion of the prior century. All things considered, this was a far-fetched scheme; Persia was by far the "superpower" of its day, and since the end of the Persian War over a century earlier numerous Greeks had served Persian kings as mercenaries and merchants. Nevertheless, the idea of an invasion created an excuse for Macedonian and Greek imperialism and aggression under cultural pretext of revenge.

Unfortunately for Philip, he was murdered by one of his bodyguards in 336 BCE, just two years after conquering Greece. Family politics might have been to blame here, as his estranged wife Olympias (mother of Alexander) may have ordered his murder, as well as the murder of his other wife and children. It is worth noting, however, that the theory of Olympias' involvement in Philip's murder was once accepted as fact but has faced sustained criticism for many years. Regardless of who was ultimately responsible for the assassination, Alexander ascended to the throne at the age of twenty following his father's demise, and he remained devoted to his mother for as long as she lived.

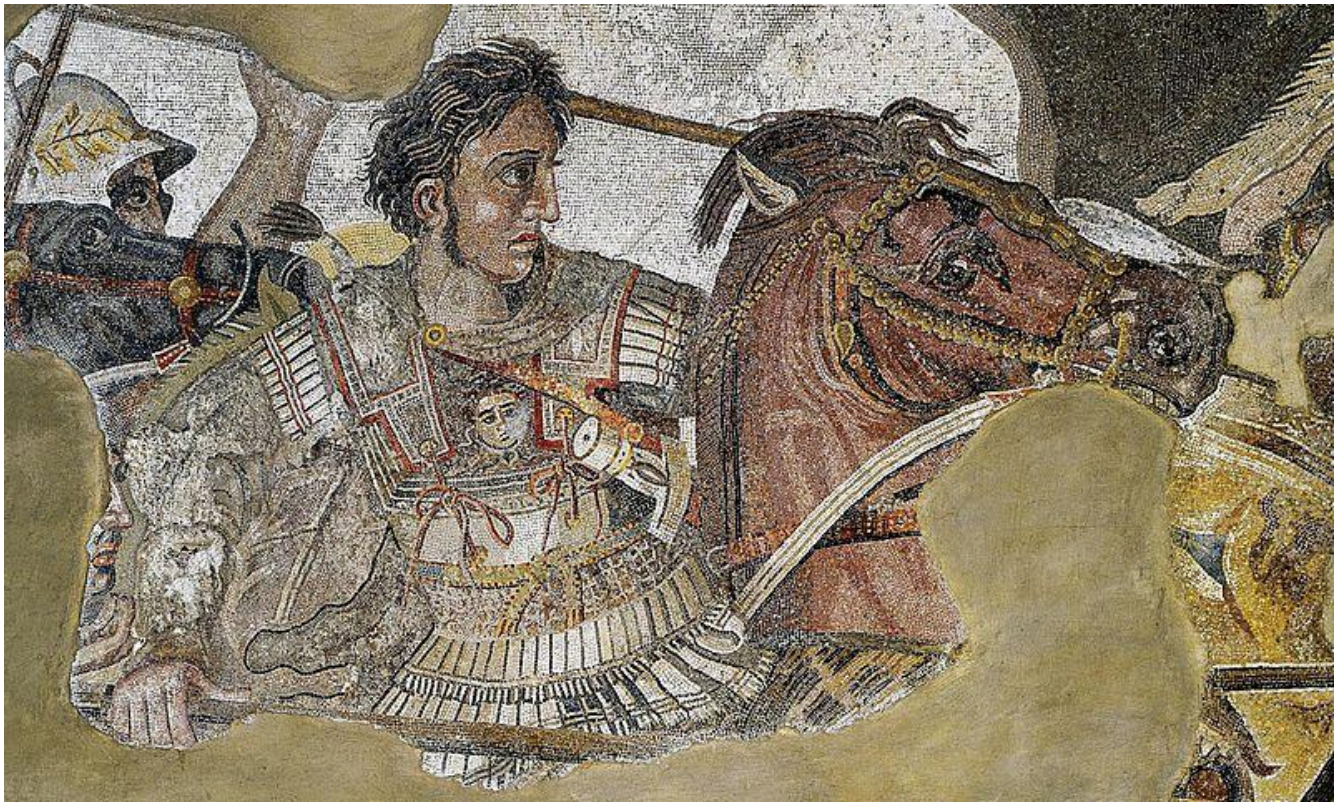
Alexander the Great

Alexander was one of the historical figures who truly deserves the honorific "the Great." He was a military genius and a courageous warrior, personally leading his armies in battle and fighting on despite being wounded on several occasions. He was a charismatic and inspirational leader who won the loyalty not only of his Macedonian countrymen, but the Greeks and, most remarkably, the people of the Persian Empire whom he conquered. He was also driven by incredible ambition; tutored by none other than Aristotle in his youth, he modeled himself on the legendary Greek hero Achilles, hoping to not only match but to surpass Achilles' prowess in battle. He became a legend in his own life, worshiped as a god by many of his subjects, and even his Greek subjects came to venerate him as one of the greatest leaders of all time.

Alexander's conquests began almost immediately after seizing the throne. He first ruthlessly killed off his rivals and enemies in Macedon and Greece, executing nobles he suspected of treason, and then leading an army back through Macedon, crushing the Thracian tribes of the north who threatened to defect. Some of the Greek poleis rose up, hoping to end Macedonian control almost as soon as it had begun, but Alexander returned to reconquer the rebellious Greek cities. In the case of the city of Thebes, for instance, Alexander let the Thebans know that, by rebelling, they had signed their own death warrant and he refused to accept their surrender, sacking the city and slaughtering thousands of its inhabitants as a warning to the rest of Greece.

By 334 BCE, two years after he became king, Alexander was thoroughly in control of Greece. He immediately embarked on his father's mission to attack Persia, leading a relatively small army (of about 45,000 men) into Persian territory – note how much smaller this army was than the Persian one had been a century ear-

lier, when Xerxes I had invaded with over 200,000 soldiers. He immediately engaged Persian forces and started winning battles, securing Anatolia and the rich Greek port cities in 333 BCE and Syria in 332 BCE. In almost every major battle, Alexander personally led the cavalry, a quality that inspired loyalty and confidence in his men.



A Roman mosaic depicting Alexander the Great in battle, possibly based on a Greek original.

His success against the Persians can be explained in part by the fact that the Persian technique of calling up their armies was too slow. Even though Alexander had arrived in Anatolia with only 45,000 men, against a potential Persian army of close to 300,000, far fewer troops were actually available to the Persians at any one time during the first years of Alexander's campaign. Instead, the first two years of the invasion consisted of Macedonian and Greek forces engaging with smaller Persian armies, some of which even included Greek mercenaries. Alexander's forces succeeded in conquering Persian territory piecemeal, taking key fortresses and cities, seizing supplies, and fighting off Persian counter-attacks; even with its overall military superiority, the Persian Empire could not focus its full might against the Greeks until much of the western empire had already been lost. In addition, Alexander was happy to offer alliances and concessions to Persian subjects who surrendered, sometimes even honoring with lands and positions those who had fought against him and lost honorably. In sum, conquest by Alexander was not experienced as a disaster for most Persian subjects, merely a shift in rulership.

In 332 BCE, the Persian king, Darius III, tried to make peace with Alexander and (supposedly – there is reason to believe that this episode was invented by Greek propagandists afterwards) offered him his daughter in marriage, along with the entire western half of the Persian Empire. Alexander refused and marched into

Egypt, where he was welcomed as a divine figure and liberator from Persia. Alexander made a point of visiting the key Egyptian temples and paying his respects to the Egyptian gods (he identified the chief Egyptian deity Amun-Ra with Zeus, father of the Greek gods), which certainly eased his acceptance by the Egyptians. In the meantime, Darius III succeeded in raising the entire strength of the Persian army, knowing that a final showdown was inevitable.

From Egypt, the Greek armies headed east, defeating the Persians at two more major battles, culminating in 330 BCE when they seized Persepolis, the Persian capital city. There, the Greek armies looted the entire palace complex before burning it to the ground; historians have concluded that Alexander ordered the burning to force the remaining Persians who were resistant to his conquest to acknowledge its finality. The wealth of Persepolis and the surrounding Persian cities paid for the entire Greek army for years to come and inspired a renaissance of building back in Greece and Macedon, paid for with Persian gold. Darius III fled to the east but was murdered by Persian nobles, who hoped to hold on to their own independence (this did not work – Alexander painstakingly hunted down the assassins over the next few years).

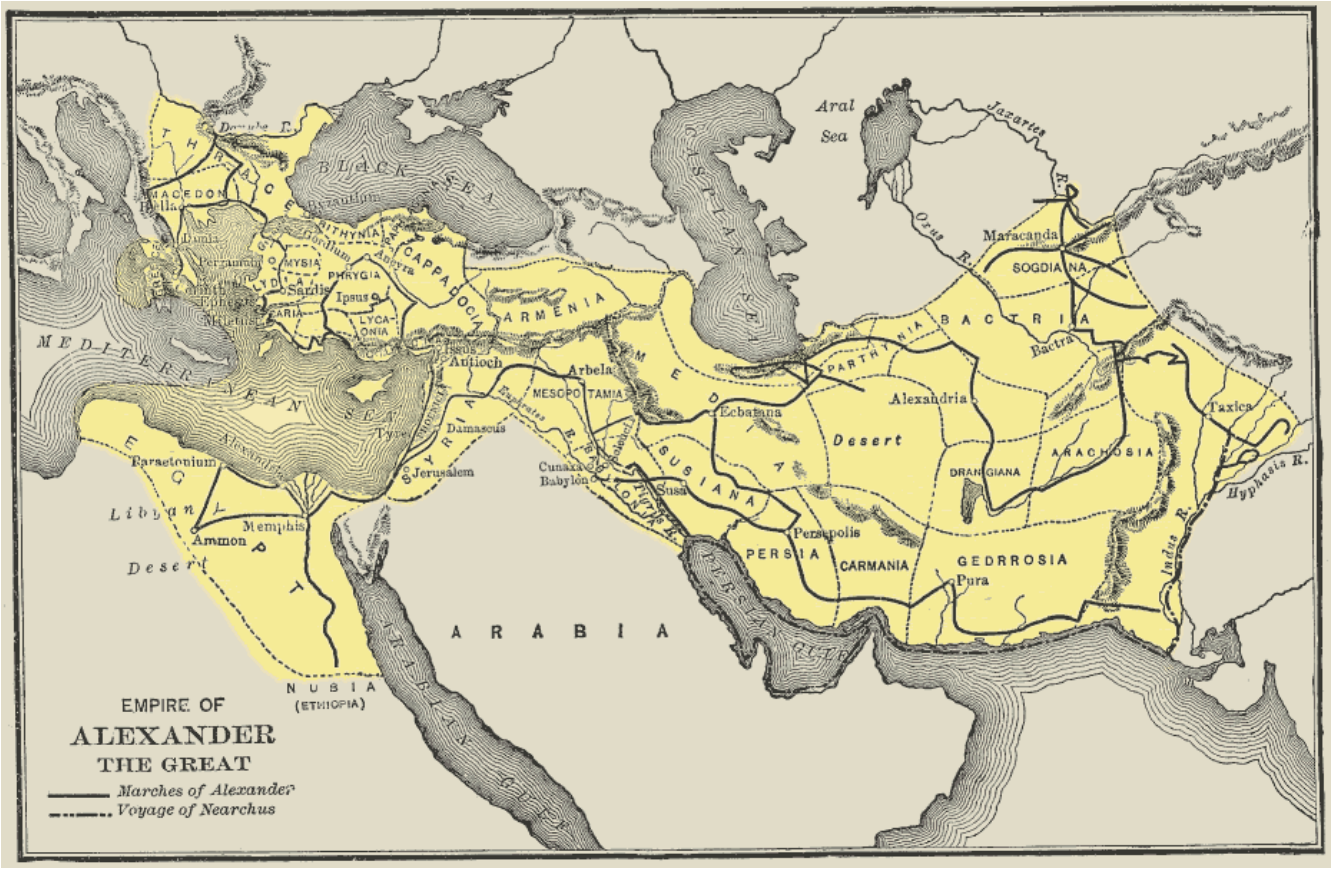
Alexander After the Conquest of Persia

Alexander paused his campaign to pay off his men and allow some of his troops to return to Greece. He then arranged for thousands of his Greek and Macedonian officers to marry Persian noblewomen in an effort to formally and permanently fuse together the Greek and Persian civilizations. His goal was not to devastate the empire, but to become the next "Great King" to whom all other leaders had to defer. He maintained the Persian bureaucracy (such as the organization of the Satrapies) and enlisted thousands of Persian soldiers who joined his campaign as his armies moved even farther east. He also made a show of treating Darius's family with respect and honor, demonstrating that he wanted to win the Persians over rather than humiliate them. Alexander declared that the ancient city of Babylon would be his new capital. Even though he now ruled over the largest empire in the world, however, he was unsatisfied, and he set off to conquer lands his new Persian subjects told him about beyond the borders of the empire.

Alexander headed east again with his armies, defeating the tribesmen of present-day Afghanistan and then fighting a huge battle against the forces of the Indian king Porus in the northern Indus River Valley in 327 BCE (Alexander was so impressed by Porus that after the battle he appointed him satrap of what had been Porus's kingdom). He pressed on into India for several months, following the Indus south, but finally his loyal but exhausted troops refused to go on. Alexander had heard of Indian kingdoms even farther east (i.e. toward the Ganges River Valley, completely unknown to the Greeks before this point) and, being Alexander, he wanted to conquer them too. His men, however, were both weary and rich beyond their wildest dreams. Few of them could see the point of further conquests and wanted instead to return home and enjoy their hard-won loot. Some of his followers were now over 65 years old, having fought for both Philip II and then Alexander, and they concluded that it was high time to go home.

Alexander consulted an oracle that confirmed that disaster would strike if he crossed the next river, so

after sulking in his tent for a week, he finally relented. To avoid the appearance of a retreat, however, he insisted that his armies fight their way down the Indus river valley and then across the southern part of the former Persian Empire on their way back to Mesopotamia. Unfortunately, Alexander made a major tactical error when he reached the Indian Ocean, splitting his forces into a fleet and a land force that would travel west separately. The fleet survived unscathed, but the army had to cross the brutally difficult Makran desert (in the southern part of present-day Pakistan and Iran), which cost Alexander's forces more lives than had the entire Indian campaign.



Alexander's conquests – the dark black lines trace his route from Macedon in the far northwest through Egypt, across the Persian heartland, then to Afghanistan and India, and finally along the shores of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf back to Babylon.

The return journey was arduous, and it took years to get back to the heartland of Persia. In 323 BCE, his armies finally arrived in Babylon. Alexander was exhausted and plagued by injuries from the many battles he had fought, but Macedonian and Greek tradition required him to drink to excess with his generals. Some combination of his injuries, alcohol, and exhaustion finally caught up with him. Supposedly, while he lay on his deathbed, his generals asked who would follow him as Great King and he replied "the strongest," then died. The results were predictable: decades of fighting as each general tried to take over the huge empire Alexander had forged.

The true legacy of Hellenistic civilization was not Alexander's wars, as remarkable as they were, but their aftermath. During his campaigns, Alexander founded numerous new cities that were to be colonies for his victorious Greek soldiers, all of which were named Alexandria except for ones that he named after his horse,

Bucephalus, and his dog, Peritas. For almost 100 years, Greeks and Macedonians streamed to these colonies, which resulted in a tremendous growth of Greek culture across the entire ancient world. They also came to settle in conquered Persian cities. Everywhere, Greeks became a new elite class, establishing Greek laws and Greek buildings and amenities. At the same time, the Greeks were always a small minority in the lands of the east, a fact that Alexander had certainly recognized. To deal with the situation, not only did he encourage inter-marriage, but he simply took over the Persian system of governance, with its royal road, its regional governors, and its huge and elaborate bureaucracy.

Conclusion

While Alexander the Great is a well-known figure from ancient history, the Hellenistic period as a whole is not. The reason for that relative neglect (in popular culture and in many history surveys, at least those at the pre-college level) is that the Hellenistic age is overshadowed by what was happening simultaneously to the west: the rise of Rome. In precisely the same period in which Alexander and his successors first conquered then ruled the territories of the former Persian Empire, Rome was in the process of evolving from a town in central Italy to the center of what would eventually be one of the greatest and longest-lasting empires in world history.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Macedonian expansion – MaryroseB54

Alexander mosaic – Unattributed

Alexander's conquests – George Willis Botsford

This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 7: The Hellenistic Age in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

READING: THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

Christopher Brooks

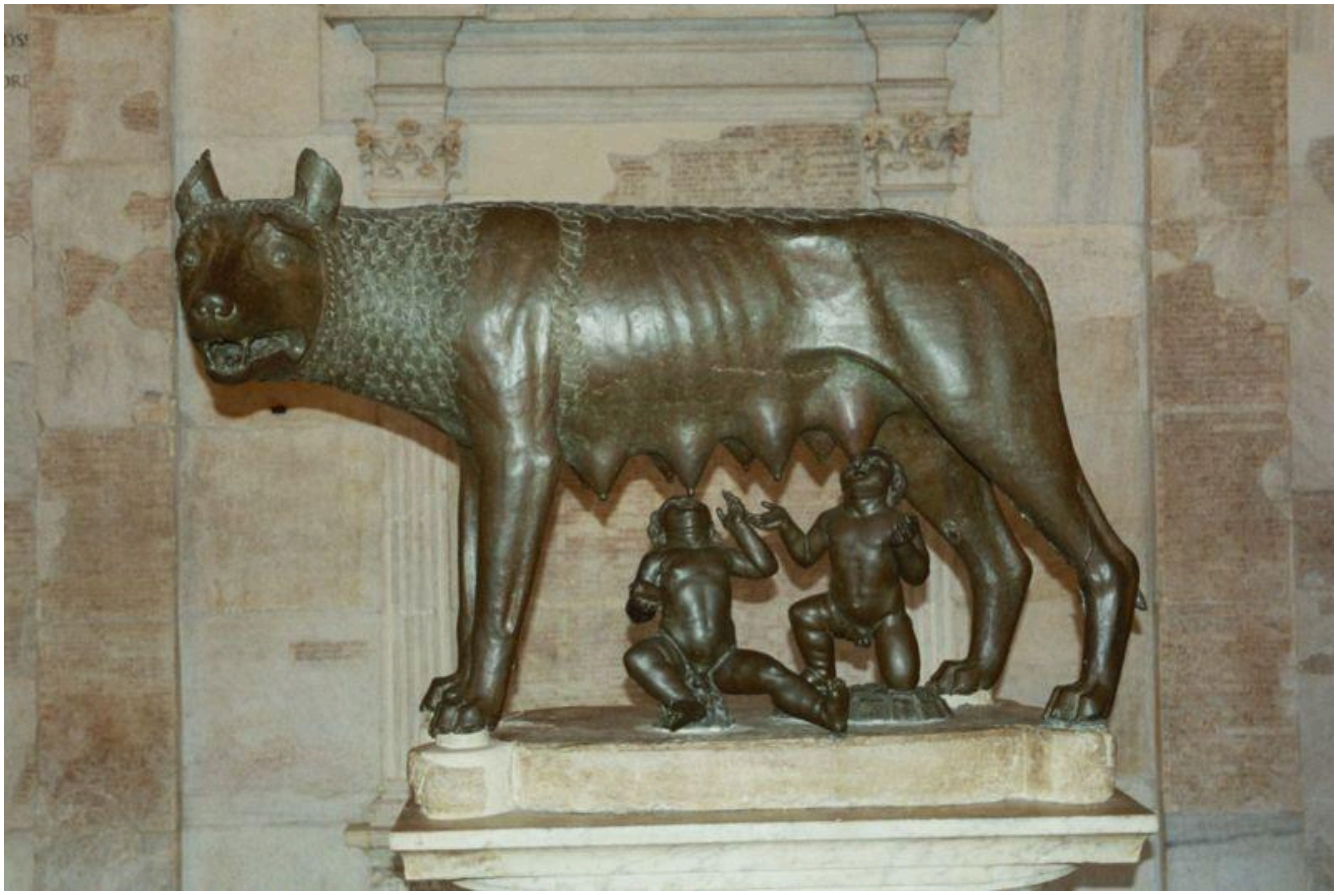
Introduction

In many ways, Rome defines Western Civilization. Even more so than Greece, the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire that followed created the idea of a single, united civilization sharing certain attributes and providing a lasting intellectual and political legacy. Its boundaries, from what is today England to Turkey and from Germany to Spain, mark out the heartland of what its inhabitants would later consider itself to be "The West" in so many words. The Greek intellectual legacy was eagerly taken up by the Romans and combined with unprecedented organization and engineering on a scale the Greeks had never imagined, even under Alexander the Great.

Roman Origins

Rome was originally a town built amidst seven hills surrounded by swamps in central Italy. The Romans were just one group of "Latins," central Italians who spoke closely-related dialects of the Latin language. Rome itself had a few key geographical advantages. Its hills were easily defensible, making it difficult for invaders to carry out a successful attack. It was at the intersection of trade routes, thanks in part to its proximity to a natural ford (a shallow part of a river that can be crossed on foot) in the Tiber River, leading to a prosperous commercial and mercantile sector that provided the wealth for early expansion. It also lay on the route between the Greek colonies of southern Italy and various Italian cultures in the central and northern part of the peninsula.

The legend that the Romans themselves invented about their own origins had to do with two brothers: Romulus and Remus. In the legend of Romulus and Remus, two boys were born to a Latin king, but then kidnapped and thrown into the Tiber River by the king's jealous brother. They were discovered by a female wolf and suckled by her, eventually growing up and exacting their revenge on their treacherous uncle. They then fought each other, with Romulus killing Remus and founding the city of Rome. According to the story, the city of Rome was founded on April 21, 753 BCE. This legend is just that: a legend. Its importance is that it speaks to how the Romans wanted to see themselves, as the descendants of a great man who seized his birthright through force and power, accepting no equals. In a sense, the Romans were proud to believe that their ancient heritage involved being literally raised by wolves.



Replica of an Etruscan-era statue of Romulus and Remus suckling from the wolf.

The Romans were a warrior people from very early on, feuding and fighting with their neighbors and with raiders from the north. They were allied with and, for a time, ruled by a neighboring people called the Etruscans who lived to the northwest of Rome. The Etruscans were active trading partners with the Greek poleis of the south, and Rome became a key link along the Etruscan – Greek trade route. The Etruscans ruled a loose empire of allied city-states that carried on a brisk trade with the Greeks, trading Italian iron for various luxury goods. This mixing of cultures, Etruscan, Greek, and Latin, included shared mythologies and stories. The Greek gods and myths were shared by the Romans, with only the names of the gods being changed (e.g. Zeus became Jupiter, Aphrodite became Venus, Hades became Pluto, etc.). In this way, the Romans became part of the larger Mediterranean world of which the Greeks were such a significant part.

According to Roman legends, the Etruscans ruled the Romans from some time in the eighth century BCE until 509 BCE. During that time, the Etruscans organized them to fight along Greek lines as a phalanx. From the phalanx, the Romans would eventually create new forms of military organization and tactics that would overwhelm the Greeks themselves (albeit hundreds of years later). There is no actual evidence that the Etruscans ruled Rome, but as with the legend of Romulus and Remus, the story of early Etruscan rule inspired the Romans to think of themselves in certain ways – most obviously in utterly rejecting foreign rule of any kind, and even of foreign cultural influence. Romans were always fiercely proud (to the point of belligerence) of their heritage and identity.

By 600 BCE the Romans had drained the swamp in the middle of their territory and built the first of their large public buildings. As noted, they were a monarchy at the time, ruled by (possibly) Etruscan kings, but with powerful Romans serving as advisers in an elected senate. Native-born men rich enough to afford weapons were allowed to vote, while native-born men who were poor were considered full Romans but had no vote. In 509 BCE (according to their own legends), the Romans overthrew the last Etruscan king and established a full Republican form of government, with elected senators making all of the important political decisions. Roman antipathy to kings was so great that no Roman leader would ever call himself *Rex* – king – even after the Republic was eventually overthrown centuries later.

Note: The Celts

While the Hellenistic world was flourishing in Greece and the Middle East, and Rome was beginning its long climb from obscurity to power, most of Western Europe was dominated by the Celts. The Celts provide background context to the rise of Rome, since Roman expansion would eventually spell the end of Celtic independence in most of Europe.

Much less is known about the Celts than about the contemporaneous cultures of the Mediterranean because the Celts did not leave a written record. The Celts were not a unified empire of any kind; they were a tribal people who shared a common culture and a set of beliefs, along with certain technologies having to do with metal-working and agriculture.

The Celts were a warrior society which seemed to have practiced a variation of what would later be known as feudal law, in which every offense demanded retribution in the former of either violence or "man gold": the payment needed to atone for a crime and thereby prevent the escalation of violence. The Celts were in contact with the people of the Mediterranean world from as early as 800 BCE, mostly through trade. They lived in fortified towns and were as quick to raid as to trade with their neighbors.

By about 450 BCE the Celts expanded dramatically across Europe. They seem to have become more warlike and expansionist and they adopted a number of technologies already in use further south, including chariot warfare and currency. By 400 BCE groups of Celts began to raid further into "civilized" lands, sacking Rome itself in 387 BCE and pushing into the Hellenistic lands of Macedonia, Greece, and Anatolia. Subsequently, Celtic raiders tended to settle by about 200 BCE, often forming distinct smaller kingdoms within larger lands, such as the region called Galatia in Anatolia, and serving as mercenary warriors for the Hellenistic kingdoms.

Eventually, when the Romans began to expand beyond Italy itself, it was the Celts who were first conquered and then assimilated into the Republic. The Romans regarded Celts as barbarians, but they were thought to be barbarians who were at least capable of assimilating and adopting "true" civilization from the Romans. Centuries later, the descendants of conquered Celts considered themselves fully Roman: speaking Latin as their native language, wearing togas, drinking wine, and serving in the Roman armies.

The Republic

The Roman Republic had a fairly complex system of government and representation, but it was one that would last about 500 years and preside over the vast expansion of Roman power. An assembly, called the Centuriate Assembly, was elected by the citizens and created laws. Each year, the assembly elected two executives called consuls to oversee the laws and ensure their enforcement. The consuls had almost unlimited power, known as *imperium*, including the right to inflict the death penalty on law-breakers, and they were preceded everywhere by twelve bodyguards called *lictors*. Consular authority was, however, limited by the fact that the terms were only a year long and each consul was expected to hold the other in check if necessary. Under the consuls there was the Senate, essentially a large body of aristocratic administrators, appointed for life, who controlled state finances. The whole system was tied closely to the priesthoods of the Roman gods, who performed divinations and blessings on behalf of the city. While the Romans were deeply suspicious of individuals who seemed to be trying to take power themselves, several influential families worked behind the scenes to ensure that they could control voting blocks in the Centuriate Assembly and the Senate.

When Rome faced a major crisis, the Centuriate Assembly could vote to appoint a *dictator*, a single man vested with the full power of imperium. Symbolically, all twenty-four of the lictors would accompany the dictator, who was supposed to use his almost-unlimited power to save Rome from whatever threatened it, then step down and return things to normal. While the office of dictator could have easily led to an attempted takeover, for hundreds of years very few dictators abused their powers and instead respected the temporary nature of Roman dictatorship itself.

The rich were referred to as *patricians*, families with ancient roots in Rome who occupied most of the positions of the senate and the judiciary in the city. There were about one hundred patrician families, descending from the men Romulus had, allegedly, appointed to the first senate. They were allied with other rich and powerful people, owners of large tracts of land, in trying to hold in check the *plebeians*, Roman citizens not from patrician backgrounds.

While the Senate began as an advisory body, it later wrested real law-making power from the consuls (who were, after all, almost always drawn from its members). By 133 BCE, the Senate proposed legislation and could veto the legislation of the consuls. An even more important power was its ability to designate funds for war and public building, giving it enormous power over what the Roman government actually did, since the senate could simply cut off funding to projects it disagreed with.

The Centuriate Assembly was divided into five different classes based on wealth (a system that ensured that the wealthy could always outvote the poorer). The wealthiest class consisted of the *equestrians*, so named because they could afford horses and thus form the Roman cavalry; the equestrian class would go on to be a leading power bloc in Roman history well into the Imperial period. The Centuriate Assembly voted on the consuls each year, declared war and peace, and acted as a court of appeal in legal cases involving the death penalty. It could also propose legislation, but the Senate had to approve it for it to become law.

Class Struggle

Rome struggled with a situation analogous to that of Athens, in which the rich not only had a virtual monopoly on political power, but in many cases had the legal right to either enslave or at least extract labor from debtors. In Rome's case, an ongoing class struggle called the Conflict of Orders took place from about 500 BCE to 360 BCE (140 years!), in which the plebeians struggled to get more political representation. In 494 BCE, the plebeians threatened to simply leave Rome, rendering it almost defenseless, and the Senate responded by allowing the creation of two officials called *Tribunes,* men drawn from the plebeians who had the legal power to veto certain decisions made by the Senate and consuls. Later, the government created a *Plebeian Council* to represent the needs of the plebeians, approved the right to marry between patricians and plebeians, banned debt slavery, and finally, came to the agreement that of the two consuls elected each year, one had to be a plebeian. By 287 BCE, the Plebeian Assembly could pass legislation with the weight of law as well.

Roman soldiers were citizen-soldiers, farmers who volunteered to fight for Rome in hopes of being rewarded with wealth taken from defeated enemies. An important political breakthrough happened in about 350 BCE when the Romans enacted a law that limited the amount of land that could be given to a single citizen after a victory, ensuring a more equitable distribution of land to plebeian soldiers. This was a huge incentive to serve in the Roman army, since any soldier now had the potential to become very rich if he participated in a successful campaign against Rome's enemies.

That being said, class struggle was always a factor in Roman politics. Even after the plebeians gained legal concessions, the rich always held the upper hand because wealthy plebeians would regularly join with patricians to out-vote poorer plebeians. Likewise, in the Centuriate Assembly, the richer classes had the legal right to out-vote the poorer classes – the equestrians and patricians often worked together against the demands of the poorer classes. Practically speaking, by the early third century BCE the plebeians had won meaningful legal rights, namely the right to representation and lawmaking, but those victories were often overshadowed by the fact that wealthy plebeians increasingly joined with the existing patricians to create something new: the Roman aristocracy. Most state offices did not pay salaries, so only those with substantial incomes from land (or from loot won in campaigns) could afford to serve as full-time representatives, officials, or judges – that, too, fed into the political power of the aristocracy over common citizens.

In the midst of this ongoing struggle, the Romans came up with the basis of Roman law, the system of law that, through various iterations, would become the basis for most systems of law still in use in Europe today (Britain being a notable exception). Private law governed disputes between individuals (e.g. property suits, disputes between business partners), while public law governed disputes between individuals and the government (e.g. violent crimes that were seen as a threat to the social order as a whole). In addition, the Romans established the Law of Nations to govern the territories it started to conquer in Italy; it was an early form of international law based on what were believed to be universal standards of justice.

The plebeians had been concerned that legal decisions would always favor the patricians, who had a monopoly on legal proceedings, so they insisted that the laws be written down and made publicly available.

Thus, in 451 BCE, members of the Roman government wrote the Twelve Tables, lists of the laws available for everyone to see, which were then posted in the Roman Forum in the center of Rome. Just as it was done in Athens a hundred years earlier, having the laws publicly available reduced the chances of corruption. In fact, according to a Roman legend, the ten men who were charged with recording the laws were sent to Athens to study the laws of Solon of Athens; this was a deliberate use or "copy" of his idea.

Roman Expansion

Roman expansion began with its leadership of a confederation of allied cities, the Latin League. Rome led this coalition against nearby hill tribes that had periodically raided the area, then against the Etruscans that had once ruled Rome itself. Just as the Romans started to consider further territorial expansion, a fierce raiding band of Celts swooped in and sacked Rome in 389 BCE, a setback that took several decades to recover from. In the aftermath, the Romans swore to never let the city fall victim to an attack again.

A key moment in the early period of Roman expansion was in 338 BCE when Rome defeated its erstwhile allies in the Latin League. Rome did not punish the cities after it defeated them, however. Instead, it offered them citizenship in its republic (albeit without voting rights) in return for pledges of loyalty and troops during wartime, a very important precedent because it meant that with every victory, Rome could potentially expand its military might. Soon, the elites of the Latin cities realized the benefits of playing along with the Romans. They were dealt into the wealth distributed after military victories and could play an active role in politics so long as they remained loyal, whereas resisters were eventually ground down and defeated with only their pride to show for it. While Rome would rarely extend actual citizenship to whole communities in the future, the assimilation of the Latins into the Roman state did set an important precedent: conquered peoples could be won over to Roman rule and contribute to Roman power, a key factor in Rome's ongoing expansion from that point forward.

Expansion of the Republic, from the region marked in dark red around Rome itself in Central Italy north and south along the Italian Peninsula, culminating in the conquests of Northern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia (whose conquests are described in the section below).

Rome rapidly expanded to encompass all of Italy except the southernmost regions. Those regions, populated largely by Greeks who had founded colonies there centuries before, invited a Greek warrior-king named Pyrrhus to aid them against the Romans around 280 BCE (Pyrrhus was a Hellenistic king who had already wrested control of a good-sized swath of Greece from the Antigonid dynasty back in Greece). Pyrrhus won two major battles against the Romans, but in the process he lost two-thirds of his troops. After his victories, he made a comment that "one more such victory will undo me" – this led to the phrase "pyrrhic victory," which means a temporary victory that ultimately spells defeat, or winning the battle but losing the war. He took his remaining troops and returned to Greece. After he fled, the south was unable to mount much of a resistance, and all of Italy was under Roman control by 263 BCE.

Roman Militarism

It is important to emphasize the extreme militarism and terrible brutality of Rome during the republican period, very much including this early phase in which it began to acquire its empire. Wars were annual: with very few exceptions over the centuries the Roman legions would march forth to conquer new territory every single year. The Romans swiftly acquired a reputation for absolute ruthlessness and even wanton cruelty, raping and/or slaughtering the civilian inhabitants of conquered cities, enslaving thousands, and in some cases utterly wiping out whole populations (the neighboring city of Veii was obliterated in roughly 393 BCE, for example, right at the start of the conquest period). The Greek historian Polybius calmly noted at the time in his sweeping history of the republic that insofar as there was a deliberate intention behind all of this cruelty, it was easy to identify: causing terror.

Roman soldiers were inspired by straightforward greed as well as the tremendous cultural importance placed on winning military glory. *Nothing* was as important to a male Roman citizen than his reputation as a soldier. Likewise, Roman aristocrats all acquired their political power through military glory until late in the republic, and even then military glory was all but required for a man to achieve any kind of political importance. The greatest honor a Roman could win was a *triumph*, a military parade displaying the spoils of war to the cheers of the people of Rome; many people held important positions in Rome, but only the greatest generals were ever rewarded with a triumph.

The overall picture of Roman culture is of a society that was in its own way as fanatical and obsessed with war as was Sparta during the height of its barracks society. Unlike Sparta, however, Rome was able to mobilize gigantic armies, partly because slaves came to perform most of the work on farms and workshops over time, freeing up free Roman men to participate in the annual invasions of neighboring territories. One prominent contemporary historian of Rome, W.V. Harris, wisely warns against the temptation of "power worship" when studying Roman history. Rome did indeed accomplish remarkable things, but it did so through appalling cruelty and astonishing levels of violence.

The Punic Wars

Rome's great rival in this early period of expansion was the North-African city of Carthage, founded centuries earlier by Phoenician colonists. Carthage was one of the richest and most powerful trading empires of the Hellenistic Age, a peer of the Alexandrian empires to the east, trading with them and occasionally skirmishing with the Ptolemaic armies of Egypt and with the Greek cities of Sicily. Rome and Carthage had long been trading partners, and for centuries there was no real reason for them to be enemies since they were separated by the Mediterranean. That being said, as Rome's power increased to encompass all of Italy, the Carthaginians became increasingly concerned that Rome might pose a threat to its own dominance.

Conflict finally broke out in 264 BCE in Sicily. The island of Sicily was one of the oldest and most important areas for Greek colonization. There, a war broke out between the two most powerful poleis, Syra-

cuse and Messina. The Carthaginians sent a fleet to intervene on behalf of Messinans, but the Messinans then called for help from Rome as well (a betrayal of sorts from the perspective of Carthage). Soon, the conflict escalated as Carthage took the side of Syracuse and Rome saw an opportunity to expand Roman power in Sicily. The Centuriate Assembly voted to escalate the Roman military commitment since its members wanted the potential riches to be won in war. This initiated the First Punic War, which lasted from 264 to 241 BCE. (Note: "Punic" refers to the Roman term for Phoenician, and hence Carthage and its civilization.)

The Romans suffered several defeats, but they were rich and powerful enough at this point to persist in the war effort. Rome benefited greatly from the fact that the Carthaginians did not realize that the war could grow to be about more than just Sicily; even after winning victories there, the Carthaginians never tried to invade Italy itself (which they could have done, at least early on). The Romans eventually learned how to carry out effective naval warfare and stranded the Carthaginian army in Sicily. The Carthaginians sued for peace in 241 BCE and agreed to give up their claims to Sicily and to pay a war indemnity. The Romans, however, betrayed them and seized the islands of Corsica and Sardinia as well, territories that were still under the nominal control of Carthage.

From the aftermath of the First Punic War and the seizure of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica emerged the Roman provincial system: the islands were turned into "provinces" of the Republic, each of which was obligated to pay tribute (the "tithe," meaning tenth, of all grain) and follow the orders of Roman governors appointed by the senate. That system would continue for the rest of the republican and imperial periods of Roman history, with the governors wielding enormous power and influence in their respective provinces.

Unsurprisingly, the Carthaginians wanted revenge, not just for their loss in the war but for Rome's seizure of Corsica and Sardinia. For twenty years, the Carthaginians built up their forces and their resources, most notably by invading and conquering a large section of Spain, containing rich mines of gold and copper and thousands of Spanish Celts who came to serve as mercenaries in the Carthaginian armies. In 218 BCE, the great Carthaginian general Hannibal (son of the most successful general who had fought the Romans in the First Punic War) launched a surprise attack in Spain against Roman allies and then against Roman forces themselves. This led to the Second Punic War (218 BCE – 202 BCE).

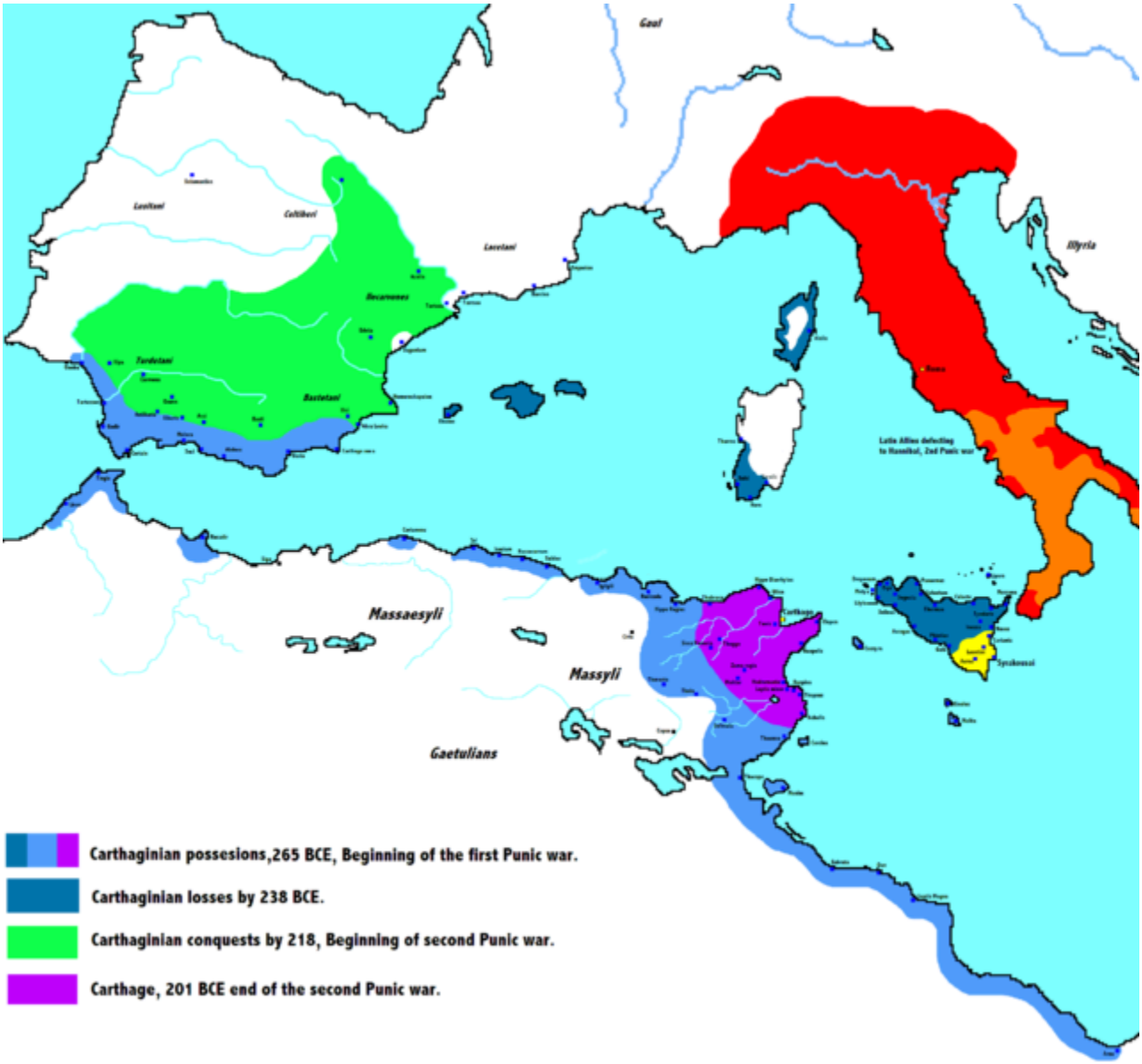
Hannibal crossed the Alps into Italy from Spain with 60,000 men and a few dozen war elephants (most of the elephants perished, but the survivors proved very effective, and terrifying, against the Roman forces). For the next two years, he crushed every Roman army sent against him, killing tens of thousands of Roman soldiers and marching perilously close to Rome. Hannibal never lost a single battle in Italy, yet neither did he force the Romans to sue for peace.

Hannibal defeated the Romans repeatedly with clever tactics: he lured them across icy rivers and ambushed them, he concealed a whole army in the fog one morning and then sprang on a Roman legion, and he led the Romans into narrow passes and slaughtered them. In one battle in 216 BCE, Hannibal's smaller army defeated a larger Roman force by letting it push in the Carthaginian center, then surrounding it with cavalry. He was hampered, though, by the fact that he did not have a siege train to attack Rome itself (which was heavily fortified), and he failed to win over the southern Italian cities which had been conquered by the

Romans a century earlier. The Romans kept losing to Hannibal, but they were largely successful in keeping Hannibal from receiving reinforcements from Spain and Africa, slowly but steadily weakening his forces.

Eventually, the Romans altered their tactics and launched a guerrilla war against Hannibal within Italy, harrying his forces. This was totally contrary to their usual tactics, and the dictator Fabius Maximus who insisted on it in 217 BCE was mockingly nicknamed "the Delayer" by his detractors in the Roman government despite his evident success. The Romans vacillated on this strategy, suffering the terrible defeat mentioned above in 216 BCE, but as Hannibal's victories grew and some cities in Italy and Sicily started defecting to the Carthaginian side, they returned to it.

A brilliant Roman general named Scipio defeated the Carthaginian forces back in Spain in 207 BCE, cutting Hannibal off from both reinforcements and supplies, which weakened his army significantly. Scipio then attacked Africa itself, forcing Carthage to recall Hannibal to protect the city. Hannibal finally lost in 202 BCE after coming as close as anyone had to defeating the Romans. The victorious Scipio, now easily the most powerful man in Rome, became the first great general to add to his own name the name of the place he conquered: he became Scipio "Africanus" – conqueror of Africa.



The Punic Wars over time – note how much Carthage's empire was reduced by the end of the Second Punic War, encompassing only the region marked in purple around Carthage itself.

An uneasy peace lasted for several decades between Rome and Carthage, despite enduring anti-Carthaginian hatred in Rome; one prominent senator named Cato the Elder reputedly ended every speech in the Senate with the statement "...and Carthage must be destroyed." Rome finally forced the issue in the mid-second century BCE by meddling in Carthaginian affairs. The third and last Punic War that ensued was utterly one-sided: it began in 149 BCE, and by 146 BCE Carthage was defeated. Not only were thousands of the Carthaginian people killed or enslaved, but the city itself was brutally sacked (the comment by Polybius regarding the terror inspired by Rome, noted above, was specifically in reference to the horrific sack of Carthage). The Romans created a myth to commemorate their victory, claiming that they had "plowed the earth with salt" at Carthage so that nothing would ever grow there again – that was not literally true, but it did serve as a useful legend as the Romans expanded their territories even further.

Greece

Rome expanded eastward during the same period, eventually conquering all of Greece, the heartland of the culture the Romans so admired and emulated. While Hannibal was busy rampaging around Italy, the Macedonian King Philip V allied with Carthage against Rome, a reasonable decision at the time because it seemed likely that Rome was going to lose the war. In 201 BCE, after the defeat of the Carthaginians, Rome sent an army against Philip to defend the independence of Greece and to exact revenge. There, Philip and the king of the Seleucid empire (named Antiochus III) had agreed to divide up the eastern Mediterranean, assuming they could defeat and control all of the Greek poleis. An expansionist faction in the Roman senate successfully convinced the Centuriate Assembly to declare war. The Roman legions defeated the Macedonian forces without much trouble in 196 BCE and then, perhaps surprisingly, they left, having accomplished their stated goal of defending Greek independence. Rome continued to fight the Seleucids for several more years, however, finally reducing the Seleucid king Antiochus III to a puppet of Rome.

Despite having no initial interest in establishing direct control in Greece, the Romans found that rival Greek poleis clamored for Roman help in their conflicts, and Roman influence in the region grew. Even given Rome's long standing admiration for Greek culture, the political and military developments of this period, from 196 – 168 BCE, helped confirm the Roman belief that the Greeks were artistic and philosophical geniuses but, at least in their present iteration, were also conniving, treacherous, and lousy at political organization. There was also a growing conservative faction in Rome led by Cato the Elder that emphatically emphasized Roman moral virtue over Greek weakness.

Philip V's son Perseus took the throne of Macedon in 179 BCE and, while not directly threatening Roman power, managed to spark suspicion among the Roman elite simply by reasserting Macedonian sovereignty in the region. In 172 BCE Rome sent an army and Macedon was defeated in 168 BCE. Rome split Macedon into puppet republics, plundered Macedon's allies, and lorded over the remaining Greek poleis. Revolts in 150 and 146 against Roman power served as the final pretext for the Roman subjugation of Greece. This time, the Romans enacted harsh penalties for disloyalty among the Greek cities, utterly destroying the rich city of Corinth and butchering or enslaving tens of thousands of Greeks for siding against Rome. The plunder from Corinth specifically also sparked great interest in Greek art among elite Romans, boosting the development of Greco-Roman artistic traditions back in Italy.

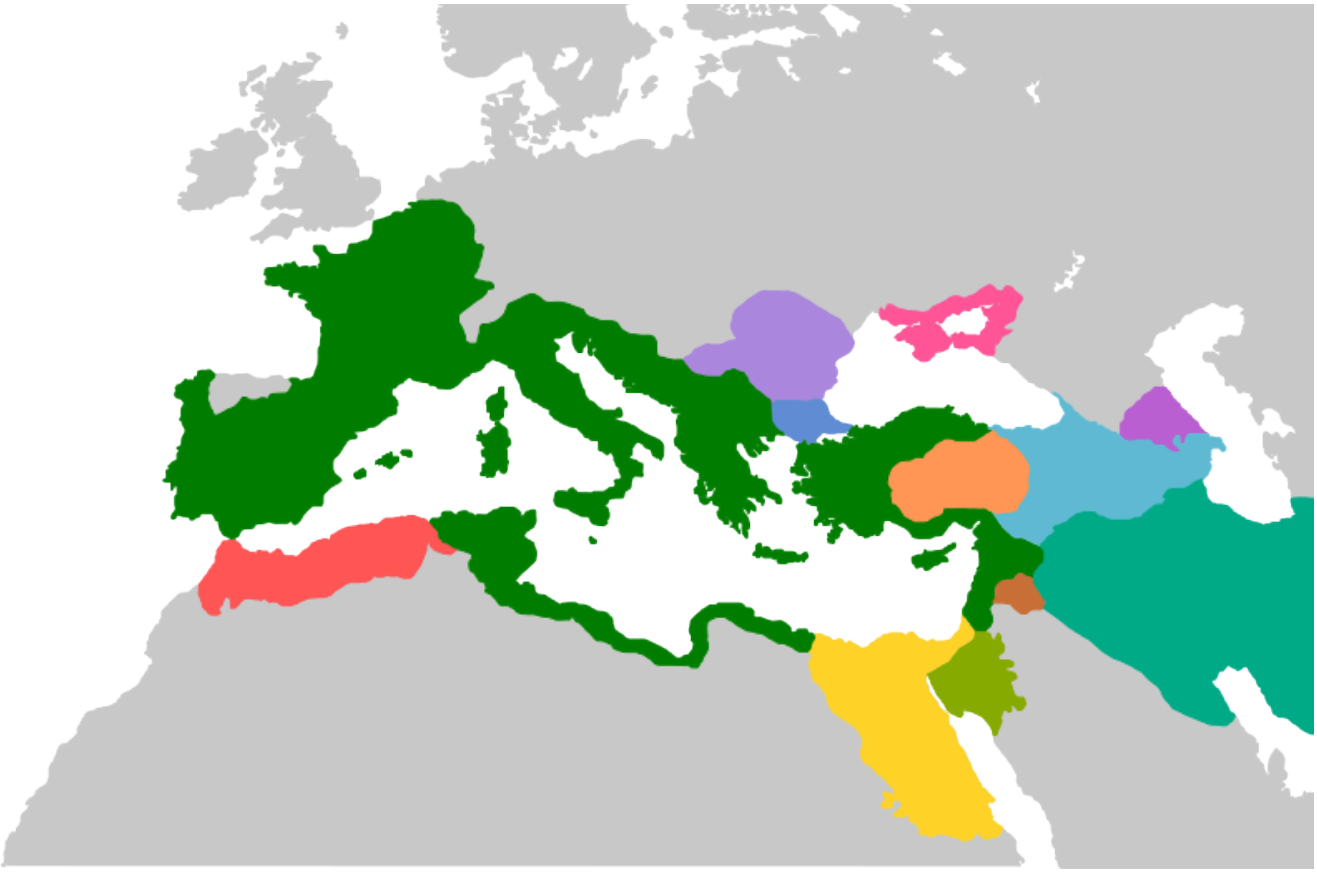
Thus, after centuries of warfare, by 140 BCE the Romans controlled almost the entire Mediterranean world, from Spain to Anatolia. They had not yet conquered the remaining Hellenistic kingdoms, namely those of the Seleucids in the Near East and the Ptolemies in Egypt, but they controlled a vast territory nonetheless. Even the Ptolemies, the most genuinely independent power in the region, acknowledged that Rome held all the real power in international affairs.

The last great Hellenistic attempt to push back Roman control was in the early first century BCE, with the rise of a Greek king, Mithridates VI, from Pontus, a small kingdom on the southern shore of the Black Sea. Mithridates led a large anti-Roman coalition of Hellenistic peoples first in Anatolia and then in Greece

itself starting in 88 BCE. Mithridates was seen by his followers as a great liberator from Roman corruption (one Roman governor had molten gold poured down his throat to symbolize the just punishment of Roman greed). He went on to fight a total of three wars against Rome, but despite his tenacity he was finally defeated and killed in 63 BCE, the same year that Rome extinguished the last pitiful vestiges of the Seleucid kingdom.

A Roman bust of Mithridates VI sculpted in the first century CE (i.e. over a century after Mithridates was defeated) by a Roman sculptor. Here, he is depicted in the lion headdress of Hercules – the implication is that the Romans respected his ferocity in historical hindsight, even though he had been a staunch enemy of Rome.

Under the leadership of a general and politician, Pompey ("the Great"), both Mithridates and the remaining independent formerly Seleucid territories were defeated and incorporated either as provinces or puppet states under the control of the Republic. With that, almost the entire Mediterranean region was under Rome's sway – Egypt alone remained independent.



The Republic as of 40 BCE. The Republic itself is marked in dark green, with the other regions consisting of other independent states. Many of those would subsequently fall under the sway of Rome or be conquered outright (such as Egypt).

Greco-Roman Culture

The Romans had been in contact with Greek culture for centuries, ever since the Etruscans struck up their trading relationship with the Greek poleis of southern Italy. Initially, the Etruscans formed a conduit for trade and cultural exchange, but soon the Romans were trading directly with the Greeks as well as the various Greek colonies all over the Mediterranean. By the time the Romans finally conquered Greece itself, they had already spent hundreds of years absorbing Greek ideas and culture, modeling their architecture on the great buildings of the Greek Classical Age and studying Greek ideas.

Despite their admiration for Greek culture, there was a paradox in that Roman elites had their own self-proclaimed "Roman" virtues, virtues that they attributed to the Roman past, which were quite distinct from Greek ideas. Roman virtues revolved around the idea that a Roman was strong, honest, straightforward, and powerful, while the Greeks were (supposedly) shifty, untrustworthy, and incapable of effective political organization. The simple fact that the Greeks had been unable to forge an empire except during the brief period of Alexander's conquests seemed to the Romans as proof that they did not possess an equivalent degree of virtue.

The Romans summed up their own virtues with the term *Romanitas*, which meant to be civilized, to be strong, to be honest, to be a great public speaker, to be a great fighter, and to work within the political structure in alliance with other civilized Romans. There was also a powerful theme of self-sacrifice associated with Romanitas – the ideal Roman would sacrifice himself for the greater good of Rome without hesitation. In some ways, Romanitas was the Romans' spin on the old Greek combination of arete and civic virtue.

One example of Romanitas in action was the role of dictator. A Roman dictator, even more so than a consul, was expected to embody Romanitas, leading Rome through a period of crisis but then *willingly giving up power*. Since the Romans were convinced that anything resembling monarchy was politically repulsive, a dictator was expected to serve for the greater good of Rome and then step aside when peace was restored. Indeed, until the first century CE, dictators duly stepped down once their respective crises were addressed.

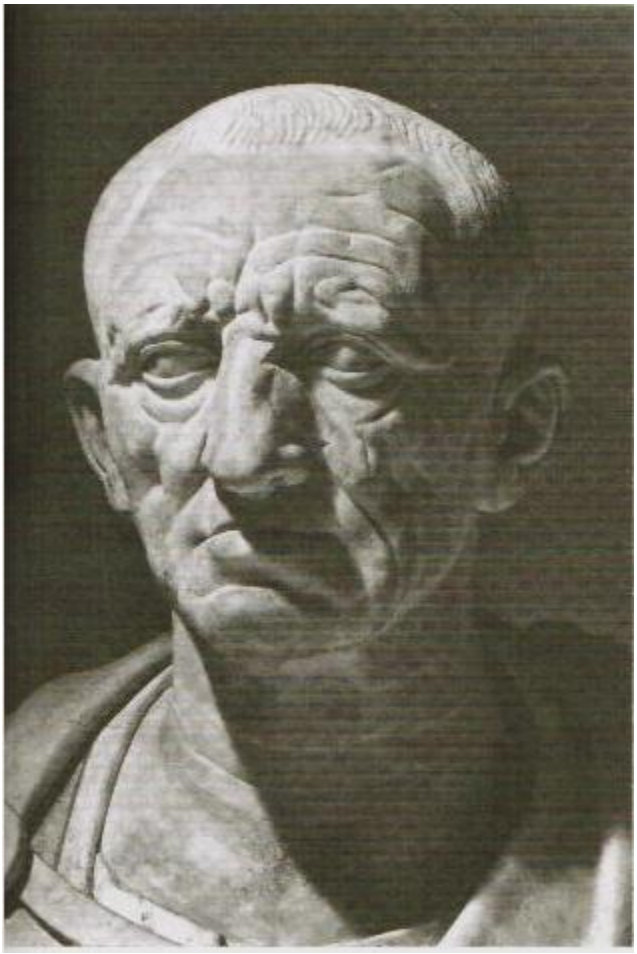
Romanitas was profoundly compatible with Greek Stoicism (which came of age in the Hellenistic monarchies just as Rome itself was expanding). Stoicism celebrated self-sacrifice, strength, political service, and the rejection of frivolous luxuries; these were all ideas that seemed laudable to Romans. By the first century BCE, Stoicism was the Greek philosophy of choice among many aristocratic Romans (a later Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, was even a Stoic philosopher in his own right).

The implications of Romanitas for political and military loyalty and morale are obvious. One less obvious expression of Romanitas, however, was in public building and celebrations. One way for elite (rich) Romans to express their Romanitas was to fund the construction of temples, forums, arenas, or practical public works like roads and aqueducts. Likewise, elite Romans would often pay for huge games and contests with free food and drink, sometimes for entire cities. This practice was not just in the name of showing off; it was an expression of one's loyalty to the Roman people and their shared Roman culture. The creation of numerous Roman buildings (some of which survive) is the result of this form of Romanitas.

Despite their tremendous pride in Roman culture, the Romans still found much to admire about Greek intellectual achievements. By about 230 BCE, Romans started taking an active interest in Greek literature. Some Greek slaves were true intellectuals who found an important place in Roman society. One status symbol in Rome was to have a Greek slave who could tutor one's children in the Greek language and Greek learning. In 220 BCE a Roman senator, Quintus Fabius Pictor, wrote a history of Rome in Greek, the first major work of Greek literature written by a Roman (like so many ancient sources, it has not survived). Soon, Romans were imitating the Greeks, writing in both Greek and Latin and creating poetry, drama, and literature.

That being noted, the interest in Greek culture was muted until the Roman wars in Greece that began with the defeat of Philip V of Macedon. Rome's Greek wars created a kind of "feeding frenzy" of Greek art and Greek slaves. Huge amounts of Greek statuary and art were shipped back to Rome as part of the spoils of war, having an immediate impact on Roman taste. The appeal of Greek art was undeniable. Greek artists, even those who escaped slavery, soon started moving to Rome en masse because there was so much money to be made there if an artist could secure a wealthy patron. Greek artists, and the Romans who learned from them, adapted the Hellenistic Greek style. In many cases, classical statues were recreated exactly by sculptors, somewhat like modern-day prints of famous paintings. In others, a new style of realistic portraiture in sculpture that

originated in the Hellenistic kingdoms proved irresistible to the Romans; whereas the Greeks of the Classical Age usually idealized the subjects of art, the Romans came to prefer more realistic and "honest" portrayals. We know precisely what many Romans looked like because of the realistic busts made of their faces: wrinkles, warts and all.



The "Patrician Torlonia," a bust of an unknown Roman politician from sometime in the first century BCE.

Along with philosophy and architecture, the most important Greek import to arrive on Roman shores was rhetoric: the mastery of words and language in order to persuade people and win arguments. The Greeks held that the two ways a man could best his rivals and assert his virtue were battle and public discussion and argumentation. This tradition was felt very keenly by the Romans, because those were precisely the two major ways the Roman Republic operated – the superiority of its armies was well-known, while individual leaders had to be able to convince their peers and rivals of the correctness of their positions. The Romans thus very consciously tried to copy the Greeks, especially the Athenians, for their skill at oratory.

Not surprisingly, the Romans both admired and resented the Greeks for the Greek mastery of words. The Romans came to pride themselves on a more direct, less subtle form of oratory than that (supposedly) practiced in Greece. Part of Roman oratorical skill was the use of passionate appeals to emotional responses in the audience, ones that were supposed to both harness and control the emotions of the speaker himself. The

Romans also formalized instruction in rhetoric, a practice of studying the speeches of great speakers and politicians of the past and of debating instructors and fellow students in mock scenarios.

Roman Society

Much of Roman social life revolved around the system of *clientage*. Clientage consisted of networks of "patrons" – people with power and influence – and their "clients" – those who looked to the patrons for support. A patron would do things like arrange for his or her (i.e. there were women patrons, not just men) clients to receive lucrative government contracts, to be appointed as officers in a Roman legion, to be able to buy a key piece of farmland, and so on. In return, the patron would expect political support from their clients by voting as directed in the Centuriate or Plebeian Assembly, by influencing other votes, and by blocking political rivals. Likewise, clients who shared a patron were expected to help one another. These were open, publicly-known alliances rather than hidden deals made behind closed doors; groups of clients would accompany their patron into meetings of the senate or assemblies as a show of strength.

The government of the late Republic was still in the form of the Plebeian Assembly, the Centuriate Assembly, the Senate, ten tribunes, two consuls, and a court system under formal rules of law. By the late Republic, however, a network of patrons and clients had emerged that largely controlled the government. Elite families of nobles, through their client networks, made all of the important decisions. Beneath this group were the equestrians: families who did not have the ancient lineages of the patricians and who normally did not serve in public office. The equestrians, however, were rich, and they benefited from the fact that senators were formally banned from engaging in commerce as of the late third century BCE. They constituted the business class of Republican Rome who supported the elites while receiving various trade and mercantile concessions.

Meanwhile, the average plebeian had long ago lost his or her representation. The Plebeian Assembly was controlled by wealthy plebeians who were the clients of nobles. In other words, they served the interests of the rich and had little interest in the plight of the class they were supposed to represent. This created an ongoing problem for Rome, one that was exploited many times by populist leaders: Rome relied on a free class of citizens to serve in the army, but those same citizens often had to struggle to make ends meet as farmers. As the rich grew richer, they bought up land and sometimes even forced poorer citizens off of their farms. Thus, there was an existential threat to Rome's armies, and with it, to Rome itself.

A comparable pattern existed in the territories – soon provinces – conquered in war. Rome was happy to grant citizenship to local elites who supported Roman rule, and sometimes entire communities could be granted citizenship on the basis of their loyalty (or simply their perceived usefulness) to Rome. Citizenship was a useful commodity, protecting its holders from harsher legal punishments and affording them significant political rights. Most Roman subjects, however, were just that: subjects, not citizens. In the provinces they were subject to the goodwill of the Roman governor, who might well look for opportunities to extract provincial wealth for his own benefit.

At the bottom of the Roman social system were the slaves. Slaves were one of the most lucrative forms

of loot available to Roman soldiers, and so many lands had been conquered by Rome that the population of the Republic was swollen with slaves. Fully one-third of the population of Italy were slaves by the first century CE. Even freed slaves, called *freedmen*, had limited legal rights and had formal obligations to serve their former masters as clients. Roman slaves spanned the same range of jobs noted with other slaveholding societies like the Greeks: elite slaves lived much more comfortably than did most free Romans, but most were laborers or domestic servants. All could be abused by their owners without legal consequence.

Slavery was a huge economic engine in Roman society. Much of the "loot" seized in Roman campaigns was made up of human beings, and Roman soldiers were eager to capitalize on captives they took by selling them on returning to Italy. In historical hindsight, however, slavery undermined both Roman productivity and the pace of innovation in Roman society. It simply was not necessary to seek out new and better ways of doing things in the form of technological progress or social innovations because slave labor was always available. While Roman engineering was impressive, Rome developed no new technology to speak of in its thousand-year history. Likewise, the long-term effect of the growth of slavery in Rome was to undermine the social status of free Roman citizens, with farmers in particular struggling to survive as rich Romans purchased land and built huge slave plantations.

There were many slave uprisings, the most significant of which was led by Spartacus, a gladiator (warrior who fought for public amusement) originally from Thrace. Spartacus led the revolt of his gladiatorial school in the Italian city of Capua in 73 BCE. He set up a war camp on the slopes of the volcano Mt. Vesuvius, to which thousands of slaves fled, culminating in an "army" of about 70,000. He tried to convince them to flee over the Alps to seek refuge in their (mostly Celtic) homelands, but was eventually convinced to turn around to plunder Italy. The richest man in Italy, the senator Crassus, took command of the Roman army assembled to defeat Spartacus, crushing the slave army and killing Spartacus in 71 BCE (and lining the road to Rome with 6,000 crucified slaves).

In one area, however, Rome represented greater freedom and autonomy than did some of its neighboring societies (like Greece): gender roles. While Roman culture was explicitly patriarchal, with families organized under the authority of the eldest male of the household (the *pater familias*), there is a great deal of textual evidence that suggests that women enjoyed considerable independence nevertheless. Women retained the ownership of their dowries at marriage, could initiate divorce, and controlled their own inheritances. Widows, who were common thanks to the young marriage age of women and the death of soldier husbands, were legally autonomous and continued to run households after the death of the husband. Within families, women's voices carried considerable weight, and in the realm of politics, while men held all official positions, women exercised considerable influence from behind the scenes.

It is easy to overstate women's empowerment in Roman society; Roman culture celebrated the devoted mother and wife as the female ideal, and Roman traditionalists decried the loosening of strict gender roles that seems to have taken place over time during the Republic. Women were expected to be frugal managers of households and, in theory, they were to avoid ostentatious displays. Likewise, Roman law explicitly designated men as the official decision-makers within the family unit. That being noted, however, one of the reasons that

we know that women did enjoy a higher degree of autonomy than in many other societies is the number of surviving texts that both described and, in many cases, celebrated the role of women. Those texts were written by both men and women, and most Romans (men very much included) felt that it was both appropriate and desirable for both boys and girls to be properly educated.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Romulus and Remus – Stinkzwam

Expansion of the Republic – Javierfv1212

Punic Wars – Javierfv1212

Mithridates VI – Eric Gaba

Map of the Republic – Alvaro qc

Patrician Torlonia – Unknown

This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 8: The Roman Republic in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

Livy: The Rape of Lucretia, from the History of Rome

This text is available online at through the Ancient History Sourcebook

It took the Roman historian Livy (d. 17 AD) forty years to write his 142-book History of Rome. *In this excerpt, he repeats a legend which was extremely important to Romans during the Republic. The sons of the King of Rome, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, are at Ardea, a city which the army is attempting to conquer, when they hear of the virtue of the Roman matron Lucretia.*

LVII. One day when the young men were drinking at the house of Sextus Tarquinius, after a supper where they had dined with the son of Egerius, Tarquinius Conlatinus, they fell to talking about their wives, and each man fell to praising his wife to excess. Finally Tarquinius Conlatinus declared that there was no need to argue; they might all be sure that no one was more worthy than his Lucretia. "Young and vigorous as we are, why don't we go get out horses and go and see for ourselves what our wives are doing? And we will base our judgement on whatever we see them doing when their husbands arrive unannounced." Encouraged by the wine, "Yes, let's go!" they all cried, and they went on horseback to the city. Darkness was beginning to fall when they arrived and they went to the house of Conlatinus. There, they found Lucretia behaving quite differently from the daughters-in-law of the King, whom they had found with their friends before a grand feast, preparing to have a night of fun. Lucretia, even though it was night, was still working on her spinning, with her servants, in the middle of her house. They were all impressed by Lucretia's chaste honor. When her husband and the Tarquins arrived, she received them, and her husband, the winner, was obliged to invite the king's sons in. It was then that Sextus Tarquinius was seized by the desire to violate Lucretia's chastity, seduced both by her beauty and by her exemplary virtue. Finally, after a night of youthful games, they returned to the camp.

LVIII. Several days passed. Sextus Tarquinius returned to the house of Conlatinus, with one of his companions. He was well received and given the hospitality of the house, and maddened with love, he waited until he was sure everyone else was asleep. Then he took up his sword and went to Lucretia's bedroom, and placing his sword against her left breast, he said, "Quiet, Lucretia; I am Sextus Tarquinius, and I have a sword in my hand. If you speak, you will die." Awakening from sleep, the poor woman realized that she was without help and very close to death. Sextus Tarquinius declared his love for her, begging and threatening her alternately, and attacked her soul in every way. Finally, before her steadfastness, which was not affected by the fear of death even after his intimidation, he added another menace. "When I have killed you, I will put next to you the body of a nude servant, and everyone will say that you were killed during a dishonorable act of adultery." With this menace, Sextus Tarquinius triumphed over her virtue, and when he had raped her he left, having taken away her honor. Lucretia, overcome with sorrow and shame, sent messengers both to her husband at Ardea and her father at Rome, asking them each to come "at once, with a good friend, because a very terrible thing had happened." Spurius

Lucretius, her father, came with Publius Valerius, the son of Volesus, and Conlatinus came with Lucius Junius Brutus; they had just returned to Rome when they met Lucretia's messenger. They found Lucretia in her chamber, overpowered by grief. When she saw them she began to cry. "How are you?" her husband asked. "Very bad," she replied, "how can anything go well for a woman who has lost her honor? There are the marks of another man in your bed, Conlatinus. My body is greatly soiled, though my heart is still pure, as my death will prove. But give me your right hand in faith that you will not allow the guilty to escape. It was Sextus Tarquinius who returned our hospitality with enmity last night. With his sword in his hand, he came to take his pleasure for my unhappiness, but it will also be his sorrow if you are real men." They promised her that they would pursue him, and they tried to appease her sorrow, saying that it was the soul that did wrong, and not the body, and because she had had no bad intention, she did no wrong. "It is your responsibility to see that he gets what he deserves," she said, "I will absolve myself of blame, and I will not free myself from punishment. No woman shall use Lucretia as her example in dishonor." Then she took up a knife which she had hidden beneath her robe, and plunged it into her heart, collapsing from her wound; she died there amid the cries of her husband and father.

LIX. Brutus, leaving them in their grief, took the knife from Lucretia's wound, and holding it all covered with blood up in the aid, cried, "By this blood, which was so pure before the crime of the prince, I swear before you, O gods, to chase the King Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, with his criminal wife and all their offspring, by fire, iron, and all the methods I have at my disposal, and never to tolerate Kings in Rome evermore, whether of that family of any other."

Source:

Translated from the original in Jean Bayet, ed., Tite-Live: Histoire Romaine, Tome I, livre I. Paris: Societé d'Édition "les belles-lettres," 1954, pp. 92-95.

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MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *The Rape of Lucretia*

Reading Journal

Like in the previous module, here we have another ancient historian writing about the past. The earliest version of this foundational story of the Roman Republic (that we know about) circulated around the late 3rd century BCE, so at least 200 years after the events allegedly took place. The version we are reading is by Livy and is included in his 142 volume *History of Rome.* Livy was writing in the tumultuous period that marked the end of the Republic and the beginning of the empirical rule. In your entry, address similar questions: what does this text tell us about the values of the Roman Republic? What are the source's limitations?

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART VII

MODULE SIX: ROME: FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

READING: THE END OF THE REPUBLIC AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Christopher Brooks

The End of the Republic

The Roman Republic lasted for roughly five centuries. It was under the Republic that Rome evolved from a single town to the heart of an enormous empire. Despite the evident success of the republican system, however, there were inexorable problems that plagued the Republic throughout its history, most evidently the problem of wealth and power. Roman citizens were, by law, supposed to have a stake in the Republic. They took pride in who they were and it was the common patriotic desire to fight and expand the Republic among the citizen-soldiers of the Republic that created, at least in part, such an effective army. At the same time, the vast amount of wealth captured in the military campaigns was frequently siphoned off by elites, who found ways to seize large portions of land and loot with each campaign. By around 100 BCE even the existence of the Plebeian Assembly did almost nothing to mitigate the effect of the debt and poverty that afflicted so many Romans thanks to the power of the clientage networks overseen by powerful noble patrons.

The key factor behind the political stability of the Republic up until the aftermath of the Punic Wars was that there had *never* been open fighting between elite Romans in the name of political power. In a sense, Roman expansion (and especially the brutal wars against Carthage) had united the Romans; despite their constant political battles within the assemblies and the senate, it had never come to actual bloodshed. Likewise, a very strong component of *Romanitas* was the idea that political arguments were to be settled with debate and votes, not clubs and knives. Both that unity and that emphasis on peaceful conflict resolution within the Roman state itself began to crumble after the sack of Carthage.

The first step toward violent revolution in the Republic was the work of the Gracchus brothers – remembered historically as the Gracchi (i.e. "Gracchi" is the plural of "Gracchus"). The older of the two was Tiberius Gracchus, a rich but reform-minded politician. Gracchus, among others, was worried that the free, farm-owning common Roman would go extinct if the current trend of rich landowners seizing farms and replacing farmers with slaves continued. Without those commoners, Rome's armies would be drastically weakened. Thus, he managed to pass a bill through the Centuriate Assembly that would limit the amount of land a single man could own, distributing the excess to the poor. The Senate was horrified and fought bitterly to reverse the bill. Tiberius ran for a second term as tribune, something no one had ever done up to that point, and a group of senators clubbed him to death in 133 BCE.

Tiberius's brother Gaius Gracchus took up the cause, also becoming tribune. He attacked corruption

in the provinces, allying himself with the equestrian class and allowing equestrians to serve on juries that tried corruption cases. He also tried to speed up land redistribution. His most radical move was to try to extend full citizenship to all of Rome's Italian subjects, which would have effectively transformed the Roman Republic into the Italian Republic. Here, he lost even the support of his former allies in Rome, and he killed himself in 121 BCE rather than be murdered by another gang of killers sent by senators.

The reforms of the Gracchi were temporarily successful: even though they were both killed, the Gracchi's central effort to redistribute land accomplished its goal. A land commission created by Tiberius remained intact until 118 BCE, by which time it had redistributed huge tracts of land held illegally by the rich. Despite their vociferous opposition, the rich did not suffer much, since the lands in question were "public lands" largely left in the aftermath of the Second Punic War, and normal farmers did enjoy benefits. Likewise, despite Gaius's death, the Republic eventually granted citizenship to all Italians in 84 BCE, after being forced to put down a revolt in Italy. In hindsight, the historical importance of the Gracchi was less in their reforms and more in the manner of their deaths – for the first time, major Roman politicians had simply been murdered (or killed themselves rather than be murdered) for their politics. It became increasingly obvious that true power was shifting away from rhetoric and toward military might.

A contemporary of the Gracchi, a general named Gaius Marius, took further steps that eroded the traditional Republican system. Marius combined political savvy with effective military leadership. Marius was both a consul (elected an unprecedented seven times) and a general, and he used his power to eliminate the property requirement for membership in the army. This allowed the poor to join the army in return for nothing more than an oath of loyalty, one they swore to their general rather than to the Republic. Marius was popular with Roman commoners because he won consistent victories against enemies in both Africa and Germany, and because he distributed land and farms to his poor soldiers. This made him a people's hero, and it terrified the nobility in Rome because he was able to bypass the usual Roman political machine and simply pay for his wars himself. His decision to eliminate the property requirement meant that his troops were totally dependent on him for loot and land distribution after campaigns, undermining their allegiance to the Republic.

A general named Sulla followed in Marius's footsteps by recruiting soldiers directly and using his military power to bypass the government. In the aftermath of the Italian revolt of 88 – 84 BCE, the Assembly took Sulla's command of Roman legions fighting the Parthians away and gave it to Marius in return for Marius's support in enfranchising the people of the Italian cities. Sulla promptly marched on Rome with his army, forcing Marius to flee. Soon, however, Sulla left Rome to command legions against the army of the anti-Roman king Mithridates in the east. Marius promptly attacked with an army of his own, seizing Rome and murdering various supporters of Sulla. Marius himself soon died (of old age), but his followers remained united in an anti-Sulla coalition under a friend of Marius, Cinna.

After defeating Mithridates, Sulla returned and a full-scale civil war shook Rome in 83 – 82 BCE. It was horrendously bloody, with some 300,000 men joining the fighting and many thousands killed. After Sulla's ultimate victory he had thousands of Marius's supporters executed. In 81 BCE, Sulla was named dictator; he greatly strengthened the power of the Senate at the expense of the Plebeian Assembly, had his enemies in Rome

murdered and their property seized, then retired to a life of debauchery in his private estate (and soon died from a disease he contracted). The problem for the Republic was that, even though Sulla ultimately proved that he was loyal to republican institutions, other generals might not be in the future. Sulla could have simply held onto power indefinitely thanks to the personal loyalty of his troops.

Julius Caesar

Thus, there is an unresolved question about the end of the Roman Republic: when a new politician and general named Julius Caesar became increasingly powerful and ultimately began to replace the Republic with an empire, was he merely making good on the threat posed by Marius and Sulla, or was there truly something unprecedented about his actions? Julius Caesar's rise to power is a complex story that reveals just how murky Roman politics were by the time he became an important political player in about 70 BCE. Caesar himself was both a brilliant general and a shrewd politician; he was skilled at keeping up the appearance of loyalty to Rome's ancient institutions while exploiting opportunities to advance and enrich himself and his family. He was loyal, in fact, to almost no one, even old friends who had supported him, and he also cynically used the support of the poor for his own gain.

Two powerful politicians, Pompey and Crassus (both of whom had risen to prominence as supporters of Sulla), joined together to crush the slave revolt of Spartacus in 70 BCE and were elected consuls because of their success. Pompey was one of the greatest Roman generals, and he soon left to eliminate piracy from the Mediterranean, to conquer the Jewish kingdom of Judea, and to crush an ongoing revolt in Anatolia. He returned in 67 BCE and asked the Senate to approve land grants to his loyal soldiers for their service, a request that the Senate refused because it feared his power and influence with so many soldiers who were loyal to him instead of the Republic. Pompey reacted by forming an alliance with Crassus and with Julius Caesar, who was a member of an ancient patrician family. This group of three is known in history as the First Triumvirate.

Busts of the members of the First Triumvirate: Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey.

Each member of the Triumvirate wanted something specific: Caesar hungered for glory and wealth and hoped to be appointed to lead Roman armies against the Celts in Western Europe, Crassus wanted to lead armies against Parthia (i.e. the "new" Persian Empire that had long since overthrown Seleucid rule in Persia itself), and Pompey wanted the Senate to authorize land and wealth for his troops. The three of them had so many clients and wielded so much political power that they were able to ratify all of Pompey's demands, and both Caesar and Crassus received the military commissions they hoped for. Caesar was appointed general of the territory of Gaul (present-day France and Belgium) and he set off to fight an infamous Celtic king named Vercingetorix.

From 58 to 50 BCE, Caesar waged a brutal war against the Celts of Gaul. He was both a merciless combatant, who slaughtered whole villages and enslaved hundreds of thousands of Celts (killing or enslaving over a million people in the end), and a gifted writer who wrote his own accounts of his wars in excellent Latin prose. His forces even invaded England, establishing a Roman territory there that lasted centuries. All of the lands he invaded were so thoroughly conquered that the descendants of the Celts ended up speaking languages based on Latin, like French, rather than their native Celtic dialects.

Caesar's victories made him famous and immensely powerful, and they ensured the loyalty of his battle-hardened troops. In Rome, senators feared his power and called on Caesar's former ally Pompey to bring him to heel (Crassus had already died in his ill-considered campaign against the Parthians; his head was used as a prop in a Greek play staged by the Parthian king). Pompey, fearing his former ally's power, agreed and brought his armies to Rome. The Senate then recalled Caesar after refusing to renew his governorship of Gaul and his military command, or allowing him to run for consul in absentia.

The Senate hoped to use the fact that Caesar had violated the letter of republican law while on campaign to strip him of his authority. Caesar had committed illegal acts, including waging war without authorization from the Senate, but he was protected from prosecution so long as he held an authorized military command. By refusing to renew his command or allow him to run for office as consul, he would be open to charges. His enemies in the Senate feared his tremendous influence with the people of Rome, so the conflict was as much about factional infighting among the senators as fear of Caesar imposing some kind of tyranny.

Caesar knew what awaited him in Rome – charges of sedition against the Republic – so he simply took his army with him and marched off to Rome. In 49 BCE, he dared to cross the Rubicon River in northern Italy, the legal boundary over which no Roman general was allowed to bring his troops; he reputedly announced that "the die is cast" and that he and his men were now committed to either seizing power or facing total defeat. The brilliance of Caesar's move was that he could pose as the champion of his loyal troops as well as that of the common people of Rome, whom he promised to aid against the corrupt and arrogant senators; he never claimed to be acting for himself, but instead to protect his and his men's legal rights and to resist the corruption of the Senate.

Pompey had been the most powerful man in Rome, both a brilliant general and a gifted politician, but he did not anticipate Caesar's boldness. Caesar surprised him by marching straight for Rome. Pompey only had two legions, both of whom had served under Caesar in the past and, and he was thus forced to recruit new

troops. As Caesar approached, Pompey fled to Greece, but Caesar followed him and defeated his forces in battle in 48 BCE. Pompey himself escaped to Egypt, where he was promptly murdered by agents of the Ptolemaic court who had read the proverbial writing on the wall and knew that Caesar was the new power to contend with in Rome. Subsequently, Caesar came to Egypt and stayed long enough to forge a political alliance, and carry on an affair, with the queen of Egypt: Cleopatra VII, last of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Caesar helped Cleopatra defeat her brother (to whom she was married, in the Egyptian tradition) in a civil war and to seize complete control over the Egyptian state. She also bore him his only son, Caesarion.

Caesar returned to Rome two years later after hunting down Pompey's remaining loyalists. There, he had himself declared dictator for life and set about creating a new version of the Roman government that answered directly to him. He filled the Senate with his supporters and established military colonies in the lands he had conquered as rewards for his loyal troops (which doubled as guarantors of Roman power in those lands, since veterans and their families would now live there permanently). He established a new calendar, which included the month of "July" named after him, and he regularized Roman currency. Then he promptly set about making plans to launch a massive invasion of Persia.

Instead of leading another glorious military campaign, however, in March of 44 BCE Caesar was assassinated by a group of senators who resented his power and genuinely desired to save the Republic. The result was not the restoration of the Republic, however, just a new chapter in the Caesarian dictatorship. Its architect was Caesar's heir, his grand-nephew Octavian, to whom Caesar left (much to almost everyone's shock) almost all of his vast wealth.

Mark Antony and Octavian

Following his death, Caesar's right-hand man, a skilled general named Mark Antony, joined with Octavian and another general named Lepidus to form the "Second Triumvirate." In 43 BCE they seized control in Rome and then launched a successful campaign against the old republican loyalists, killing off the men who had killed Caesar and murdering the strongest senators and equestrians who had tried to restore the old institutions. Mark Antony and Octavian soon pushed Lepidus to the side and divided up control of Roman territory – Octavian taking Europe and Mark Antony taking the eastern territories and Egypt. This was an arrangement that was not destined to last; the two men had only been allies for the sake of convenience, and both began scheming as to how they could seize total control of Rome's vast empire.

Mark Antony moved to the Egyptian city of Alexandria, where he set up his court. He followed in Caesar's footsteps by forging both a political alliance and a romantic relationship with Cleopatra, and the two of them were able to rule the eastern provinces of the Republic in defiance of Octavian. In 34 BCE, Mark Antony and Cleopatra declared that Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar, Caesarion, was the heir to Caesar (not Octavian), and that their own twins were to be rulers of Roman provinces. Rumors in the west claimed that Antony was under Cleopatra's thumb (which is unlikely: the two of them were both savvy politicians and seem to have shared a genuine affection for one another) and was breaking with traditional Roman values, and Octavian

seized on this behavior to claim that he was the true protector of Roman morality. Soon, Octavian produced a will that Mark Antony had supposedly written ceding control of Rome to Cleopatra and their children on his death; whether or not the will was authentic, it fit in perfectly with the publicity campaign on Octavian's part to build support against his former ally in Rome.

A dedication featuring Cleopatra VII making an offering to the Egyptian goddess Isis. Note the remarkable mix of Egyptian and Greek styles: the image is in keeping with traditional Egyptian carvings, and Isis is an ancient Egyptian goddess, but the dedication itself is written in Greek.

When he finally declared war in 32 BCE, Octavian claimed he was only interested in defeating Cleopatra, which led to broader Roman support because it was not immediately stated that it was yet another Roman civil war. Antony and Cleopatra's forces were already fairly scattered and weak due to a disastrous campaign against the Persians a few years earlier. In 31 BCE, Octavian defeated Mark Antony's forces, which were poorly equipped, sick, and hungry. Antony and Cleopatra's soldiers were starved out by a successful blockade engi-

neered by Octavian and his friend and chief commander Agrippa, and the unhappy couple killed themselves the next year in exile. Octavian was 33. As his grand-uncle had before him, Octavian began the process of manipulating the institutions of the Republic to transform it into something else entirely: an empire.

When Octavian succeeded in defeating Marc Antony, he removed the last obstacle to his own control of Rome's vast territories. While paying lip service to the idea that the Republic still survived, he in fact replaced the republican system with one in which a single sovereign ruled over the Roman state. In doing so he founded the Roman Empire, a political entity that would survive for almost five centuries in the west and over a thousand years in the east.

This system was called the *Principate*, rule by the "First." Likewise, although "Caesar" had originally simply been the family name of Julius Caesar's line, "Caesar" came to be synonymous with the emperor himself by the end of the first century CE. The Roman terms for rule would last into the twentieth century CE: the imperial titles of the rulers of both Russia and Germany – "Tsar" and "Kaiser" – meant "Caesar." In turn, the English word "emperor" derives from *imperator*, the title of a victorious Roman general in the field, which was adopted as yet another honorific by the Roman emperors. The English word "prince" is another Romanism, from *Princeps Civitatis*, "First Citizen," the term that Augustus invented for himself. For the sake of clarity, this chapter will use the anglicized term "emperor" to refer to all of the leaders of the Roman imperial system.

Augustus

The height of Roman power coincided with the first two hundred years of the Roman Empire, a period that was remembered as the *Pax Romana*: the Roman Peace. It was possible during the period of the Roman Empire's height, from about 1 CE to 200 CE, to travel from the Atlantic coast of Spain or Morocco all the way to Mesopotamia using good roads, speaking a common language, and enjoying official protection from banditry. The Roman Empire was as rich, powerful, and glorious as any in history up to that point, but it also represented oppression and imperialism to slaves, poor commoners, and conquered peoples.

Octavian was unquestionably the architect of the Roman Empire. Unlike his great-uncle, Julius Caesar, Octavian eliminated all political rivals and set up a permanent hereditary emperorship. All the while, he claimed to be restoring not just peace and prosperity, but the Republic itself. Since the term *Rex* (king) would have been odious to his fellow Romans, Augustus instead referred to himself as *Princeps Civitatus*, meaning "first citizen." He used the Senate to maintain a facade of republican rule, instructing senators on the actions they were to take; a good example is that the Senate "asked" him to remain consul for life, which he graciously accepted. By 23 BCE, he assumed the position of tribune for life, the position that allowed unlimited power in making or vetoing legislation. All soldiers swore personal oaths of loyalty to him, and having conquered Egypt from his former ally Mark Antony, Augustus was worshiped there as the latest pharaoh. The Senate awarded Octavian the honorific *Augustus*: "illustrious" or "semi-divine." It is by that name, Augustus Caesar, that he is best remembered.

Despite his obvious personal power, Augustus found it useful to maintain the facade of the Republic,

along with republican values like thrift, honesty, bravery, and honor. He instituted strong moralistic laws that penalized (elite) young men who tried to avoid marriage and he celebrated the piety and loyalty of conservative married women. Even as he converted the government from a republic to a bureaucratic tool of his own will, he insisted on traditional republican beliefs and republican culture. This no doubt reflected his own conservative tastes, but it also eased the transition from republic to autocracy for the traditional Roman elites.

As Augustus's powers grew, he received an altogether novel legal status, *imperium majus*, that was something like access to the extraordinary powers of a dictator under the Republic. Combined with his ongoing tribuneship and direct rule over the provinces in which most of the Roman army was garrisoned at the time, Augustus's practical control of the Roman state was unchecked. As a whole, the legal categories used to explain and excuse the reality of Augustus's vast powers worked well during his administration, but sometimes proved a major problem with later emperors because few were as competent as he had been. Subsequent emperors sometimes behaved as if the laws were truly irrelevant to their own conduct, and the formal relationship between emperor and law was never explicitly defined. Emperors who respected Roman laws and traditions won prestige and veneration for having done so, but there was never a formal legal challenge to imperial authority. Likewise, as the centuries went on and many emperors came to seize power through force, it was painfully apparent that the letter of the law was less important than the personal power of a given emperor in all too many cases.

One of the more spectacular surviving statues of Augustus. Augustus was, among other things, a master of propaganda, commissioning numerous statues and busts of himself to be installed across the empire.

This extraordinary power did not prompt resistance in large part because the practical reforms Augustus introduced were effective. He transformed the Senate and equestrian class into a real civil service to manage the enormous empire. He eliminated tax farming and replaced it with taxation through salaried officials. He instituted a regular messenger service. His forces even attacked Ethiopia in retaliation for attacks on Egypt and he received ambassadors from India and Scythia (present-day Ukraine). In short, he supervised the consolidation of Roman power after the decades of civil war and struggle that preceded his takeover, and the large majority of Romans and Roman subjects alike were content with the demise of the Republic because of the improved stability Augustus's reign represented. Only one major failure marred his rule: three legions (perhaps as many as 20,000 soldiers) were destroyed in a gigantic ambush in the forests of Germany in 9 CE, halting any

attempt to expand Roman power past the Rhine and Danube rivers. Despite that disaster, after Augustus's death the senate voted to deify him: like his great-uncle Julius, he was now to be worshipped as a god.

The Imperial Dynasties

The period of the *Pax Romana* included three distinct dynasties:

The Julian dynasty: 14 – 68 CE – those emperors related (by blood or adoption) to Caesar's line.

The Flavian dynasty: 69 – 96 CE – a father and his two sons who seized power after a brief civil war.

The "Five Good Emperors": 96 – 180 CE – a "dynasty" of emperors who chose their successors, rather than power passing to their family members.

The Julian Dynasty

There is a simple and vexing problem with any discussion of the Roman emperors: the sources. While archaeology and the surviving written sources create a reasonably clear basis for understanding the major political events of the Julian dynasty, the biographical details are much more difficult. All of the surviving written accounts about the lives of the Julian emperors were written many decades, in some cases more than a century, after their reign. In turn, the two most important biographers, Tacitus and Suetonius, detested the actions and the character of the Julians, and thus their accounts are rife with scandalous anecdotes that may or may not have any basis in historical truth (Tacitus is universally regarded as the more reliable, although Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars* does make for very entertaining reading). Thus, the biographical sketches below are an attempt to summarize what is known for sure, along with some notes on the scandalous assertions that may be at least partly fabricated.

When Augustus died in 14 CE, his stepson Tiberius (r. 14 – 37 CE) became emperor. While it was possible that the Senate might have tried to reassert its power, there was no political will to do so. Only idealistic or embittered senators really dreamed of restoring the Republic, and a coup would have been rejected by the vast majority of Roman citizens. Under the Caesars, after all, the empire had never been more powerful or wealthy. Genuine concessions had been made to the common people, especially soldiers, and the only people who really lost out in the short term were the old elite families of patricians, who no longer had political power independent of the emperor (although they certainly retained their wealth and status).

Tiberius began his rule as a cautious leader who put on a show of only reluctantly following in Augustus's footsteps as emperor. He was a reasonably competent emperor for over a decade, delegating decisions to the Senate and ensuring that the empire remained secure and financially solvent. In addition, he oversaw a momentous change to the priorities of the Roman state: the Roman Empire no longer embarked on a sustained campaign of expansion as it had done ever since the early decades of the Republic half a millennium earlier. This does not appear to have been a conscious policy choice on the part of Tiberius, but instead a shift

in priorities: the Senate was now staffed by land-owning elites who did not predicate their identities on warfare, and Tiberius himself saw little benefit in warring against Persia or invading Germany (he also feared that successful generals might threaten his power, at one point ordering one to call off a war in Germany). The Roman Empire would continue to expand at times in the following centuries, but never to the degree or at the pace that it had under the Republic.

Eventually, Tiberius retreated to a private estate on the island of Capri (off the west coast of Italy). Suetonius's biography would have it that on Capri, Tiberius indulged his penchant for bloodshed and sexual abuse, which is highly questionable – what is not questionable is that Tiberius became embittered and suspicious, ordering the murders of various would-be claimants to his throne back in Rome, and sometimes ignoring affairs of state. When he died, much to the relief of the Roman populace, great hopes were pinned on his heir.

That heir was Gaius (r. 37 – 41 CE), much better known as "Caligula," literally meaning "little boots" but which translates best as "bootsie." As a boy, Caligula moved with his father, a famous and well-liked general related by marriage to the Julians, from army camp to army camp. While he did so he liked to dress up in miniature legionnaire combat boots; hence, he was affectionately dubbed "Bootsie" by the troops (one notable translation of the work of Suetonius by Robert Graves translates Caligula as "Bootikins" instead).

Even if some of the stories of his personal sadism are exaggerated, there is no doubt that Caligula was a disastrous emperor. According to the biographers, Caligula quickly earned a reputation for cruelty and megalomania, enjoying executions (or simple murders) as forms of entertainment and spending vast sums on shows of power. Convinced of his own godhood, Caligula had the heads of statues of the gods removed and replaced with his own head. He liked to appear in public dressed as various gods *or* goddesses; one of his high priests was his horse, Incitatus, whom he supposedly appointed as a Roman consul. He staged an invasion of northern Gaul of no tactical significance which culminated in a Triumph (military parade, traditionally one of the greatest demonstrations of power and glory of a victorious general) back in Rome.

Much of the scandalous gossip about him, historically, is because he was unquestionably the enemy of the Senate, seeing potential traitors everywhere and inflicting waves of executions against former supporters. He used trials for treason to enrich himself after squandering the treasury on buildings and public games. He also made senators wait on him dressed as slaves, and demanded that he be addressed as "*dominus et deus*," meaning "master and god." He was finally murdered by a group of senators and guardsmen.

The next emperor was Claudius (r. 41 – 54 CE), the one truly competent emperor of the Julian line after Augustus. Claudius had survived palace intrigues because he walked with a limp and spoke with a pronounced stutter; he was widely considered to be a simpleton, whereas he was actually highly intelligent. Once in power Claudius proved himself a competent and refreshingly sane emperor, ending the waves of terror Caligula had unleashed. He went on to oversee the conquest of England, first begun by Julius Caesar decades earlier. He was also a scholar, mastering the Etruscan and Punic languages and writing histories of those two civilizations (the histories are now lost, unfortunately). He restored the imperial treasury, depleted by Tiberius and Caligula, and maintained the Roman borders. He also established a true bureaucracy to manage the vast

empire and began the process of formally distinguishing between the personal wealth of the emperor and the official budget of the Roman state.

According to Roman historians, Claudius was eventually betrayed and poisoned by his wife, who sought to have her son from another marriage become emperor. That son was Nero. Nero (r. 54 – 68 CE) was another Julian who acquired a terrible historical reputation; while he was fairly popular during his first few years as emperor, he eventually succumbed to a Caligula-like tendency of having elite Romans (including his domineering mother) killed. In 64 CE, a huge fire nearly destroyed the city, which was largely built out of wood. This led to the legend of Nero "playing his fiddle while Rome burned" – in fact, in the fire's aftermath Nero had shelters built for the homeless and set about rebuilding the roughly half of the city that had been destroyed, using concrete buildings and grid-based streets. That said, he did use space cleared by the fire to begin the construction of a gigantic new palace in the middle of Rome called the "golden house," into which he poured state revenues.

Nero's terrible reputation arose from the fact that he unquestionably hounded and persecuted elite Romans, using a law called the *Maiestas* that made it illegal to slander the emperor to extract huge amounts of money from senators and equestrians. He also ordered imagined rivals and former advisors to kill themselves, probably out of mere jealousy. Besides Roman elites, his other major target was the early Christian movement, whom he blamed for the fire in Rome and whom he relentlessly persecuted (thousands were killed in the gladiatorial arena, ripped apart by wild animals). Thus, the two groups in the position to write Nero's history – elite Romans and early Christians – had every reason to hate him. In addition, Nero took great pride in being an actor and musician, two professions that were considered by Roman elites to be akin to prostitution. His artistic indulgences were thus scandalous violations of elite sensibilities. After completely losing the support of both the army and the Senate, Nero committed suicide in 68 CE.

Another note on the sources: what the "bad" emperors of the Julian line (Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero) had in common is that they violated the old traditions of *Romanitas*, squandering wealth and glorifying themselves in various ways, thus inspiring hostility from many elite Romans. Since it was other elite Romans (albeit many years later) who became their biographers, we in the present cannot help but have a skewed view of their conduct. Historians have rehabilitated much of the rule of Tiberius and (to a lesser extent) Nero in particular, arguing that even if they were at loggerheads with the Senate at various times and probably did unfairly prosecute at least some senators, they did a decent job of running the empire as well.

The Flavian Dynasty

In the aftermath of Nero's death, a brief civil war broke out. Four generals competed for the emperorship, supported by their armies. In the end, a general named Vespasian (r. 69 – 79 CE) seized power and founded a fairly short-lived dynasty consisting of himself and his two sons, known to history as the Flavians. The importance of Vespasian's takeover was that it reinforced the idea that real power in Rome was no longer that of the old power-broking families, but instead the armies; Vespasian had no legal claim to the throne, but

his emperorship was ratified by the Senate nevertheless. The emperor's major concern had to be maintaining the loyalty of the armies above all else, because they could and would openly fight to put their man on the throne in a time of crisis – this occurred numerous times in the centuries to come.

Vespasian was one of the great emperors of the early empire. He pulled state finances back from the terrible state they had been left in by Nero and restored the relationship between the emperor and the Roman elite; it certainly did not hurt his reputation that he was a successful general, one of the traditional sources of status among Roman leaders. He was also renowned for his openness and his grounded outlook. Reputably, he did not keep a guard and let people speak to him directly in public audiences. In an act of classic *Romanitas*, he started work on the famous Colosseum (known at the time as the Flavian Amphitheater) in Rome in order to provide a grand setting for public games and performances. All of this happened in just a decade; he died of natural causes in 79 CE.

The outside of the Colosseum in present-day Rome.

Vespasian's older son Titus (r. 79 – 81 CE) had been groomed to follow his father and began as a promising and competent emperor. Unfortunately, almost as soon as he took the throne a volcano in southern Italy, Mt. Vesuvius, erupted, followed shortly by another huge fire as well as an epidemic in Rome. Titus struggled to aid victims of all three disasters, but was then struck by fever and died in 81 CE.

Vespasian's second son, Domitian (r. 81 – 96 CE), who was not "supposed" to take the throne, proved to be a terrible ruler. He created an atmosphere of terror in elite Roman circles in an effort to watch out for potential rebels, murdering senators and elites he suspected. He adopted a Caligula-like concern for glorifying himself (like Caligula, he insisted that he be addressed as "*dominus et deus*") and liked to appear before the senate in the armor of a Roman commander returning from victory. He was moralistic about both sex

and the divinity of the emperors, instituting the policy that all oaths had to be sword to the godhood of the emperor. About the only positive undertaking in his rule was major building projects, both for palaces for himself and public works (including roads and fortifications), and it is also worth noting that the empire remained under a stable administration during his reign. That noted, Domitian became increasingly paranoid and violent between 89 and 96 CE, until he was finally killed by assassins in the palace.

The "Five Good Emperors" and the Severans

Following the work of the great eighteenth-century English historian Edward Gibbon, historians frequently refer to the rulers of the Roman Empire who followed the death of Domitian as the "Five Good Emperors," those who successfully managed the Empire at its height. For almost a century, emperors appointed their own successors from the most competent members of the younger generation of Roman elites. Not least because none of them (except the last, to disastrous consequences) had surviving direct heirs of their own, each emperor would adopt a younger man as his son, thereby ensuring his succession. Rome prospered during this period under this relatively meritocratic system of political succession. It was under one of these emperors, Trajan, that the empire achieved its greatest territorial expanse.

One of the important aspects of the behavior of the "good emperors" is that they fit the model of a "philosopher-king" first described by Plato centuries earlier. Even though monarchy had been repugnant to earlier Romans, during the period of the Republic, the good emperors tried to live and act according to traditional Roman *Romanitas*, undertaking actions not only for their own glorification but for the good of the Roman state. The borders were maintained (or, as under Trajan, expanded), public works and infrastructure built, and infighting among elites kept to a minimum.

Trajan's accomplishments deserve special mention, not only because of his success in expanding the Empire, but in how he governed it. He was a fastidious and straightforward administrator, focusing his considerable energies on the practical business of rule. He personally responded to requests and correspondence, he instituted a program of inexpensive loans to farmers and used the interest to pay for food for poor children, and he worked closely and successfully with the Senate to maintain stability and imperial solvency. The fact that personally led the legions on major military campaigns capped his reign in the military glory expected of an emperor following the rule of the Flavians, but he was remembered at least as well for his skill as a leader in peacetime.

The next two emperors, Hadrian and Antoninus Pius, did not win comparable military glory, but they did defend the borders (Hadrian gave up Trajan's conquests in Mesopotamia to do so, recognizing that they were unsustainable), oversaw major building projects, and maintained Roman stability. Hadrian spent much of his reign touring the Roman provinces, particularly Greece. It was clear by his reign that the emperor's authority was practically limitless, with both emperors issuing imperial proclamations known as "rescripts" while away from Rome that carried the force of law.

This period of successful rule eventually broke down when the practice of choosing a competent fol-

lower ended – the emperor Marcus Aurelius, a brilliant leader and Stoic philosopher (161 – 180 CE) named his arrogant and foolish son Commodus (r. 177 – 192 CE) his co-emperor three years before Aurelius's death. Storm clouds had already been gathering under Aurelius, who found himself obliged to lead military campaigns against incursions of Germanic tribes in the north despite his own lack of a military background (or, really, temperament). He had, however, been a scrupulously efficient and focused political leader. His decision to make Commodus his heir was due to a simple fact: Aurelius was the first of the Five Good Emperors to have a biological son who survived to adulthood. As emperor, Commodus indulged his taste for debauchery and ignored affairs of state, finally being assassinated after twelve years of incompetence.

One last dynasty emerged in the aftermath of Commodus's death, that of the Severans who ruled from 192 – 235 CE. They faced growing threats on the Roman borders, as Germanic tribes staged repeated (and often at least temporarily successful) incursions to the north and a new Persian dynasty known as the Sasanians pressed against Roman territory to the east. The last Severan emperor, Severus Alexander, died in 235 CE, ushering in a terrible period of military defeat and instability considered in the next chapter.

Beyond The Empire

As noted above, by the year 117 CE under Trajan the Empire reached its greatest size. It encompassed most of England across to Germany and Romania, all of North Africa from present-day Morocco, and extended to the borders of the Persian Empire. Beyond these borders were "barbarians" of various kinds; as far as the Romans were concerned there were no civilized people outside of their borders except the Persians. Trajan's successor, the emperor Hadrian, built an enormous series of fortifications to consolidate power on the frontiers – these were eventually (by the third century CE) known as the *limes*, permanent garrisons and fortresses that were meant to serve as barriers to prevent "barbarian" incursions. Some of these survive to the present, including Hadrian's Wall in northern England. While fleets patrolled the rivers and oceans, these garrisons controlled access to the empire.

The Empire at the height of its territorial expanse under Trajan in 117 CE.

As far as the Romans were concerned, there were only two things beyond those borders: to the north and northeast, endless tracts of inhospitable land and semi-human barbarians like the Germanic tribes, and to the east, the only other civilization Rome was prepared to recognize: the Persians, ruled first by the Parthians and then the Sasanians. For the rest of the Roman Imperial period, Rome and Persia periodically engaged in both raiding and full-scale warfare, with neither side proving capable of conclusively defeating the other.

Germania

The most important, and threatening, border for Rome was to its north, on the eastern and northern banks of the Rhine and Danube rivers. The region the Romans called *Germania* was an enormous stretch of heavily forested land, which was cold, wet, and uninviting from the Roman perspective. The "Germans" were a hugely diverse group of tribes practicing feudal law, the system of law in which offenses were met with clan-based violent retribution or blood payments. For hundreds of years there were complex relationships between various tribes and the Roman empire in which the Romans both fought with and, increasingly, hired German tribes to serve as mercenaries. Eventually, some of the Germanic tribes were allowed to settle along the Roman borders in return for payments of tribute to Rome.

The two major rivers, the Rhine and the Danube, were the key dividing lines to the north of Rome, with Roman legions manning permanent fortifications there. As far as the Romans were concerned, even if they were able to militarily they did not *want* to conquer German territory. The Romans tended to regard the

Germans as being semi-human at best, incapable of understanding true civilization. Some Romans did admire their bravery and codes of honor – the same Tacitus who provides much of the information on the early emperors contrasted the supposed weakness and dissolution of his contemporary Romans with the rough virtue of the Germans. That being noted, most Romans believed that the Celts, conquered by Caesar centuries earlier, were able to learn and assimilate to Roman culture, but the Germans, supposedly, were not. Likewise, *Germania* was assumed to be too cold, too wet, and too infertile to support organized farming and settlement. Thus, the role of the *limes* was to hold the Germans back rather than to stage new wars of conquest. For about three hundred years, they did just that, until the borders started breaking down by the third century CE.

The Army and Assimilation

Rome had established control over its vast territory thanks to the strength of the citizen-soldiers of the Republic. As described in the last chapter, however, the republican military system declined after the Punic Wars as the number of free, economically independent Roman citizens capable of serving in the army diminished. By the first century, most Roman soldiers became career soldiers loyal to a specific general who promised tangible rewards rather than volunteers who served only in a given campaign and then returned home to their farms.

Perhaps the most important thing Augustus did besides establishing the principate itself was to reorganize the Roman legions. He created a standing professional army with regular pay and retirement benefits, permanently ending the reliance on the volunteer citizen – soldiers that had fought for Rome under the republic. Instead, during the empire, Legionaries served for twenty years and then were put on reserve for another five, although more than half died before reaching retirement age. The major benefits of service were a very large bonus paid on retirement (equivalent to 13 years of pay!) and land: military colonies spread across the empire ensured that a loyal soldier could expect to establish a prosperous family line if he lived that long.

Service in the army was grueling and intense. Roman soldiers were expected to be able to march over 20 miles in a standard day's march carrying a heavy pack. They were subject to brutal discipline, up to and including summary execution if they were judged to have been derelict in their duties – one of the worst was falling asleep on guard duty, punishable by being beaten to death by one's fellow soldiers. Roman soldiers were held to the highest standards of unit cohesion, and their combat drills meant they were constantly ready for battle.

Wall carvings of a Roman legion in battle, with the characteristic large rectangular shields. A regular legionnaire would typically fight in formation using a short sword after throwing javelins while closing with the enemy.

The army was important in integrating provincial subjects into Roman culture. A soldier recruited from the provinces had to learn Latin, at least well enough to take orders and respond to them. Auxiliaries served with men from all over the empire, not just their own home regions, and what each soldier had in common was service to Rome. Commanding officers were often from the Italian heartland, forming a direct link to the Roman center. Military families were a reality everywhere, with sons often becoming soldiers after their fathers. Thus, the experience of serving in the legions or the auxiliaries tended to promote a shared sense of Roman identity, even when soldiers were drawn from areas that had been conquered by Rome in the recent past.

In the provinces, there was a pattern that took place over a few generations. After being conquered by the Romans, there were often resistance movements and rebellions. Those were put down with overwhelming

and brutal force, often worse than that of the initial invasion. Eventually, local elites were integrated in the governor's office and ambitious people made sure their sons learned Latin. Locals started joining the army and, if lucky, returned eventually with money and land to show for it. Roman amenities like aqueducts and baths were built and roads linked the province with the rest of the empire. In short, assimilation happened. A few generations after Roman conquest, many (local elites especially) in a given province would identify with Roman civilization. Regular people in the countryside, meanwhile, would at least be obliged to tolerate Roman rule even if they did not embrace it.

Conclusion

For the first two centuries of its existence, Rome was overwhelmingly powerful, and its political institutions were strong enough to survive even prolonged periods of incompetent rule. Trouble was afoot on Rome's borders, however, as barbarian groups became more populous and better-organized, and as the meritocratic system of the "Five Good Emperors" gave way to infighting, assassination, and civil war. At the same time, what began as a cult born in the Roman territory of Palestine was making significant inroads, especially in the eastern half of the Empire: Christianity.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

First Triumvirate – Andreas Wahra

Cleopatra VII – Jastrow

Augustus Caesar – Till Niermann

Colosseum – Andreas Ribbefjord

Empire 117 CE – Eleassar

Roman Legion – Ursus

This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 8: The Roman Republic and Chapter 9: The Roman Empire in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: TACITUS ON NERO

This text is available online at *The Annals of Tacitus*. *It has been a*dapted with minor edits for clarity.

Selections from *The Annals of Tacitus,*

Book XIV

3 Nero, therefore, began to avoid private meetings with her [Agrippina, his mother]; when she left for her gardens or the estates at Tusculum and Antium, he commended her intention of resting; finally, convinced that, wherever she might be kept, she was still an incubus,º he decided to kill her, debating only whether by poison, the dagger, or some other form of violence. The first choice fell on poison. But, if it was to be given at the imperial table, then the death could not be referred to chance, since Britannicus had already met a similar fate. At the same time, it seemed an arduous task to tamper with the domestics of a woman whose experience of crime had made her vigilant for foul play; and, besides, she had herself fortified her system by taking antidotes in advance. Cold steel and bloodshed no one could devise a method of concealing: moreover, there was the risk that the agent chosen for such an atrocity might spurn his orders. Mother wit came to the rescue in the person of Anicetus the freedman, preceptor of Nero's boyish years, and detested by Agrippina with a vigour which was reciprocated. Accordingly, he pointed out that it was possible to construct a ship, part of which could be artificially detached, well out at sea, and throw the unsuspecting passenger overboard:— "Nowhere had accident such scope as on salt water; and, if the lady should be cut off by shipwreck, who so captious as to read murder into the delinquency of wind and wave? The sovereign, naturally, would assign the deceased a temple and the other displays of filial piety."

[Nero invites Agrippina to celebrate the festival of Minerva at his villa. Agrippina hears rumours of a plot against her, so she is on guard. However, her fears are allayed with her reception at the villa. Nero accompanies her back to her boat which will take her home and says farewell.]

5 A starlit night and the calm of an unruffled sea appeared to have been sent by Heaven to afford proof of guilt. The ship had made no great way,[11] and two of Agrippina's household were in attendance, Crepereius Gallus standing not far from the tiller, while Acerronia, bending over the feet of the recumbent princess, recalled exultantly the penitence of the son and the re-entry of the mother into favour. Suddenly the signal was given: the canopy above them, which had been heavily weighted with lead, dropped, and Crepereius was crushed and killed on the spot. Agrippina and Acerronia were saved by the height of the couch-sides, which, as it happened, were too solid to give way under the impact. Nor did the break-up of the vessel follow: for confusion was universal, and even the men accessory to the plot were impeded by the large numbers of the ignorant.

The crew then decided to throw their weight on one side and so capsize the ship; but, even on their own part, agreement came too slowly for a sudden emergency, and a counter-effort by others allowed the victims a gentler fall into the waves. Acerronia, however, incautious enough to raise the cry that she was Agrippina, and to demand aid for the emperor's mother, was dispatched with poles, oars, and every nautical weapon that came to hand. Agrippina, silent and so not generally recognised, though she received one wound in the shoulder, swam until she was met by a few fishing-smacks, and so reached the Lucrine lake,**12** whence she was carried into her own villa.**13**

[Agrippina realizes that this had been an assassination attempt, but sends a message to her son that she was in a terrible accident but he should not come to her so that she might rest and recover. Meanwhile, Nero hears his mother escaped and frets about what to do, since he know he is now in danger. Anicetus – who had concocted the original plan – departs Nero's villa to finish Agrippina off.]

8 In the interval, Agrippina's jeopardy, which was attributed to accident, had become generally known; and there was a rush to the beach, as man after man learned the news. Some swarmed up the sea-wall,**14** some into the nearest fishing-boats: others were wading middle-deep into the surf, a few standing with outstretched arms. The whole shore rang with lamentations and vows and the din of conflicting questions and vague replies. A huge multitude streamed up with lights, and, when the knowledge of her safety spread, set out to offer congratulations; until, at the sight of an armed and threatening column, they were forced to scatter. Anicetus drew a cordon around the villa, and, breaking down the entrance, dragged off the slaves as they appeared, until he reached the bedroom-door. A few servants were standing by: the rest had fled in terror at the inrush of men. In the chamber was a dim light and a single waiting-maid; and Agrippina's anxiety deepened every instant. Why no one from her son — nor even Agermus? Had matters prospered, they would have worn another aspect. Now, nothing but solitude, hoarse alarms, and the symptoms of irremediable ill! Then the maid rose to go. "Dost thou too forsake me?" she began, and saw Anicetus behind her, accompanied by Herculeius, the trierarch, and Obaritus, a centurion of marines. "If he had come to visit the sick, he might take back word that she felt refreshed. If to do murder, she would believe nothing of her son: matricide was no article of their instructions." The executioners surrounded the couch, and the trierarch began by striking her on the head with a club. The centurion was drawing his sword to make an end, when she proffered her womb to the blow. "Strike here," she exclaimed, and was despatched with repeated wounds.

9 So far the accounts concur. Whether Nero inspected the corpse of his mother and expressed approval of her figure is a statement which some affirm and some deny.**15** She was cremated the same night, on a dinner-couch, and with the humblest rites; nor, so long as Nero reigned, was the earth piled over the grave or enclosed. Later, by the care of her servants, she received a modest tomb, hard by the road to Misenum and that villa of the dictator Caesar which looks from its dizzy height to the bay outspread beneath. As the pyre was kindled, one of her freedmen, by the name of Mnester, ran a sword through his body, whether from love of his mistress or from fear of his own destruction remains unknown. This was that ending to which, years before, Agrippina had given her credence, and her contempt. For to her inquiries as to the destiny of Nero the astrologers answered that he should reign, and slay his mother;**16** and "Let him slay," she had said, "so that he reign."

Book XV

37 He [Nero] himself, to create the impression that no place gave him equal pleasure with Rome, began to serve banquets in the public places and to treat the entire city as his palace. In point of extravagance and notoriety, the most celebrated of the feasts was that arranged by Tigellinus; which I shall describe as a type, instead of narrating time and again the monotonous tale of prodigality. He constructed, then, a raft on the Pool of Agrippa,[8] and superimposed a banquet, to be set in motion by other craft acting as tugs. The vessels were gay with gold and ivory, and the oarsmen were catamites marshalled according to their ages and their libidinous attainments. He had collected birds and wild beasts from the ends of the earth, and marine animals from the ocean itself. On the quays of the lake stood brothels, filled with women of high rank; and, opposite, naked harlots met the view. First came obscene gestures and dances; then, as darkness advanced, the whole of the neighbouring grove, together with the dwelling-houses around, began to echo with song and to glitter with lights. Nero himself, defiled by every natural and unnatural lust had left no abomination in reserve with which to crown his vicious existence; except that, a few days later, he became, with the full rites of legitimate marriage, the wife of one of that herd of degenerates,[9] who bore the name of Pythagoras. The veil was drawn over the imperial head, witnesses were dispatched to the scene; the dowry, the couch of wedded love, the nuptial torches, were there: everything, in fine, which night enshrouds even if a woman is the bride, was left open to the view.

38 There followed a disaster, whether due to chance or to the malice of the sovereign is uncertain — for each version has its sponsors[10] — but graver and more terrible than any other which has befallen this city by the ravages of fire. It took its rise in the part of the Circus touching the Palatine and Caelian Hills; where, among the shops packed with inflammable goods, the conflagration broke out, gathered strength in the same moment, and, impelled by the wind, swept the full length of the Circus: for there were neither mansions screened by boundary walls, nor temples surrounded by stone enclosures, nor obstructions of any description, to bar its progress. The flames, which in full career overran the level districts first, then shot up to the heights, and sank again to harry the lower parts, kept ahead of all remedial measures, the mischief travelling fast, and the town being an easy prey owing to the narrow, twisting lanes and formless streets typical of old Rome.[11] In addition, shrieking and terrified women; fugitives stricken or immature in years; men consulting their own safety or the safety of others, as they dragged the infirm along or paused to wait for them, combined by their dilatoriness or their haste to impede everything. Often, while they glanced back to the rear, they were attacked on the flanks or in front; or, if they had made their escape into a neighbouring quarter, that also was involved in the flames, and even districts which they had believed remote from danger were found to be in the same plight. At last, irresolute what to avoid or what to seek, they crowded into the roads or threw themselves down in the fields: some who had lost the whole of their means — their daily bread included — chose to die, though the way of escape was open, and were followed by others, through love for the relatives whom they had proved unable to rescue. None ventured to combat the fire, as there were reiterated threats from a large number of persons who

forbade extinction, and others were openly throwing firebrands[12] and shouting that "they had their authority" — possibly in order to have a freer hand in looting, possibly from orders received.

39 Nero, who at the time was staying in Antium, did not return to the capital until the fire was nearing the house by which he had connected the Palatine with the Gardens of Maecenas.[13] It proved impossible, however, to stop it from engulfing both the Palatine and the house and all their surroundings. Still, as a relief to the homeless and fugitive populace, he opened the Campus Martius, the buildings[14] of Agrippa, even his own Gardens, and threw up a number of extemporized shelters to accommodate the helpless multitude. The necessities of life were brought up from Ostia and the neighbouring municipalities, and the price of grain was lowered to three sesterces. Yet his measures, popular as their character might be, failed of their effect; for the report had spread that, at the very moment when Rome was aflame, he had mounted his private stage,[15] and typifying the ills of the present by the calamities of the past, had sung the destruction of Troy.

40 Only on the sixth day, was the conflagration brought to an end at the foot of the Esquiline, by demolishing the buildings over a vast area and opposing to the unabated fury of the flames a clear tract of ground and an open horizon. But fear had not yet been laid aside, nor had hope yet returned to the people, when the fire resumed its ravages; in the less congested parts of the city, however; so that, while the toll of human life was not so great, the destruction of temples and of porticoes dedicated to pleasure was on a wider scale. The second fire produced the greater scandal of the two, as it had broken out on Aemilian property[16] of Tigellinus and appearances suggested that Nero was seeking the glory of founding a new capital and endowing it with his own name.[17] Rome, in fact, is divided into fourteen regions, of which four remained intact, while three were laid level with the ground: in the other seven nothing survived but a few dilapidated and half-burned relics of houses.[18]

....

43 In the capital, however, the districts spared by the palace were rebuilt, not, as after the Gallic fire, indiscriminately and piecemeal, but in measured lines of streets, with broad thoroughfares, buildings of restricted height, and open spaces, while colonnades were added as a protection to the front of the tenement-blocks. These colonnades Nero offered to erect at his own expense, and also to hand over the building-sites, clear of rubbish, to the owners. He made a further offer of rewards, proportioned to the rank and resources of the various claimants, and fixed a term within which houses or blocks of tenement must be completed, if the bounty was to be secured. As the receptacle of the refuse he settled upon the Ostian Marshes, and gave orders that vessels which had carried grain up the Tiber must run down-stream laden with débris. The buildings themselves, to an extent definitely specified, were to be solid, untimbered structures of Gabine or Alban stone,[26] that particular stone being proof against fire. Again, there was to be a guard to ensure that the water-supply — intercepted by private lawlessness[a] — should be available for public purposes in greater quantities and at more points; appliances for checking fire were to be kept by everyone in the open; there were to be no joint partitions between buildings, but each was to be surrounded by its own walls. These reforms, welcomed for their utility, were also beneficial to the appearance of the new capital. Still, there were those who held that the old form had

been the more salubrious, as the narrow streets and high-built houses were not so easily penetrated by the rays of the sun; while now the broad expanses, with no protecting shadows, glowed under a more oppressive heat.

Source:

Loeb Classical Library, 5 volumes, Latin texts and facing English translation: Harvard University Press, 1925 thru 1937. Translation by C. H. Moore (*Histories*) and J. Jackson (*Annals*).

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *Tacitus on Nero.*

Reading Journal

Tacitus is another ancient historian, and his descriptions of the lives of the Roman emperors certainly contain flourish! For this journal entry, do a bit of online research about Tacitus. Share any links that you used. Did you find any information that might be relevant to understanding Tacitus' biases or perspectives?

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART VIII

MODULE SEVEN: ROMAN DECLINE AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

READING: THE LATE EMPIRE AND CHRISTIANITY

Christopher Brooks

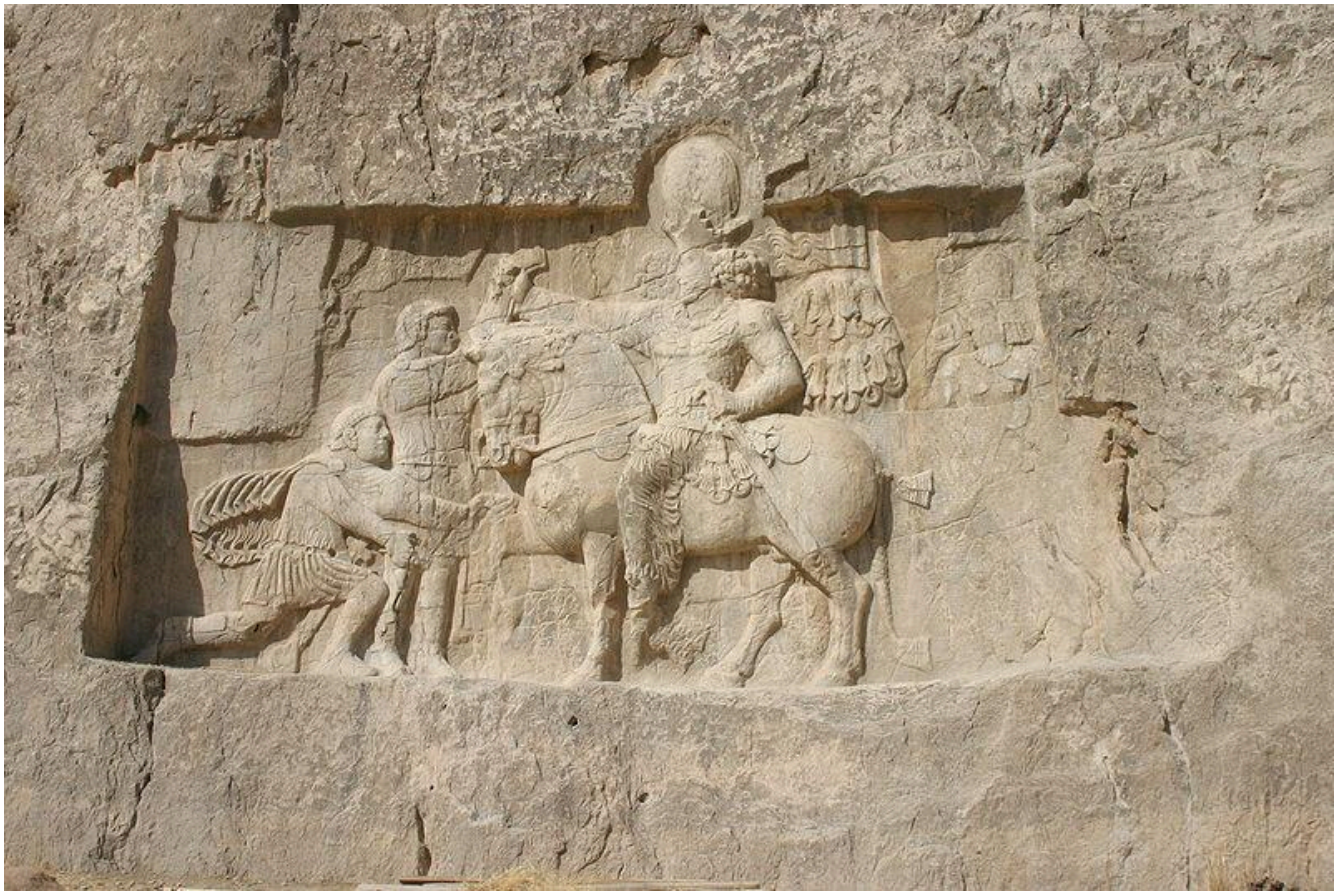
Rome underwent half a century of crisis in the middle of the third century CE. Beset along its borders and hobbled by constant infighting, the empire was at real risk of collapse for decades. It did not collapse, however, and in fact enjoyed a resurgence of a sort that held the Roman state together until the end of the fifth century (the western half of the Empire "fell" in 476 CE).

In fact, the period between the end of the five good emperors and the collapse of Rome was much more complex than one of simple decline and weakness, and even when the city of Rome could not defend itself, Roman civilization left an enormous, permanent impression on Western Civilization. Perhaps most importantly, what began as an obscure cult in Roman-ruled Judea eventually became one of the great world religions – Christianity – thanks to its success in spreading throughout the Roman Empire before the western Empire's collapse.

Crisis and Recovery

Major crises affected the Empire from 235 to 284 CE. The basis of the crises was increasing pressure from foreign invaders on the Roman borders coupled with political instability within the Empire itself. The emperor Severus Alexander was murdered in 235 CE. All of the emperors to follow for the next fifty years were murdered or died in battle as well, save one; there were twenty-six emperors in those fifty years, and only one died of natural causes. Many emperors stayed on the throne for only a few months before they were killed. Not surprisingly, in this environment, most emperors were only concerned with either seizing the throne or staying alive once they had it, meaning they tended to neglect everything important to the stability of the Empire.

As the quality of Roman leadership declined and the threats grew worse, the results were predictable: Rome lost battles and territory. The emperor Valerian was captured by the Persian king Shapur I when he led a Roman army against Persia and, according to some accounts, was used as the Persian king's personal footstool for climbing up onto his horse. Another emperor rebuilt walls around Rome itself in 270 CE because of the threat of Germanic invaders from the north, who had pushed all the way into northern Italy. Likewise, emperors, all being generals at this point, traveled constantly with their armies and made their courts wherever they had to while waging campaigns.



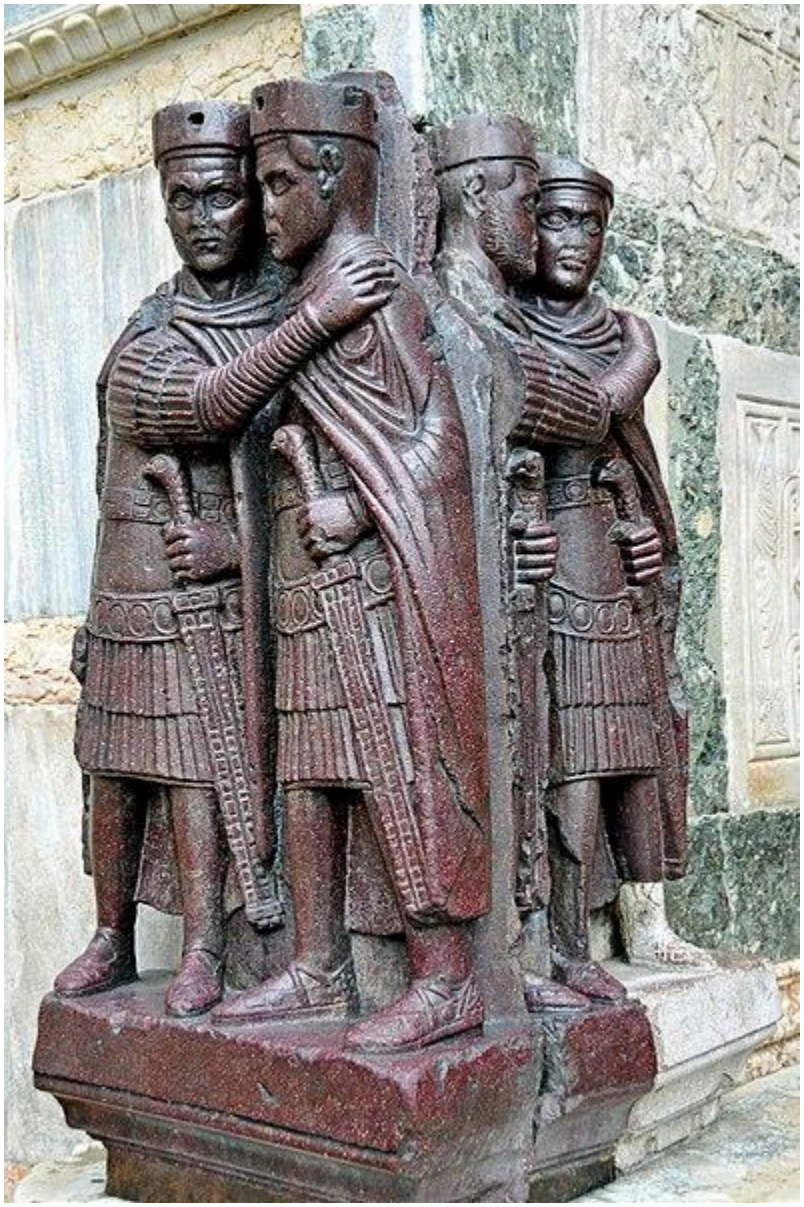
The defeat of the emperor Valerian, kneeling on the left, before the Persian king Shapur I, on horseback.

The problem was that the entire Roman imperial system hinged on the direct, personal decision-making of the emperor himself. The emperor was supposed to oversee all major building campaigns, state finances, and the worship of the Roman gods, not just military strategy. Thus, in an era when the speed a message could travel was limited by how fast a messenger could travel on horseback, the machinery of the Roman government ground to a halt whenever the latest emperor was weeks or even months away from Rome. Needless to say, the problem was exacerbated when the Empire was torn between rival claimants to the throne – for a few years toward the end of the crisis period the empire proper was split into three competing "empires"' under rival imperial pretenders.

The three rival "Roman Empires" as of 271 CE.

Diocletian

Turning back to Rome, the period of crisis that had made the eastern empire so vulnerable to Persian invasion ended with the ascension of the emperor Diocletian in 284 CE. Diocletian not only managed to survive for twenty years after taking the throne, he also reorganized the empire and pulled it back from the brink. Recognizing that the sheer size of the empire was a detriment to its effective governance, Diocletian decided to share power with a co-emperor: Diocletian ruled the eastern half of the empire and his co-emperor Maximian ruled the west. Then, about ten years after he took the throne, Diocletian decided to further divide responsibility and each emperor took on junior emperor. This created the *Tetrarchy*, the rule of four. Diocletian further subdivided the empire, so that for the rest of his reign, the four co-emperors (two "augusti" and two "caesars") worked together to administer the entire territory.



A Roman depiction of the tetrarchy dating from the period of Diocletian's reign.

Diocletian's hope was that the tetrarchy would end the cycle of assassinations. The junior emperors were the senior emperors' respective heirs, destined to assume full power when their seniors stepped down. When that happened, each new senior emperor would then select new juniors. The overall effect was, if it worked, a neat succession of power instead of the constant bloodshed and uncertainty that had haunted Roman politics for half a century; this system was quite similar to the merit-based selection process of emperors that had held during the rule of the Five Good Emperors.

Diocletian also divided the Empire into smaller provinces so that governors had an easier time with administration. These provinces were grouped into larger units called *dioceses* overseen by an official called a "vicar." When Christianity moved from being an illegal cult to the official religion of the empire (see below), the division of imperial territory into dioceses, overseen by vicars, would be adopted by the Catholic Church. That practice persists all the way to the present in the administration of the Church.

To deal with the threat of both Persia and the Germanic tribes, Diocletian reorganized the Roman army and recruited more soldiers, making it larger than it ever had been. He built new roads for military use to be able to move armies along the borders more efficiently. Borrowing from the Persian practice, he emphasized the use of heavy cavalry to respond quickly to threats. Finally, even though the army itself was now larger, he made individual legions smaller, so that each legion's commander no longer had enough power to take over with a single attack on the current emperor (that worked well enough for Diocletian himself, but it made little difference in the long run).

State finances were in shambles when Diocletian came to power. To try to deal with the problem, Diocletian reformed the tax system and instituted an official census for taxation purposes. He also tried to freeze wages and prices by decree, something that did not work since it created a black market for both goods and labor. Peasants bore the brunt of Diocletian's reforms; most independent farmers that still existed were turned into serfs (*coloni*), one step above slaves. State tax collectors were so feared that many peasants willingly gave their land to wealthy landowners who promised to protect them from the tax agents.

Finally, Diocletian tried to reinstate religious orthodoxy. He believed that too many people had turned away from worship of the Roman gods, which had in turn brought about the long period of crisis preceding his takeover. Thus, he went after sects that he thought threatened stability, including Christianity. He banned Christian worship and executed several thousand Christians who refused to renounce their beliefs in an attempt to wipe out the cult once and for all. Needless to say, this was a spectacular failure.

Diocletian retired in 305 CE due to failing health, as did (reluctantly) his co-emperor in the west. The idea behind the Tetrarchy was that the junior emperors would then become the senior emperors and recruit new juniors – this system worked exactly once, as the junior emperors under Diocletian and Maximian took power. Instead of a smooth transition inaugurating a stable new beginning, however, the Empire was yet again plunged into civil war. A general (at the time stationed in Britain) named Constantine, son of the Tetrarch Constantius, launched a military campaign to reunite Rome under his sole rule. By 312 CE he had succeeded, claiming total control and appointing no co-emperor.

Constantine

Constantine did away with the system of co-emperors (although it would re-emerge after his death), but otherwise he left things as they had been under Diocletian's reforms. The eastern and western halves of the Empire still had separate administrations and he kept up the size and organization of the army. He also took a decisive step toward stabilizing the economy by issuing new currency based on a fixed gold standard. The new coin, the *solidus*, was to be the standard international currency of the western world for 800 years.

Constantine's greatest historical impact, however, was in the realm of religion. He was the first Christian emperor, something that had an enormous effect on the history of Europe and, ultimately, the world. Before his climactic battle in 312 CE to defeat his last rival to the imperial throne, Constantine had a vision that he claimed was sent by the Christian God, promising him victory if he converted to Christianity. There

are plenty of theories about a more cynical explanation for his conversion (most revolving around the fact that Constantine went on to plunder the temples of the old Roman gods), but regardless of the fact that he used his conversion to help himself to the wealth of "pagan" temples, he actively supported Christian institutions and empowered Christian officials. Ultimately, his sponsorship of Christianity saw it expand dramatically in his lifetime.

In 324 CE, Constantine founded a new capital city for the entire empire at the site of the ancient Greek town of Byzantium, at the intersection of Europe and Anatolia (he renamed it "Constantine's City," Constantinople, which is today Istanbul). It was at the juncture of the eastern and western halves of the Empire, with all trade routes between Asia and Europe passing through its area of influence. It became the heart of wealth and power in the Empire and a Christian "new beginning" for Roman civilization itself. The city grew to become one of the great cities of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, fed by grain from Egypt and bringing in enormous wealth through trade. Subsequent emperors also built up massive fortifications, walls so strong that it took 1,000 years for an enemy to be able to breach them (namely the Ottoman Turks, who finally conquered the city in 1453 CE).

Religion: Roman Faiths and the birth of Christianity

Rome had always been a hotbed of religious diversity. While the official Roman gods were venerated across the Empire, Roman elites had no objections to the worship of other deities, and indeed many Romans (elites and commoners alike) eagerly embraced foreign faiths. Originating in the Hellenistic kingdoms, many Romans were attracted to *mystery religions*, cults that promised spiritual salvation to their members. These mystery religions shared a belief that the universe was full of magical charms that could lead to spiritual salvation or eternal life itself. In many ways, they were more like cults of magic than traditional religious faiths. A worshiper could join multiple mystery religions, intoning chants and prayers and participating in rituals in hopes of securing good fortune and wealth in life and the possibility of spiritual immortality after death.

Even Rome's perennial adversary Persia supplied sources of spiritual inspiration to Rome. Mithras, the Zoroastrian god of war, the sun, and rebirth became immensely popular among Romans. Mithrans believed that Mithras had been a soldier, slain by his enemies, who then rose to enjoy eternal life. Roman soldiers campaigning in Persia brought Mithraism back to Rome since Mithras's identity as a former soldier made his worship all the more appealing to members of the Roman military. The worship of Mithras was so popular that, some historians have noted, it is easy to imagine the Roman Empire becoming Mithran instead of Christian if Constantine had not converted to the latter faith.

A relief from an altar of Mithras dating from the second or third century CE. In all of the discovered Mithran temples, Mithras is depicted slaying a bull, which somehow (the details of the myth are long lost) helped to create the world.

In some cases, non-Roman gods even came to supplant Roman ones; one of the Severan emperors embraced the worship of the Syrian sun god Sol Invictus (meaning "the unconquered sun") and had a temple built in Rome to honor the god alongside the traditional Roman deities. The notion of being as powerful and unstoppable as the sun appealed to future emperors, so subsequent emperors tended to venerate Sol Invictus along with the Roman Jupiter until the triumph of Christianity. In other cases, the worship of non-Roman gods was so popular that it simply could not be suppressed in the few cases in which Roman leaders saw a need to. The Egyptian goddess Isis, who was at the heart of the largest mystery cult in the entire Mediterranean region, was so popular among both women and men that repeated attempts to purge her cult from Rome for being socially disruptive utterly failed.

The Jews and Jesus

The Roman territory of Palestine was a thorn in Rome's side thanks to the unshakable opposition of the Jews. Palestine suffered from heavy taxation and deeply-felt resentment toward the Romans. One key point of contention was that the Jews refused to pay lip service to the divinity of the emperors. The Romans insisted that their subjects participate in symbolic rituals acknowledging the primacy of the emperors, but since the Jews were strict monotheists, they would not do so.

In 66 CE there was a huge uprising against Rome. It took four years for imperial forces to crush the uprising, resulting in the greatest disaster in ancient Jewish history: the permanent destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE. In the aftermath, the Romans enslaved or deported much of the Jewish population, which contributed to the phenomenon of the Jewish *diaspora*, the people without a homeland united only by the Hebrew Bible, the teaching of the rabbis, and Jewish cultural traditions. Another uprising decades later (between 132 – 136 CE) resulted in the almost complete dispersal of the Jews, to the point that the Jewish homeland was truly lost to them until the foundation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 CE.

In the first century CE, Jewish society, especially its leadership, was divided between rival groups. Some powerful priests, the Sadducees, claimed that all Jews should follow the 10 Commandments, but only the priests of the Temple needed to follow the 613 laws and injunctions laid down by Moses. They were opposed by the Pharisees, who insisted that all Jews had to abide by all of the laws of Moses, and they also preached that a messiah – a savior – would soon come to bring about a day of judgment before Yahweh and bring about the fulfillment of the Biblical Covenant. In the deserts outside of the major cities, a group called the Essenes emphasized a life of asceticism and mysticism, while across Palestine anti-Roman revolutionaries known as the Zealots advocated for armed revolt against the Roman occupier.

The Jewish uprising that occurred against the Romans in 66 CE happened a generation after the death of another Jewish revolutionary of sorts: Jesus of Nazareth. The major source of information on the life of Jesus are the four Gospels, accounts of his life and teachings composed after his death by three of his apostles (his closest followers and students), Matthew, Mark, and John, and another early Christian leader, Luke. The Gospels were transmitted orally for decades before being recorded in their definitive versions; most scholars now date the written gospels to approximately 90 CE (about sixty years after the death of Jesus). While the specific language of the Gospels is, of course, different, and some of the events described are also described differently, the Gospels agree on most of the major aspects of the life of Jesus.

According to the Gospels, Jesus was the son of the miraculous union of the Holy Spirit, one of the aspects of the Jewish God Yahweh, and a virgin named Mary. Jesus showed an aptitude for theological and spiritual understanding at a young age, debating Jewish doctrine with learned Jewish priests when he was still a boy. At the age of thirty, having earned his living as a carpenter up to that point, Jesus began to preach a message of salvation that revolved around the concept that mankind as a whole could be saved if it sought forgiveness from God for its sins. He traveled and delivered his teachings in the Roman province of Palestine and the nearby puppet kingdoms dominated by the Romans for three years, but was then arrested by the Roman authorities

for inciting rebellion. In the end, Jesus was executed in the customary Roman fashion of crucifixion at the age of 33.

According to the Gospels, Jesus returned to life, with an angel rolling the boulder back from the entrance to the tomb in which his body had been laid to rest. He renewed his call for devotion to God and the offer of salvation for those who sought forgiveness, then passed into the divine presence. Jesus's followers, led by the twelve apostles, began to teach his lessons to others, and the new religion of Christianity was born. His followers began to refer to Jesus as "the Christ," meaning "the anointed one" in Greek, a reference to the idea that Jesus was anointed to provide salvation for humanity.

Early Christianity

At the beginning of the Christian faith, there was no single set of texts or beliefs that united Christians. The four major Gospels do not agree on everything, because they were written by different people from memory (decades after the apostles themselves were alive). It was St. Paul, a Jewish leader who underwent a profound conversion experience and became the foremost Christian evangelist, who popularized the notion that the death of Jesus on the cross was part of a divine plan that canceled out human sin. For hundreds of years, Christians debated and argued about what Christ's message had "really" been because many of Jesus's teachings were, and are, open to interpretation. Early Christians were divided on very significant issues, including:

What God did Jesus represent? One cult believed that the God of Christ was not the Jewish God, who had been vengeful and warlike. According to this sect, Christ's God was a more powerful and loving deity come to save the world from Yahweh.

Was Jesus the messiah? In Jewish doctrine, the messiah was to be a figure who liberated the Jews from oppression and made good on the Covenant between the Jews and God, delivering the Promised Land for all eternity. Many Jews had hoped that Jesus would be a revolutionary against Roman rule and, since Judea remained in Roman hands after his death, they did not believe that Jesus had been the messiah. Early Christians came to insist, following Paul, that Jesus had indeed been the messiah, but that the "liberation" he offered was spiritual in nature, rather than having to do with prosaic politics. In other words, the potential to save one's soul from damnation superseded the old Covenant.

Was Jesus human, or was he instead somehow God Himself? He lived like a normal man, but according to the gospels he had also performed miracles, and he claimed to be the son of God. Likewise, while Jesus lived an exemplary life, he also displayed traits like anger and doubt (the latter most famously on the cross when he asked God why He had "forsaken" Jesus), traits that did not seem those of a "perfect" being. This debate would go on for centuries, with equally pious groups of Christians coming to completely different conclusions about Christ's divine and human natures.

Likewise, early Christians were torn as to whether everyone could be a Christian, or instead, if membership was limited to the Jews. If Jesus was indeed the specifically Jewish messiah, after all, it did not make sense for a Roman or a Persian or a Celt to be able to convert. In the end, thanks largely to the influence of St.

Paul again, most Christians came to believe that the salvation offered by Christ was potentially universal, and that not just Jews could become Christians as a result.

Under the influence of the mystery religions noted above, many early Christians were *Gnostics*, meaning "those who know" in Greek. The Gnostics believed that Jesus had been a secret-teller, almost a magician, who provided clues in his life and teachings about how to achieve union with God. This had more to do with magic than with a recognizable set of religious rituals or customs – for example, many Gnostics believed that it was possible to deduce a series of incantations from Christ's teachings that included hundreds of secret "names of God." If a Gnostic was to properly chant all of the names of God, he would not only achieve salvation but might enjoy power on earth, as well. The Gnostics had no interest in converting people to their version of Christianity; it was a secret they wanted to keep for themselves.

Still, despite the bewildering diversity of beliefs among early Christians, there were common themes, most importantly the emphasis Jesus Himself had placed on the spiritual needs of the common people, even social outcasts. The most radical aspect of Christianity was its universalism. From Judaism, it inherited the idea that all human beings are spiritually equal. Once the debate about whether non-Jews could become Christians was resolved, it was also potentially open to anyone who heard Christianity's teachings and doctrine. Early Christians recognized no social distinctions, which was fundamentally at odds with the entire Roman system, reliant as it was on formal legal separations between social classes and a stark system of social hierarchy. Likewise, one unequivocal requirement placed on Christians was to love their neighbors, meaning in practice showing kindness and compassion to others regardless of their social rank. Few concepts could have been more alien to Roman sensibilities.

Christianity thus at least potentially threatened the hierarchical nature of Roman society. Likewise, it inherited from Judaism a strict monotheism that refused to accept the worship of the Roman emperors. What made it even more threatening than Judaism, however, was that Christianity actively sought out new converts (i.e. Christianity was inherently evangelical, in stark contrast to Judaism which did not seek new members). Roman authorities were thus already very much inclined to be suspicious of the Christians as potential rabble-rousers. In 68 CE, Nero blamed the Christians for the huge fire that consumed much of the city of Rome, and hundreds of Christian were rounded up and slaughtered in the arena. The persecution of Christians became a potent symbol for Christianity as a whole. Over a thousand years later, when Christianity was firmly entrenched as the religion of Europe, the trope of martyrdom was still used to explain righteous suffering.

Early Christian Organization

Before Constantine's conversion, Christianity expanded through missionary work, which succeeded in founding congregations across the Empire but did not seriously disrupt polytheism or the Empire's religious diversity. Imperial sponsorship changed that because it linked secular power to Christian identity. Following Constantine's conversion, being a Christian became a way to get ahead in the Roman power structure, and

over time it became a liability to remain a polytheist. Thus, whereas early Christianity had been a religion of the common people, Roman elites flocked to convert after Constantine did so in order to stay in the emperor's good graces.

Early Christians had already developed a distinct hierarchy of worshipers, a divide between priests and worshipers. Bishops were the head of each city's congregation, and they supervised a staff of priests and deacons who interacted with everyday worshipers and led services. The bishops of main cities, usually the imperial capitals of their respective provinces, came to be called an archbishop. Each bishop oversaw activity in the diocese, again following the imperial structure, in instructing people in Christian doctrine and in building charity networks. One important effect was that the church actively supported charities for the poor and hungry, a practice which won over new converts. This was one of the notable moments in history when a religion linked together a message of compassion for the needy and real, practical efforts to *help* the needy. In another strong contrast with Roman practice, Christianity saw disenfranchised groups like women and the poor (not to mention poor women) play major roles in the church's organization, especially before "official" Christianity came into being under Constantine.

Almost immediately after Constantine became a Christian, bishops saw their secular power increase dramatically. He allowed bishops to serve as official judges, giving Christians the ability to request a bishop instead of a non-Christian judge in trial. Bishops also moved in administrative circles, representing not just the church but their cities in actions and requests before governors and assemblies. In short, bishops suddenly assumed power on par with that of the traditional Roman nobility, directly linking power within the Christian church hierarchy to power within the Roman political system.

The most important bishop was the archbishop of Rome, who for the first few centuries of Christianity was just one among several major church leaders. Originally, the archbishops of cities like Alexandria and Damascus were of comparable importance to the Roman archbishop, but over time Roman archbishops tried to assert authority over the entire church hierarchy in the west. Their authority, however, was not recognized in much of the eastern part of the Empire, and it should be emphasized that it took more than six *centuries* after Constantine for the Roman archbishop's authority to receive acceptance even in the west. Eventually, however, that authority was at least nominally in place, and the Roman archbishop came to be known as the "pope," meaning simply "father," of the church.

The pope's role as leader of the church emerged for a few reasons. First and foremost, the symbolic power of the city of Rome itself gave added weight to the Roman archbishop's authority. Second, there was a doctrinal tie to the Apostle Peter, who was supposed to have been given the symbolic keys to heaven directly from Christ, which were in turn passed on to his successor in Rome (the archbishop of Rome) before being crucified. Roman archbishops could thus argue that the Christian church itself was centered in Rome, and that they inherited the spiritual keys to heaven upon taking office – this concept was known as the "Petrine Succession." By the mid-fifth century CE, the popes were claiming to have total authority over all other bishops, and at least some of those bishops (in Western Europe, at any rate) did look to Rome for guidance. In later centuries, the mere fact that the early popes had claimed that authority, and certain bishops had acknowledged

it, was cited as "proof" that the Roman papacy had always been the supreme doctrinal power in the Church as a whole.

Christianity's Relationship with Non-Christian Religions

All across the Empire, massive church buildings were erected by emperors. Right from the beginning of "official" Christianity, Constantine financed construction of huge churches, including the Basilica of St. Peter in what is today the Vatican (at the time it was an obscure graveyard in Rome). The traditional Roman public buildings, including forums, theaters, bathhouses and so on, were often neglected in favor of churches, and many temples to Roman gods and other public buildings were repurposed as churches.

Once it enjoyed the support of the Roman elite, the Christian church began incorporating non-Christian holidays into its own liturgical calendar. December 25 had been the major festival of the sun god Sol Invictus, and early Christians embraced the overlap between that celebration and Christmas, noting that Christ was like the sun as a source of spiritual life. Other Christian holidays like Easter coincided with various fertility festivals that took place in early spring, around the time of the spring equinox. The tradition of saint's days, holidays celebrated in veneration of specific saints, often overlapped with various non-Christian celebrations. Most church leaders saw no theological problem with this practice, arguing that the ultimate goal was the salvation of souls through conversion, so it made perfect sense to use existing holy days and rituals in order to ease the transition for new converts.

That being noted, the incorporation of non-Christian celebrations into the liturgical calendar did not imply that Christians were willing to accept polytheism. Unlike most ancient faiths, Christians could not tolerate the worship of other gods, which they regarded as nothing more than nonexistent delusions that endangered souls. They used the term "pagan," coming from the Latin *paganus*, which translates to "from the countryside" but has the sentiment of "country bumpkin," to describe all worshipers of all other gods, even gods that had been worshiped for thousands of years at that point. Christians thus used scorn and contempt to vilify worshipers of other gods – "pagan" indicated that the non-Christian was both ignorant and foolish, even if he or she was a member of the Roman elite.

It took about a century for the believers in the old Roman gods, especially the conservative aristocracy of Rome, to give up the fight. As money shifted toward building Christian churches and away from temples, so did Christians sometimes lead attacks to desecrate the sites of pagan worship. Riots occasionally broke out as Christian mobs attacked worshipers of other gods, all with the tacit support of the emperors. In 380 CE the Empire was officially declared to be Christian by the emperor Theodosius I and all people of importance had to be, at least nominally, Christians. There was no sustained resistance to Christianity simply because "polytheism" or "paganism" was never a unified system, and it was impossible for people who worshiped a whole range of gods to come together "against" Christianity, especially when it was the official religion of the Empire itself.

A much more difficult battle, one that it some ways was never really won, had to do with "pagan" practices. Everyone in the ancient world, Christians among them, believed in the existence of what is now thought of as "magic" and "spirits." Christian leaders came to believe that, in general, magic was dangerous, generated

by the meddling of the devil, and that the spirits found in nature were almost certainly demons in disguise. There was very little they could do, however, to overturn the entire worldview of their followers, considering that even Christian leaders themselves very much believed that spirits and magic were present in the world, demonic or not. Thus, pagan practices like blessing someone after they sneezed (to keep out an invading spirit or demon), throwing salt over one's shoulder to ward off the devil, and employing all manner of charms to increase luck were to survive to the present.

Orthodoxy and Heresy

Christianity united self-understood "Western Civilization" just as Roman culture had a few centuries earlier. At the same time, because of the peculiarities of Christian belief, it was also a potentially divisive force. Christians spoke a host of different languages and lived across the entire expanse of the Empire. As noted above, there were serious debates around who or what Jesus was. For centuries, there could be no "orthodoxy," meaning "correct belief," because there was no authority within the church (very much including the popes) who could enforce a certain set of beliefs over rival interpretations.

The beginning of orthodoxy was in the second and third centuries, when a group of theologians argued that there were three personas or states of the divine being, referred to as the Holy Trinity. In this view, God could exist simultaneously as three beings: God the Father, the being that spoke in the Old Testament, God the Son, Jesus himself, and God the Holy Spirit, the presence of God throughout the universe. This concept did not quell controversy at all, though, because it created a distinct stance that people could disagree with – rival groups of Christians came to refer to their enemies as "heretics," from the word "heresy," meaning simply "choice."

In the late third century, an Egyptian Christian priest named Arius created a firestorm of controversy when he made a simple logical argument: God the father had created Jesus, so it did not make any sense for Jesus to be the same thing as God. Furthermore, it was impossible to be both human and perfect; since Jesus was human, he was imperfect and could not therefore be God, who was perfect. This belief came to be known as "Arianism" (note that the word has nothing whatsoever to do with the misguided belief in some kind of ancient Germanic race – the "Aryans" – so important to Nazi ideology almost two thousand years later). Arianism quickly took hold among many people, most importantly among the Germanic tribes of the north, where Arian Christian missionaries made major inroads. Thus, Arianism quickly became the largest and most persistent heresy in the early Christian church.

In 325 CE, only a little over a decade after he had converted to Christianity, Constantine assembled a council of church leaders, the Council of Nicaea, to lay Arianism to rest. One of the results was the Nicene Creed (now usually referred to as the Apostles' Creed), to this day one of the central elements of Catholic Mass. In a single passage short enough to commit to memory, the Creed declared belief in Christ's identity as part of God ("consubstantial to the Father" in its present English translation), Christ's status as the son of God and the Virgin Mary, Christ's resurrection, and the promise of Christ's return at the end of the world. There was

now the first "party line" in the early history of Christianity: a specific set of beliefs backed by institutional authority.

While united in belief, Christians were divided by language, since the western Empire still spoke Latin and the eastern Empire Greek. In 410 the monk Jerome produced a version of the Christian Bible in Latin, the Vulgate, which was to be the main edition in Europe until the sixteenth century. Surprising from a contemporary perspective, however, is that it was not until 1442 (during the Renaissance) that the definitive and in a sense "final" version of the Bible was established by the Western Church when it defined exactly which books of the Old Testament were to be included and which were not.

Meanwhile, in the east, Greek was not only the language of daily life for many, it was the official language of state in the Empire and the language of the church. The books of the New Testament, starting with the Gospels, were written in Greek in the first place, and the Greek intellectual legacy was still very strong. There was an equally strong Jewish intellectual legacy that provided accurate translations from Hebrew and Aramaic to Greek, providing Greek-speaking Christians with access to a reliable version of the Old Testament.

While it certainly clarified the beliefs of the most powerful branch of the institutional church, as the Council of Nicaea defined the official orthodoxy, it guaranteed that there would always be those who rejected that orthodoxy in the name of a different theological interpretation. Likewise, the practical issues of lingual and cultural differences undermined the universalism ("Catholicism") of the Christian Church. Those differences and the diversity of belief would only grow over time.

Monasticism and Christian Culture

Near the end of the third century, a new Christian movement emerged that was to have major ramifications for the history of the Christian world: monasticism. Originally, monasticism was tied to asceticism, meaning self-denial, following the example of an Egyptian holy man named Antony. In about 280, Antony sold his goods and retreated to the desert to contemplate the divine, eschewing all worldly goods in imitation of the poverty of Christ. He would have remained in obscurity except for a book about him written by the bishop Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, that celebrated Antony's rejection of the material world and embrace of divine contemplation. According to Athanasius, normal life was full of temptation, greed, and sin, and that the holiest life was thus one that rejected it completely in favor of prayer and meditation away from human company. Thousands of people followed Antony's example, retreating to the wilderness. These early monks were called Anchorites: hermits who lived in deserts, forests, or mountains away from the temptations of a normal social existence (although they had to live close enough to civilization for the donations of food that kept them alive).

One particularly extreme sect of early monks were the *Stylites,* from the Greek word *stylos*, meaning "column." The founder of the group, St. Simeon the Stylite, climbed up a pillar in Syria and spent the next 30 years living on top of it. He was so famous for his holiness and endurance in the face of the obvious physical toll of living on top of a pillar that he attracted followers from all over the Roman world who came to listen to him preach. Soon, many others sought out columns in imitation of Simeon.

A depiction of St. Simeon from the sixth century CE. The snake symbolizes the temptation to abandon his holy life, presumably by getting down off of the pillar.

Ultimately, pillar-sitting did not become the predominant model of Christian life. Instead, groups of ascetics came together in communities called monasteries. Originally, these early monks spent almost all of their time in prayer, but over time most monastic communities came to embrace useful work as well as prayer and meditation. The most important development in the development of monasticism was the work of Benedict, an Italian bishop, who wrote a book known as the Rule in about 529 that laid out how monks should live. The Rule dictated a strict schedule for daily life that revolved around prayer, study, and useful work for the monastery itself (tending crops and animals, performing labor around the monastery, and so on). Going forward, many monasteries became economic powerhouses, owning large tracts of land and selling their products at a healthy profit.

More important than their economic productivity, at least from the perspective of the history of ideas, is

that monasteries became the major centers of learning, especially in Western Europe after the collapse of the western Roman Empire. One of the tasks undertaken by monks was the painstaking hand-copying of books, almost all of which had to do with Christian theology (e.g. the Bible itself, commentaries from important Christian leaders, etc.), but some of which were classical Greek or Roman writings that would have otherwise been lost. Often, these books were beautifully illustrated by the monks and are referred to as illuminated manuscripts – among the finest examples of medieval art.

Outside of monasteries, churches were built in practically every city and town (and many small villages) in the Roman sphere of influence. One interesting and, from a contemporary perspective, somewhat peculiar phenomenon in early Christianity was the focus on relics: holy objects. Relics were everything from the bones of saints to fragments of the "True Cross" on which Christ was crucified. Each church had to have a relic in its altar (contained in a special box called a reliquary) or it was not considered to be truly holy ground. All relics were not created equal: the larger the object, or the closer it had been to Christ or the apostles, the more holy power it was believed to contain. Thus, a thriving trade in relics (plagued by counterfeits – it was not easy to determine if a given finger bone was *really* the finger bone of St. Mark!) developed in Europe as rival church leaders tried to secure the most powerful relic for their church. This was not just about the symbolic importance of the relics, as pilgrims would travel from all over the Roman world to visit the site of noteworthy relics, bringing with them considerable wealth. Whole regional economies centered on pilgrimage sites as a result.

Christian Learning

Christian learning was a complex issue, because, strictly speaking, spiritual salvation was thought to be available to anyone simply by accepting the basic tenets of Christian doctrine. In other words, the whole intellectual world of Greek and Roman philosophy, literature, science, and so on did not necessarily relate to the Church's primary task of saving souls. Many church leaders were learned men and women, however, and insisted that there was indeed a place for learning within Christianity. The issue was never settled – one powerful church leader, Tertullian, once wrote "what does Athens have to do with Rome?", meaning, why should anyone study the Greek intellectual legacy when it was produced by pre-Christian pagans?

Once Christianity was institutionalized, church leaders generally came around to the importance of classical learning because it proved useful for administration. A vast Greco-Roman literature existed describing governance, science, engineering, etc., all of which was necessary in the newly-Christian Empire. A kind of uneasy balance was struck between studying classical learning, especially things like rhetoric, while warning against the spiritual danger of being seduced by its non-Christian messages.

The most important thinker who addressed the intersection of Christian and classical learning was St. Augustine of Hippo (a Roman city in North Africa), whose life spanned the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Augustine lived through the worst period of Roman decline, completing his work while his own city was besieged by a Germanic group called the Vandals. To Roman Christians, this posed a huge challenge – if all-powerful God had embraced them, why was their empire falling apart? Augustine's answer was that life

on earth is not ultimately significant. In his work *The City of God*, Augustine distinguished between the perfect world of heaven, attainable through Christian faith, versus the flawed and imperfect world of the living. This concept explained the decline of the Empire as being irrelevant to the greater mission of salvation. Thus, according to Augustine, all of learning was just a facet of material life; useful in its way but totally insignificant compared to the necessity of laying one's soul bare to God and waiting for the second coming of Christ.

The irony of these struggles over Christian doctrine versus ancient learning was that the issue was decided by the collapse of Rome. When Rome fell to Germanic invaders in the mid-fifth century, so began the decline of organized learning – there simply was no funding from Roman elites for what had been a robust private school system. In the absence of instruction, literature and philosophy and engineering all but vanished, preserved only in monasteries and in the eastern Empire. Once the western Empire collapsed, the church was the only institution that still supported scholarship (including basic literacy), but over time the levels of literacy and education in Europe unquestionably declined. This decline inspired the contempt of later Renaissance thinkers who wrote off the period between the fall of Rome and the beginning of the Renaissance in about 1300 CE as the "Dark Ages."

Ultimately, after the western part of the Roman Empire fell in the late fifth century, it was the Christian Church that carried on at least parts of Roman civilization, learning, and culture. One of the historical ironies of this period of history is that even though Rome's Empire began to decline and (eventually) collapse *politically*, it lived on thanks to ideas and beliefs that originally arisen in the Roman context – it lived on *ideologically* and *spiritually.*

The Fall of Rome

The fall of Rome, conventionally dated to 476 CE, is one of the most iconic events in the history of the western world. For centuries, people have tried to draw lessons from Rome's decline and fall about their own societies, a practice inspired by the question of how so mighty and, at one time, stable a civilization could so utterly disintegrate. The answers have varied considerably: Rome grew corrupt and weak over time, Rome was infiltrated by "barbarian" cultures, Rome was simply overcome by overwhelming odds, or perhaps Rome was simply transformed into a different, more diverse set of societies rather than destroyed in so many words. However the events of the period are interpreted, the simple fact remains: the political unity of the Roman Empire was shattered by the end of the fifth century CE.

While the debate as to the causes of Rome's fall will probably never be definitively answered, an important caveat should be noted: Rome did not "really" fall for another thousand years, even though the city of Rome itself, along with the western half of the Empire, did indeed lose its sovereignty in the face of invasion by Germanic "barbarians." The Roman capital had already been moved to Constantinople in the early fourth century, and the eastern half of the empire remained intact, albeit under constant military pressure, until 1453. Arguably, one of the major causes for the collapse of the western empire was the fact that the Empire as a whole

had focused its resources in the east for a century by the time waves of invaders appeared on the horizon starting in the fourth century CE.

At the time, most Christians blamed polytheism and heresy for Rome's fall: it was God's wrath exacted on a sinful society. In turn, the remaining polytheists blamed Christians for undermining the worship of the gods who had presided over the Empire while Rome was great.

From the contemporary perspective, Rome's fall seems to have less to do with divine intervention than routine defeats and growing threats.

A note on nomenclature: this section will refer to the groups responsible for the destruction of the western empire as barbarians when referring to the Roman perception of Germanic and Central Asian groups. The point is not to vilify those groups, but to emphasize the degree to which Romans were both contemptuous towards and, it turns out, vulnerable to them. When possible, it will refer to specific groups by name such as the Goths and the Huns. In addition, it will refer to "Germans" when discussing the specific groups native to Central Europe that played such a key role in the fall of Rome. That is something of a misnomer, however, since there was no kingdom or empire called "Germany" until 1871 CE (i.e. about 1,400 years later). Thus, when using the term "Germans," this section is referring to any of the Germanic cultural groups of the era rather than the citizens or subjects of a unified country.

Roman Relations with Barbarians

Romans had always held "barbarians" in contempt, and they believed that the lands held by barbarians (such as Scotland and Germany) were largely unsuitable for civilization, being too cold and wet for the kind of Mediterranean agriculture Romans were accustomed to. Romans believed that barbarian peoples like the Germans were inferior to subject peoples like the Celts, who could at least be made useful subjects (and, later, citizens) of the Empire. For the entire history of the Empire, the Romans never seem to have figured out exactly which groups they were interacting with; they would simply lump them together as "Goths" or even "Scythians," a blanket term referring to steppe peoples. Occasionally, hundreds of years after they "should have known better," Roman writers would actually refer to Germans as Celts.

It is easy to overstate this attitude; there were many members of Germanic tribes who did rise to prominence in Rome (one, Stilicho, was one of the greatest Roman generals in the late Empire, and he was half Vandal by birth). Likewise, it is clear from archaeology that many Germans made a career of fighting in the Roman armies and then returning to their native areas, and that many Germans looked up to Rome as a model of civilization to be emulated, not some kind of permanent enemy. Some Romans clearly did admire things about certain barbarian groups, as well – the great Roman historian Tacitus, in his *Germania*, even praised the Germans for their vigor and honor, although he did so in order to contrast the Germans with what he regarded as his own corrupt and immoral Roman society.

That said, it is clear that the overall pattern of contact between Rome and Germania was a combination of peaceful coexistence punctuated by many occasions of extreme violence. Various tribes would raid Roman

lands, usually resulting in brutal Roman reprisals. As the centuries went on, Rome came increasingly to rely on both Germanic troops and on playing allied tribes off against hostile ones. In fact, by the late fourth century CE, many (sometimes even most) soldiers in "Roman" armies in the western half of the Empire were recruited from Germanic groups.

The only place worthy of Roman recognition as another "true" civilization was Persia. When Rome was forced to cede territory to Persia in 363 CE after a series of military defeats, Roman writers were aghast because the loss of territory represented "abandoning" it to the other civilization and state. When "barbarians" seized territory, however, it rarely warranted any mention among Roman writers, since it was assumed that the territory could and would be reclaimed whenever it was convenient for Rome.

Meanwhile, there had been *hundreds of years* of on-again, off-again wars along the Roman borders before the "fall" of Rome actually occurred. Especially since the third century, major conflicts were an ongoing reality of the enormous borders along the Rhine and Danube. Those conflicts had prompted emperors to build the system of *limes* meant to defend Roman territory, and from that point on, the majority of Roman legions were usually deployed along the semi-fortified northern borders of the empire. There is evidence that many of those soldiers spent their careers as not-so-glorified border guards and administrators and never experienced battle itself; there is no question that the performance of the Roman military was far poorer in the late imperial period than it had been, for instance, under the Republic.

In turn, many of the Germans who settled along those borders were known as *federatii*, tribal groups who entered into treaties with Rome that required them to pay taxes in kind (i.e. in crops, animals, and other forms of wealth rather than currency) and send troops to aid Roman conquests, and who received peace and recognition (and usually annual gifts) in return. The problem for Rome was that most Germanic peoples regarded treaties as being something that only lasted as long as the emperor who had authorized the treaty lived; on his death, there would often be an incursion since the old peace terms no longer held. The first task new emperors had to attend to was often suppressing the latest invasion from the north. One example was the Goths, settled at the time somewhere around present-day Romania, whom Constantine severely punished after they turned on his forces during his war of conquest leading up to 312 CE.

The bottom line is that, as of the late fourth century CE, it seemed like "business as usual" to most political and military elites in the Roman Empire. The borders were teeming with barbarians, but they had *always* been teeming with barbarians. Rome traded with them, enlisted them as soldiers, and fought them off or punished them as Roman leaders thought it necessary. No one in Rome seemed to think that this state of affairs would ever change. What contemporary historians have determined, however, is that things *had* changed: there were *more* Germans than ever before, they were *better-organized*, and they were capable of defeating large Roman forces. What followed was a kind of "barbarian domino effect" that ultimately broke the western Empire into pieces and ended Roman power over it.

One other factor in the collapse of the western half of the Empire should be emphasized: once Rome began to lose large territories in the west, tax revenues shrunk to a fraction of what they had been. While the east remained intact, with taxes going to pay for a robust military which successfully defended Roman sover-

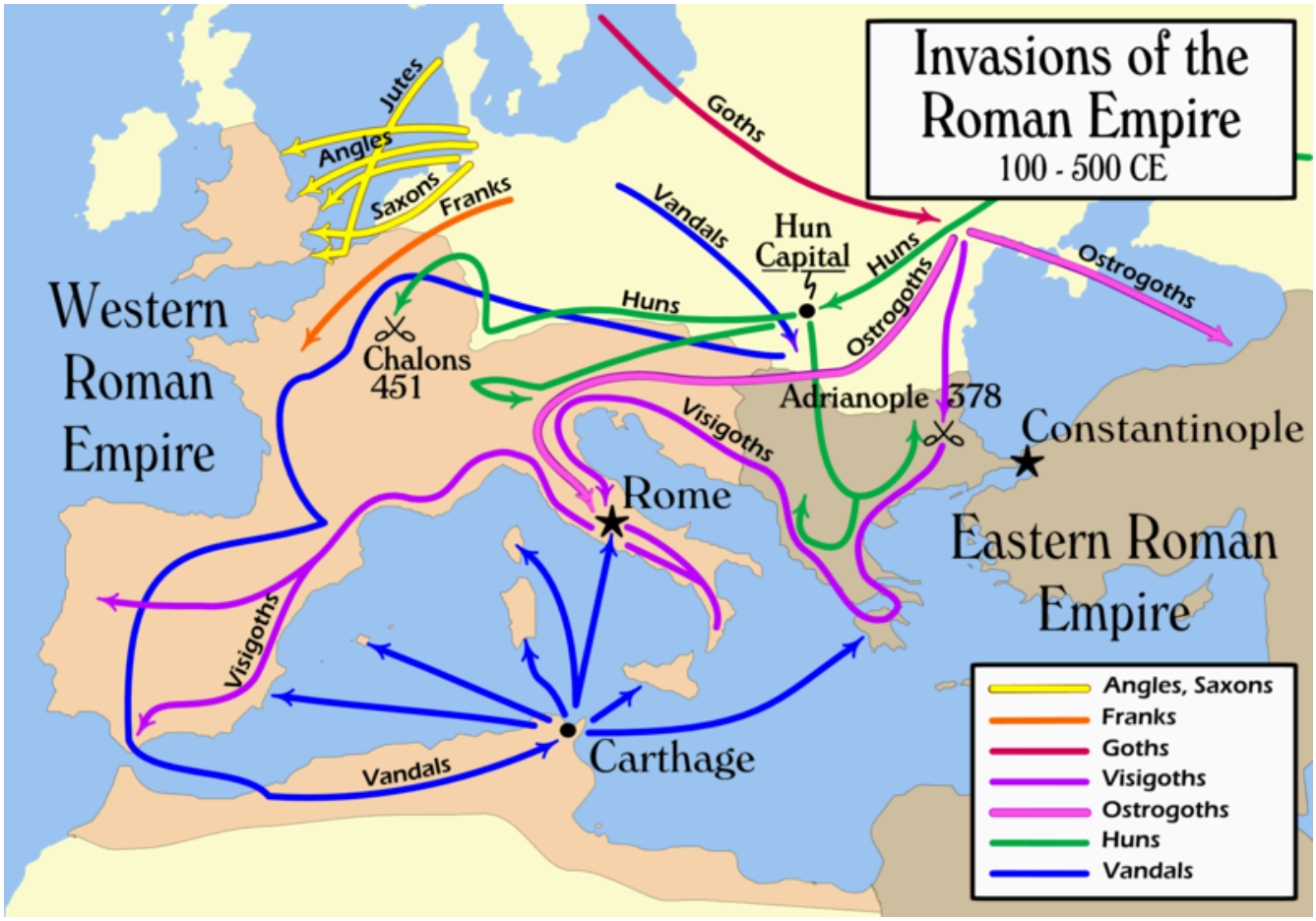
eignty, Roman armies in the west were under-funded, under-manned, and vulnerable. There was thus a vicious cycle of lost land, lost revenue, and poor military performance that saw Roman power simply disintegrate over the course of less than a century. Even the handful of effective emperors and generals in the west during that period could not staunch the tide of defeat.

Invasions

The beginning of the end for the western empire was the Huns. The Huns were warriors of the central Asian steppes: expert horsemen, skillful warriors, unattached to any particular land. They had much in common with other groups of steppe peoples like the Scythians who had raided civilized lands going back to the very emergence of civilization in Mesopotamia. They were believed to be so cruel and so unstoppable that the Germanic groups farther west claimed that they were the product of unions between demons and witches, rather than normal humans.

In 376 the Huns drove a tribe of Goths from their lands in southern Russia. Those Goths were allowed to settle in the Balkans by the Romans, but were soon extorted by Roman officials, causing the Goths to rise up against Rome in retribution. In 378 the Goths killed the emperor, Valens, and destroyed a Roman army in an open battle. The new emperor made a deal with the Goths, allowing them to serve in the Roman army under their own commanders in return for payment. This proved disastrous for Rome in the long run as the Goths, under their king Alaric, started looting Roman territory in the Balkans, finally marching into Italy itself and sacking Rome in 410 CE. The Roman government officially moved to the city of Ravenna in the north (which was more defensible) following this sack.

The Gothic attack on Rome was the first time in roughly seven hundred years that the walls of Rome had been breached by non-Romans. The entire Roman world was shocked and horrified that mere barbarians could have overwhelmed Roman armies and struck at the heart of the ancient Empire itself. Rome's impregnability was itself one of the founding stories Romans told themselves; Romans had long vowed that the Celtic sack of 387 BCE would be the last, and yet the Goths had shattered that myth. With the benefit of historical hindsight, we can see the arrival of the Huns as the beginning of a "domino effect" in which various groups were pushed into Roman territory, with the sack of Rome merely one disaster of many for the Empire.



The major invasions of the Roman Empire leading up to its fall. Note, among other things, their astonishing scope: the Goths may have originated in Scandinavia but some of their descendents ended up ruling over Spain, while the Vandals came from somewhere in present-day Germany and conquered Roman North Africa.

Leading up to that event, the Roman legions were already losing their former coherence and unity. In 406 CE a very cold winter froze the Rhine river, and armies of barbarians invaded (literally walking across the frozen river in some cases), bypassing the traditional Roman defenses. One group, the Vandals, sacked its way to the Roman provinces of Spain and seized a large swath of territory there. The entire army of Britain left in 407 CE, when yet another ambitious general tried to seize the imperial throne, and Roman power there swiftly collapsed.

Roman armies from the western empire hastily marched back to Italy to fight the Goths, abandoning their traditional defensive posts. For the next fifty years, various groups of Germanic invaders wandered across Europe, both looting and, soon, settling down to occupy territory that had only recently been part of the Roman Empire. Most of these groups soon established kingdoms of their own. The Vandals pushed through Spain and ended up conquering most of Roman North Africa. After the Goths sacked Rome itself in 410, the emperor Honorius gave them southern Gaul to get them to leave; they ended up seizing most of Spain (from the Vandals who had arrived before them) as well. At that point, the Romans came to label this group the *Visigoths* – "western Goths" – to distinguish them from other Gothic tribes still at large in the Empire.

Back in Italy, the Huns, under the leadership of the legendary warlord Attila, arrived in the late 440s,

pushing as far as the gates of Rome in 451. There, the Pope (Leo I) personally appealed to Attila not to sack the city and paid them a hefty bribe. Attila died in 453 and the Huns were soon defeated by a combined army of their former Germanic subjects and a Roman army. By then, however, the damage was done: the domino effect set off by the Hunnic invasion of the previous century had already almost completely swallowed up the western empire. Only two years after the Huns were defeated, the Vandals sailed over from Africa in 455 and sacked Rome again. This sacking, despite occurring with relatively little carnage, nevertheless led to the use of the word "vandal" to mean a malicious destroyer of property.

Italy itself held out until 476, when an Ostrogothic ("eastern Goth") warlord named Odoacer deposed the last emperor and declared himself king of Italy; the Roman emperor in Constantinople (having little choice) approved of Odoacer's authority in Italy in return for a nominal pledge of loyalty. In 493, Odoacer was deposed and killed by a different Ostrogothic king, Theodoric, but the link with Constantinople remained intact. The Roman emperor worked out a deal with Theodoric to stabilize Italy, and Theodoric went on to rule for decades (r. 493 – 526). Thus, by 500 CE Italy and the city of Rome were no longer part of the empire still called "Roman" by the people of the eastern empire. By the end of the fifth century, the western empire was gone, replaced by a series of kingdoms ruled by Germanic peoples but populated by former citizens of the Roman Empire.

Theodoric presided over a few decades of prosperity, restoring peace to the Italian peninsula and joining together with other Gothic territories to the west. He maintained excellent relations with the Pope even though he was an Arian Christian, and he set up a system in which a government existed for his Goths that was distinct from the Roman government (with him at the head of both, of course). Some historians have speculated that Theodoric and the Goths might have been able to forge a new, stable Empire in the west and thereby obviate the coming of the "Dark Ages," but that possibility was cut short when the Byzantine Empire invaded to try to reconquer its lost territory (that invasion is considered in the next chapter).

In Gaul, a fierce tribe called the Franks, from whom France derives its name, came to power, driving out rivals like the Visigoths. Unlike the other Germanic tribes, the Franks did not abandon their homeland when they set out for new territory. From the lower Rhine Valley, they gradually expanded into northern Gaul late in the fifth century. Under the leadership of the warrior chieftain Clovis (r. 481/482 – 511), the various Frankish tribes were united, which gave them the military strength to depose the last Roman governor in Gaul, drive the Visigoths into Spain, absorb the territory of yet another barbarian group known as the Burgundians, and eventually conquer most of Gaul. Thus, what began as an invasion and occupation of Roman territory evolved in time to become the earliest version of the kingdom of France.

In almost every case, the new Germanic kings pledged formal allegiance to the Roman emperor in Constantinople in return for acknowledgment of the legitimacy of their rule. They often did their best to build on the precedent of Roman civilization as well; for example, Clovis of the Franks made a point of having the Frankish laws recorded in Latin, and over time the Frankish language vanished, replaced by the early form of French, a Latinate language. In fact, for well over a century, most Germanic "kings" were, officially, treaty-holding, recognized Roman officials from the legal and diplomatic perspective of Constantinople. That said, the

"Roman" emperors of Constantinople had plenty of legal pretext to regard those kings as usurpers as well, since the treaties of acknowledgment were often full of loopholes. Thus, when the emperor Justinian invaded Italy in the sixth century, he was doing so to reassert not just the memory of the united Empire, but to restore the Empire to the legal state in which it already technically existed.

Conclusion

While interpretations of the collapse of the Empire will continue to differ as long as there are people interested in Roman history, there is no question about the basic facts: half of what had once been an enormous, coherent, and amazingly stable state was splintered into political fragments by the end of the fifth century.

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This chapter has been derived with minor modifications from Chapter 10: The Late Empire and Christianity in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: THE PASSIONS OF SAINTS PERPETUA AND FELICITY

This text is available at the Medieval Sourcebook.

The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity, ca 203

Vibia Perpetua, was executed in the arena in Carthage on 7 March 203. The account of her martyrdom – technically a Passion *-is apparently historical and has special interest as much of it was written [section 3-10], in Latin by Perpetua herself before her death. This makes it one of the earliest pieces of writing by a Christian woman.*

PROLOGUE

1. If ancient examples of faith kept, both testifying the grace of God and working the edification of man, have to this end been set in writing, that by their reading as though by the showing of the deeds again, God may be glorified and man strengthened; why should not new witnesses also be so set forth which likewise serve either end? Yea, for these things also shall at some time be ancient and necessary to our sons, though in their own present time (through some reverence of antiquity presumed) they are made of but slight account. But let those take heed who judge the one power of the Holy Spirit according to the succession of times; whereas those things which are later ought for their very lateness to be thought the more eminent, according to the abundance of grace appointed for the last periods of time. For *In the last days,* says the Lord, *I will pour my spirit upon all flesh, and their sons and daughters shall prophesy; and upon my servants and upon my handmaids I will pour forth of my spirit; and the young men shall see visions, and the old men shall dream dreams.* [Acts 2:17, cf. Joel 2:28]

We also therefore, by whom both the prophecies and the new visions promised are received and honored, and by whom those other wonders of the Holy Spirit are assigned unto the service of the Church, to which also was sent the same Spirit administering all gifts among all men, *according as the Lord hath distributed unto each* [I.Cor 7:17]- do of necessity both write them and by reading celebrate them to the glory of God; that no weakness or failing of faith may presume that among those of old time only was the grace of divinity present, whether in martyrs or in revelations vouchsafed; since God ever works that which He has promised, for a witness to them that believe not and a benefit to them that believe. Wherefore we too, brethren and dear sons, *declare to you* likewise *that which we have heard and handled* [I Cor 15:1?]*;* that both you who were pre-

sent may call to mind the glory of the Lord, and you who now know by hearing may have communion with those holy martyrs, and through them with the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is glory and honor for ever and ever. Amen.

2. There were apprehended the young catechumens, Revocatus and Felicity his fellow servant, Saturninus and Secundulus. With them also was Vibia Perpetua, nobly born reared in a liberal manner, wedded honorably; having a father and mother and two brothers, one of them a catechumen likewise, and a son, a child at the breast; and she herself was about twenty-two years of age. What follows here shall she tell herself; the whole order of her martyrdom as she left it written with her own hand and in her own words.

PERPETUA'S ACCOUNT

3. When, she said, we were still under legal surveillance and my father was liked to vex me with his words and continually strove to hurt my faith because of his love: Father, said I, Do you see (for examples) this vessel lying, a pitcher or whatsoever it may be? And he said, I see it. And I said to him, Can it be called by any other name than that which it is? And he answered, No. So can I call myself nought other than that which I am, a Christian.

Then my father angry with this word came upon me to tear out my eyes; but he only vexed me, and he departed vanquished, he and the arguments of the devil. Then because I was without my father for a few days I gave thanks unto the Lord; and I was comforted because of his absence. In this same space of a few days we were baptised, and the Spirit declared to me, I must pray for nothing else after that water save only endurance of the flesh. After a few days we were taken into prison, and I was much afraid because I had never known such darkness. O bitter day! There was a great heat because of the press, there was cruel handling of the soldiers. Lastly I was tormented there by care for the child.

Then Tertius and Pomponius, the blessed deacons who ministered to us, obtained with money that for a few hours we should be taken forth to a better part of the prison and be refreshed. Then all of them going out from the dungeon took their pleasure; I suckled my child that was now faint with hunger. And being careful for him, I spoke to my mother and strengthened my brother and commended my son unto them. I pined because I saw they pined for my sake. Such cares I suffered for many days; and I obtained that the child should abide with me in prison; and straightway I became well and was lightened of my labour and care for the child; and suddenly the prison was made a palace for me, so that I would sooner be there than anywhere else.

4. Then said my brother to me: Lady my sister, you are now in high honor, even such that you might ask for a vision; and it should be shown you whether this be a passion or else a deliverance. And I, as knowing that I conversed with the Lord, for Whose sake I had suffered such things, did promise him nothing doubting; and I said: Tomorrow I will tell you. And I asked, and this was shown me.

I beheld a ladder of bronze, marvelously great, reaching up to heaven; and it was narrow, so that not more than one might go up at one time. And in the sides of the ladder were planted all manner of things of iron. There were swords there, spears, hooks, and knives; so that if any that went up took not good heed or looked

not upward, he would be torn and his flesh cling to the iron. And there was right at the ladder's foot a serpent lying, marvelously great, which lay in wait for those that would go up, and frightened them that they might not go up. Now Saturus went up first (who afterwards had of his own free will given up himself for our -sakes, because it was he who had edified us; and when we were taken he had not been there). And he came to the ladder's head; and he turned and said: Perpetua, I await you; but see that serpent bite you not. And I said: it shall not hurt me, in the name of Jesus Christ. And from beneath the ladder, as though it feared me, it softly put forth its head; and as though I trod on the first step I trod on its head. And I went up, and I saw a very great space of garden, and in the midst a man sitting, white-headed, in shepherd's clothing, tall milking his sheep; and standing around in white were many thousands. And he raised his head and beheld me and said to me: Welcome, child. And he cried to me, and from the curd he had from the milk he gave me as it were a morsel; and I took it with joined hands and ate it up; and all that stood around said, Amen. And at the sound of that word I awoke, yet eating I know not what of sweet.

And at once I told my brother, and we knew it should be a passion; and we began to have no hope any longer in this world.

5. A few days after, the report went abroad that we were to be tried. Also my father returned from the city spent with weariness; and he came up to me to cast down my faith saying: Have pity, daughter, on my grey hairs; have pity on your father, if I am worthy to be, called father by you; if with these hands I have brought you unto this flower of youth- and I-have preferred you before all your brothers; give me not over to the reproach of men. Look upon your brothers; look upon your mother and mother's sister; look upon your son, who will not endure to live after you. Give up your resolution; do not destroy us all together; for none of us will speak openly against men again if you suffer aught.

This he said fatherly in his love, kissing my hands and grovelling at my feet; and with tears he named me, not daughter, but lady. And I was grieved for my father's case because he would not rejoice at my passion out of all my kin; and I comforted him, saying: That shall be done at this tribunal, whatsoever God shall please; for know that we are not established in our own power, but in God's. And he went from me very sorrowful.

6. Another day as we were at meal we were suddenly snatched away to be tried; and we came to the forum. Therewith a report spread abroad through the parts near to the forum, and a very great multitude gathered together. We went up to the tribunal. The others being asked, confessed. So they came to me. And my father appeared there also, with my son, and would draw me from the step, saying: Perform the Sacrifice; have mercy on the child. And Hilarian the procurator – he that after the death of Minucius Timinian the proconsul had received in his room the right and power of the sword – said: Spare your father's grey hairs; spare the infancy of the boy. Make sacrifice for the Emperors' prosperity. And I answered: I am a Christian. And when my father stood by me yet to cast down my faith, he was bidden by Hilarian to be cast down and was smitten with a rod. And I sorrowed for my father's harm as though I had been smitten myself; so sorrowed I for his unhappy old age. Then Hilarian passed sentence upon us all and condemned us to the beasts; and cheerfully we went down to the dungeon. Then because my child had been used to being breastfed and to staying with me in the prison, straightway I sent Pomponius the deacon to my father, asking for the child. But my father would not give him.

And as God willed, no longer did he need to be suckled, nor did I take fever; that I might not be tormented by care for the child and by the pain of my breasts.

7. A few days after, while we were all praying, suddenly in the midst of the prayer I uttered a word and named Dinocrates; and I was amazed because he had never come into my mind save then; and I sorrowed, remembering his fate. And straightway I knew that I was worthy, and that I ought to ask for him. And I began to pray for him long, and to groan unto the Lord. Immediately the same night, this was shown me.

I beheld Dinocrates coming forth from a dark place, where were many others also; being both hot and thirsty, his raiment foul, his color pale; and the wound on his face which he had when he died. This Dinocrates had been my brother in the flesh, seven years old, who being diseased with ulcers of the face had come to a horrible death, so that his death was abominated of all men. For him therefore I had made my prayer; and between him and me was a great gulf, so that either might not go to the other. There was moreover, in the same place where Dinocrates was, a font full of water, having its edge higher than was the boy's stature; and Dinocrates stretched up as though to drink. I was sorry that the font had water in it, and yet for the height of the edge he might not drink.

And I awoke, and I knew that my brother was in travail. Yet I was confident I should ease his travail; and I prayed for him every day till we passed over into the camp prison. (For it was in the camp games that we were to fight; and the time was the feast of the Emperor Geta's birthday.) And I prayed for him day and night with groans and tears, that he might be given me.

8. On the day when we abode in the stocks, this was shown me.

I saw that place which I had before seen, and Dinocrates clean of body, finely clothed, m comfort; and the font I had seen before, the edge of it being drawn to the boy's navel; and he drew water thence which flowed without ceasing. And on the edge was a golden cup full of water; and Dinocrates came up and began to drink therefrom; which cup failed not. And being satisfied he departed away from the water and began to play as children will, joyfully.

And I awoke. Then I understood that he was translated from his pains.

9. Then a few days after, Pudens the adjutant, in whose charge the prison was, who also began to magnify us because he understood that there was much grace in us, let in many to us that both we and they in turn might be comforted. Now when the day of the games drew near, there came in my father to me , spent with weariness, and began to pluck out his beard and throw it on e ground and to fall on his face cursing his years and saying such words as might move all creation. I was grieved for his unhappy old age.

10. The day before we fought, I saw in a vision that Pomponius the deacon had come hither to the door of the prison, and knocked hard upon it. And I went out to him and opened to him; he was clothed in a white robe ungirdled, having shoes curiously wrought. And he said to me: Perpetua, we await you; come. And he took my hand, and we began to go through rugged and winding places. At last with much breathing hard we came to the amphitheatre, and he led me into the midst of the arena. And he said to me: Be not afraid; I am here with you and labour together with you. And he went away. And I saw much people watching closely. And because I knew that I was condemned to the beasts I marvelled that beasts were not sent out against me. And

there came out against me a certain ill-favored Egyptian with his helpers, to fight with me. Also there came to me comely young men, my helpers and aiders. And I was stripped naked, and I became a man. And my helpers began to rub me with oil as their custom is for a contest; and over against me saw that Egyptian wallowing in the dust. And there came forth a man of very great stature, so that he overpassed the very top of the amphitheatre, wearing a robe ungirdled, and beneath it between the two stripes over the breast a robe of purple; having also shoes curiously wrought in gold and silver; bearing a rod like a master of gladiators, and a green branch whereon were golden apples. And he besought silence and said: The Egyptian, if shall conquer this woman, shall slay her with the sword; and if she shall conquer him, she shall receive this branch. And he went away. And we came nigh to each other, and began to buffet one another. He tried to trip up my feet, but I with my heels smote upon his face. And I rose up into the air and began so to smite him as though I trod not the earth. But when I saw that there was yet delay, I joined my hands, setting finger against finger of them. And I caught his head, and he fell upon his face; and I trod upon his head. And the people began to shout, and my helpers began to sing. And I went up to the master of gladiators and received the branch. And he kissed me and said to me: Daughter, peace be with you. And I began to go with glory to the gate called the Gate of Life.

And I awoke; and I understood that I should fight, not with beasts but against the devil; but I knew that mine was the victory.

Thus far I have written this, till the day before the games; but the deed of the games themselves let him write who will.

SATURUS' ACCOUNT

11. And blessed Saturus too delivered this vision which he himself wrote down.

We had suffered, he said, and we passed out of the flesh, and we began to be carried towards the east by four angels whose hand touched us not. And we went not as though turned upwards upon our backs, but as though we went up an easy hill. And passing over the world's edge we saw a very great light; and I said to Perpetua (for she was at my side): This which the Lord promised us; we have received His promise. And while we were being carried by these same four angels, a great space opened before us, as it had been a having rose-trees and all kinds of flowers. The height of the trees was after the manner of the cypress, and their leaves sang without ceasing. And there in the garden were four other angels, more glorious than the rest; who when they saw us gave us honor and said to the other angels: Lo, here are they, here are they: and marvelled. And the four angels who bore us set us down trembling; and we passed on foot by a broad way over a plain. There we found Jocundus and Saturninus and Artaxius who in the same persecution had been burned alive; and Quintus, a martyr also, who in prison had departed this life; and we asked of them where were the rest. The other angels said to us: Come first, go in, and salute the Lord.

12. And we came near to a place, of which place the walls were such, they seemed built of light; and before the door of that place stood four angels who clothed us when we went in with white raiment. And we went in, and we heard as it were one voice crying *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,* without any end. And we saw sitting in that

same place as it were a man, white-headed, having hair like snow; youthful of countenance; whose feet we saw not. And on his right hand and on his left, four elders; and behind them stood many other elders. And we went in with wonder and stood before the throne; and the four angels raised us up and we kissed him, and with his hand he passed over our faces. And the other elders said to us: Stand you. And we stood, and gave the kiss of peace. And the elders said to us: Go you and play. And I said to Perpetua: You have that which you desire. And she said to me: Yes, God be thanked; so that I that was glad in the flesh am now more glad.

13. And we went out, and we saw before the doors, on the right Optatus the bishop, and on the left Aspasius the priest and teacher, being apart and sorrowful. And they cast themselves at our feet and said: Make peace between us, because you went forth and left us thus. And we said to them: Are not you our Father, and you our priest, that you should throw yourselves at our feet? And we were moved, and embraced them. And Perpetua began to talk with them in Greek; and we set them apart in the pleasure garden beneath a rose tree. And while we yet spoke with them, the angels said to them: Let these go and be refreshed; and whatsoever dissensions you have between you, Put them away from you each for each. And they made them to be confounded. And they said to Optatus: Correct your people; for they come to you as those that return from the games and wrangle concerning the parties there. And it seemed to us as though they would shut the gates. And we began to know many brothers there, martyrs also. And we were all sustained there with a savour inexpressible which satisfied us. Then in joy I awoke.

NARRATIVE OF MARTYRDOM

14. These were the glorious visions of those martyrs themselves, the most blessed Saturus and Perpetua, which they themselves wrote down. But Secundulus by an earlier end God called from this world while he was yet in prison; not without grace, that he should escape the beasts. Yet if not his soul, his flesh at least knew the sword.

15. As for Felicity, she too received this grace of the Lord. For because she was now gone eight months (being indeed with child when she was taken) she was very sorrowful as the day of the games drew near, fearing lest for this cause she should be kept back (for it is not lawful for women that are with child to be brought forth for torment) and lest she should shed her holy and innocent blood after the rest, among strangers and malefactors. Also her fellow martyrs were much afflicted lest they should leave behind them so good a friend and as it were their fellow-traveller on the road of the same hope. Wherefore with joint and united groaning they poured out their prayer to the Lord, three days before the games. Incontinently after their prayer her pains came upon her. And when by reason of the natural difficulty of the eighth month she was oppressed with her travail and made complaint, there said to her one of the servants of the keepers of the door: You that thus make complaint now, what wilt you do when you are thrown to the beasts, which you didst contemn when you would not sacrifice? And she answered, I myself now suffer that which I suffer, but there another shall be in me who shall suffer for me, because I am to suffer for him. So she was delivered of a daughter, whom a sister reared up to be her own daughter.

16. Since therefore the Holy Spirit has suffered, and suffering has willed, that the order of the games also

should be written; though we are unworthy to finish the recounting of so great glory, yet we accomplish the will of the most holy Perpetua, nay rather her sacred trust, adding one testimony more of her own steadfastness and height of spirit. When they were being more cruelly handled by the tribune. because through advice of certain most despicable men he feared lest by magic charms they might be withdrawn secretly from the prison house, Perpetua answered him to his face: Why do you not allow us to take some comfort, seeing we are victims most noble, namely Caesar's, and on his feast day we are to fight? Or is it not your glory that we should be taken out thither fatter of flesh? The tribune trembled and blushed, and gave order that they should be more gently handled, granting that her brothers and the rest should come in and rest with them. Also the adjutant of the prison now believed.

17. Likewise on the day before the games, when at the last feast which they call Free they made (as far as they might) not a Free Feast but a Love Feast*, with like hardihood they cast these words at the people; threatening the judgment of the Lord, witnessing to the felicity of their passion, setting at nought the curiosity of those that ran together. And Saturus said: Is not tomorrow sufficient for you? Why do you favorably behold that which you hate? You are friends today, foes tomorrow. Yet mark our faces diligently, that you may know us again on that day. So they began all to go away thence astonished; of whom many believed.

[note: Apparently Roman, as with modern, custom the condemned were allowed a choice of food. The martyrs used the opportunity to celebrate an Agape*, or Christian* Love-Feast.*]*

18. Now dawned the day of their victory, and they went forth from the prison into the amphitheatre as it were into heaven, cheerful and bright of countenance; if they trembled at all, it was for joy, not for fear. Perpetua followed behind, glorious of presence, as a true spouse of Christ and darling of God; at whose piercing look all cast down their eyes. Felicity likewise, rejoicing that she had borne a child in safety, that she might fight with the beasts, came now from blood to blood, from the midwife to the gladiator, to wash after her travail in a second baptism. And when they had been brought to the gate and were being compelled to put on, the men the dress of the priests of Saturn, the women the dress of the priestesses of Ceres, the noble Perpetua remained of like firmness to the end, and would not. For she said: For this cause came we willingly unto this, that our liberty might not be obscured. For this cause have we devoted our lives, that we might do no such thing as this; this we agreed with you. Injustice acknowledged justice; the tribune suffered that they should be brought forth as they were, without more ado. Perpetua began to sing, as already treading on the Egyptian's head. Revocatus and Saturninus and Saturus threatened the people as they gazed. Then when they came into Hilarian's sight, they began to say to Hilarian, stretching forth their hands and nodding their heads: You judge us, they said, and God you. At this the people being enraged besought that they should be vexed with scourges before the line of gladiators (those namely who fought with beasts). Then truly they gave thanks because they had received somewhat of the sufferings of the Lord.

19. But He who had said *Ask and you shall receive* [John 16:24] gave to them asking that end which each had desired. For whenever they spoke together of their desire in their martyrdom, Saturninus for his part would declare that he wished to be thrown to every kind of beast, that so indeed he might wear the more glorious crown. At the beginning of the spectacle therefore himself with Revocatus first had ado with a leopard and was

afterwards torn by a bear on a raised bridge. Now Saturus detested nothing more than a bear, but was confident already he should die by one bite of a leopard. Therefore when he was being given to a boar, the gladiator instead who had bound him to the boar was torn asunder by the same beast and died after the days of the games; nor was Saturus more than dragged. Moreover when he had been tied on the bridge to be assaulted by a bear, the bear would not come forth from his den. So Saturus was called back unharmed a second time.

20. But for the women the devil had made ready a most savage cow, prepared for this purpose against all custom; for even in this beast he would mock their sex. They were stripped therefore and made to put on nets; and so they were brought forth. The people shuddered, seeing one a tender girl, the other her breasts yet dropping from her late childbearing. So they were called back and clothed in loose robes. Perpetua was first thrown, and fell upon her loins. And when she had sat upright, her robe being rent at the side, she drew it over to cover her thigh, mindful rather of modesty than of pain. Next, looking for a pin, she likewise pinned up her dishevelled hair; for it was not meet that a martyr should suffer with hair dishevelled, lest she should seem to grieve in her glory. So she stood up; and when she saw Felicity smitten down, she went up and gave her her hand and raised her up.. And both of them stood up together and the (hardness of the people being now subdued) were called back to the Gate of Life. There Perpetua being received by one named Rusticus, then a catechumen, who stood close at her side, and as now awakening from sleep (so much was she in the Spirit and in ecstasy) began first to look about her; and then (which amazed all there), When, forsooth, she asked, are we to be thrown to the cow? And when she heard that this had been done already, she would not believe till she perceived some marks of mauling on her body and on her dress. Thereupon she called her brother to her, and that catechumen, and spoke to them, saying: Stand fast in the faith, and love you all one another; and be not offended because of our passion.

21. Saturus also at another gate exhorted Pudens the soldier, saying: So then indeed, as I trusted and foretold, I have felt no assault of beasts until now. And now believe with all your heart. Behold, I go out thither and shall perish by one bite of the leopard. And immediately at the end of the spectacle, the leopard being released, with one bite of his he was covered with so much blood that the people (in witness to his second baptism) cried out to him returning: Well washed, well washed. Truly it was well with him who had washed in this wise. Then said he to Pudens the soldier: Farewell; remember the faith and me; and let not these things trouble you, but strengthen you. And therewith he took from Pudens' finger a little ring, and dipping it in his wound gave it back again for an heirloom, leaving him a pledge and memorial of his blood. Then as the breath left him he was cast down with the rest in the accustomed place for his throat to be cut. And when the people besought that they should be brought forward, that when the sword pierced through their bodies their eyes might be joined thereto as witnesses to the slaughter, they rose of themselves and moved, whither the people willed them, first kissing one another, that they might accomplish their martyrdom with the rites of peace. The rest not moving and in silence received the sword; Saturus much earlier gave up the ghost; for he had gone up earlier also, and now he waited for Perpetua likewise. But Perpetua, that she might have some taste of pain, was pierced between the bones and shrieked out; and when the swordsman's hand wandered still (for he was a novice), herself set

it upon her own neck. Perchance so great a woman could not else have been slain (being feared of the unclean spirit) had she not herself so willed it.

O most valiant and blessed martyrs! O truly called and elected unto the glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ! Which glory he that magnifies, honors and adores, ought to read these witnesses likewise, as being no less than the old, unto the Church's edification; that these new wonders also may testify that one and the same Holy Spirit works ever until now, and with Him God the Father Almighty, and His Son Jesus Christ Our Lord, to Whom is glory and power unending for ever and ever. Amen.

Source:

From W.H. Shewring, trans. *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity,* (London: 1931).

The translation has been modernized [not re-translated] for this etext version in the following ways:

- Archaic tenses and forms have been altered.
- Paragraphs have been introduced within sections to clarify meaning.
- Some phrasing has been altered

Much of this was done with reference to Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2-4

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halsall@murray.fordham.edu

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity.*

Reading Journal

Perpetua and Felicity were early Christian martyrs. In your reading journal, discuss what this text can tell us about early Christian communities. Point to specific examples (quotes) from the text to support your analysis.

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART IX

MODULE EIGHT: BYZANTIUM AND THE EARLY MUSLIM WORLD

READING: JUSTINIAN I AND THE RISE OF BYZANTIUM

Christopher Brooks

The eastern half of the Roman Empire survived for 1,000 years after the fall of the western one. It carried on most of the traditions of Rome and added many new innovations in architecture, science, religion, and learning. It was truly one of the great civilizations of world history. And yet, as demonstrated in everything from college curricula to representations of ancient history in popular culture, the eastern empire, remembered as "Byzantium," is not as well represented in the contemporary view of the past as is the earlier united Roman Empire. Why might that be?

The answer is probably this: like the western empire before it, Byzantium eventually collapsed. However, Byzantium did not just collapse, it was absorbed into a distinct culture with its own traditions: that of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. More to the point, the religious divide between Christians and Muslims, at least from the perspective of medieval Europeans, was so stark that Byzantium was "lost" to the tradition of Western Civilization in a way that the western empire was not. Even though the Ottoman Empire itself was a proudly "western" civilization, one that eagerly built on the prosperity of Byzantium after absorbing it, there is a (misguided) centuries-long legacy of distinguishing between the Byzantine – Ottoman culture of the east and the Roman – European medieval culture of the west.

Byzantine civilization's origins are to be found in the decision by the emperor Constantine to found a new capital in the Greek village of Byzantium, renamed Constantinople ("Constantine's city"). By the time the western empire fell, the center of power in the Roman Empire had long since shifted to the east: simply put, by the fifth century CE the majority of wealth and power was concentrated in the eastern half of the empire. The people of Constantinople and the eastern empire did not call it "Byzantium" or themselves "Byzantines" – they continued to refer to themselves as "Romans" long after Rome itself was permanently outside of their territory and control.

After the fall of the western empire, the new Germanic kings acknowledged the authority of the emperor in Constantinople. They were formally his vassals (lords in his service) and he remained the emperor of the entire Roman Empire in name. At least until the Byzantine Empire began to decline in the seventh century, this was not just a convenient fiction. Even the Franks, who ruled a kingdom on the other end of Europe furthest from the reach of Constantinople, lived in genuine fear of a Byzantine invasion since the treaties they had established with Constantinople were full of loopholes and could be repudiated by any given emperor.

East versus West

Why was it that the west had fallen into political fragmentation while the east remained rich, powerful, and united? There are a few major reasons. First, Constantinople itself played a major role in the power and wealth of the east. Whereas Rome had shrunk steadily over the years, especially after its sacking in 410 and the move of the western imperial government to the Italian city of Ravenna (which was more easily defensible), Constantinople had somewhere around 500,000 residents. That can be compared to the capital of the Gothic kingdom of Gaul, Toulouse, which had 15,000 (which was a large city by the standards of the time for western Europe!). Not only was Constantinople impregnable to invaders, but its population of proud Romans repeatedly massacred barbarians who tried to seize power, and they deposed unpopular emperors who tried to rule as military tyrants rather than true emperors possessing sufficient Roman "virtue."

The Roman Empire after its political division between east and west under Diocletian. From the third through fifth centuries CE, the eastern part of the empire became the true locus of power and wealth, and as of the late fifth century, the entire western half "fell" to barbarian invasions.

The east had long been the richest part of the empire, and because of its efficient bureaucracy and tax-collecting systems, much more wealth flowed into the imperial coffers in the east than it did in the west. Each year, the imperial government in Constantinople brought in roughly 270,000 pounds of gold in tax revenue, as compared to about 20,000 in the west. This made vastly better-equipped, trained, and provisioned armies possible in the east. Furthermore, the west was still dominated by various families of unbelievably rich Roman elites who undermined the power, authority, and financial solvency of the western imperial government by

refusing to sacrifice their own prerogatives in the name of a stronger united empire. In the east, while nobles were certainly rich and powerful, they were nowhere near as powerful as their western counterparts.

There is another factor to consider, one that is more difficult to pin down than the amount of tax revenue or the existence of Constantinople's walls. Simply put, Roman identity – the degree to which social elites, soldiers, and possibly regular citizens considered themselves "Roman" and remained loyal to the Empire – seems to have been stronger in the east than the west. This might be explained by the reverse of the "vicious cycle" of defeat and vulnerability described in the last chapter regarding the west. In the east, the strength of the capital, the success of the armies, and the allegiance of elites to Rome as an idea encouraged the continued strength of Roman identity. Even if poor farmers still had little to thank the Roman state for in their daily lives, their farms were intact and local leaders were still Roman, not Gothic or Frankish or Vandal.

Lastly, the east enjoyed a simple stroke of good luck in the threats it faced from outside of the borders: the barbarians went west and Persia did not launch major invasions. The initial Gothic uprising that sparked the beginning of the end for the west was in the Balkans, but the Goths were then convinced to go west. Subsequent invasions from Central Europe were directed at the west. Even though the Huns were from the steppes of Central Asia, they established their (short-lived) empire in the west. Eastern Roman armies had to repulse threats and maintain the borders, but they did not face the overwhelming odds of their western Roman counterparts. Finally, despite Persia's overall strength and coherence, there was a lull in Persian militarism that lasted through the entire fifth century.

Justinian

The most important early emperor of Byzantium was Justinian, who ruled from 527 to 565. Justinian was the last Roman emperor to speak Latin as his native tongue; afterwards, all emperors spoke Greek. He is remembered for being both an incredibly fervent Christian, a major military leader, the sponsor of some of the most beautiful and enduring Byzantine architecture in existence, and the husband of probably the most powerful empress in the history of the empire, a former actress and courtesan named Theodora.

Justinian created a tradition that was to last for all of Byzantine history: that of the emperor being both the spiritual leader of the Christian Church and the secular ruler of the empire itself. By the time the western empire fell, the archbishops of Rome had begun their attempts to assert their authority over the church (they would not succeed even in the west for many centuries, however). Those claims were never accepted in the east, where it was the emperor who was responsible for laying down the final word on matters of religious doctrine. Justinian felt that it was his sacred duty as leader of the greatest Christian empire in the world to enforce religious uniformity among his subjects and to stamp out heresy. He called himself "beloved of Christ," a title the later emperors would adopt as well. While he was never able to force all of his subjects to conform to Christian orthodoxy (especially in rural regions far from the capital city), he did launch a number of attacks and persecutory campaigns against heretical sects.

One aspect of Justinian's focus on Christian purification was the destruction of the ancient traditions

of paganism in Greece and the surrounding areas initiated by his Christian predecessors. The Olympics had already been shut down by the emperor Theodosius I back in 393 CE (he objected to their status as a pagan religious festival, not an athletic competition). Justinian insisted that all teachers and tutors convert to Christianity and renounce their teaching of the Greek classics; when they refused in 528, he shut down Plato's Academy, functioning at that point for almost 1,000 years. (Many of the now-unemployed scholars fled to Persia, where they were welcomed by the Sasanian rulers.)

Justinian did not just enforce religious uniformity, he also imposed Roman law on all of his subjects. The empire had traditionally left local customs and laws alone so long as they did not interfere in the important business of tax collection, troop recruitment, and loyalty to the empire. Justinian saw Roman law as an aspect of Roman unity, however, and sought to stamp out other forms of law under his jurisdiction. He had legal experts go through the entire corpus of Roman law, weed out the contradictions, and figure out the laws that needed to be enforced. He codified this project in the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, which forms the direct textual antecedent for most of the legal systems still in use in Europe.

Theodora, who had come from decidedly humble origins as an entertainer, worked diligently both to free prostitutes from sexual slavery, expand the legal rights and protections of women, and protect children from infanticide. She was Justinian's confidant and supporter throughout their lives together, helping to conceive of not just legal revisions, but the splendid new building projects they supervised in Constantinople. In a famous episode from early in Justinian's reign, Theodora prevented Justinian and his advisors from fleeing from a massive riot against his rule, instead inspiring Justinian to order a counter-attack that may well have saved his reign. While most political marriages in Byzantium, as in practically every pre-modern society, had nothing whatsoever to do with love or even attraction, Theodora and Justinian clearly shared both genuine affection for one another and intellectual kinship.

The best-known surviving depiction of Justinian from a mosaic in Ravenna, Italy. In the mosaic, Justinian is dressed in the "royal purple," a color reserved for the imperial family.

Justinian was intent on re-conquering the western empire from the Germanic kings that had taken over. He was equally interested in imposing Christian uniformity through the elimination of Christian heresies like Arianism. He sent a brilliant general, Belisarius, to Vandal-controlled North Africa in 533 with a fairly small force of soldiers and cavalry, and within a year Belisarius soundly defeated the Vandal army and retook North Africa for the empire. From there, Justinian dispatched Belisarius and his force to Italy to seize it from the Ostrogoths.

What followed was twenty years of war between the Byzantines and the Gothic kingdom of Italy. The Goths had won over the support of most Italians through fair rule and reasonable levels of taxation, and most Italians thus fought against the Byzantines, even though the latter represented the legitimate Roman government. In the end, the Byzantines succeeded in destroying the Gothic kingdom and retaking Italy, but the war both crippled the Italian economy and drained the Byzantine coffers. Italy was left devastated; it was the Byzantine invasion, not the "fall of Rome" earlier, that crippled the Italian economy until the late Middle Ages.

In 542, during the midst of the Italian campaign, a horrendous plague (the "Plague of Justinian") killed off half the population of Constantinople and one-third of the empire's population as a whole. This had an obvious impact on military recruiting and morale. In the long term, the more important impact of the plague

was in severing many of the trade ties between the two halves of the empire. Economies in the west became more localized and less connected to long-distance trade, which ultimately impoverished them. A few years earlier, in 536, a major volcanic eruption in Iceland spewed so much debris in the air that Europe's climate cooled considerably with "years without a summer," badly undermining the economy as well. Thus, war, natural disaster, and disease helped usher in the bleakest period of the Middle Ages in the west, as well as leading to a strong economic and cultural division between west and east.

Even as the Byzantine forces struggled to retake Italy, Justinian, like the emperors to follow him, had a huge problem on his eastern flank: the Persian Empire. Still ruled by the Sasanians, the Persians were sophisticated and well-organized rivals of the empire who had never been conquered by Rome. Ongoing wars with Persia represented the single greatest expense Justinian faced, even as he oversaw the campaigns in Italy. The Byzantines and Persians battled over Armenia, which was heavily populated, and Syria, which was very rich. Toward the end of his reign, Justinian simply made peace with the Persian king Khusro I by agreeing to pay an annual tribute of 30,000 gold coins a year. It was ultimately less expensive to spend huge sums of gold as bribes than it was to pay for the wars.

The problem with Justinian's wars, both the reconquest in the west and the ongoing battles with the Persians in the east, was that they were enormously expensive. Because his forces won enough battles to consistently loot, and because the empire was relatively stable and prosperous under his reign, he was able to sustain these efforts during his lifetime. After he died, however, Byzantium slowly re-lost its conquests in the west to another round of Germanic invasions, and the Persians pressed steadily on the eastern territories as well.

Division and Decline

The relative political and religious unity Justinian's campaigns brought back to Byzantium declined steadily after his death. For almost 1,000 years, the two kinds of Christianity – later called "Catholic" and "Eastern Orthodox," although both terms speak to the idea of one universal and correct form of Christian doctrine – were sundered by the great political divisions between the Germanic kingdoms of the west and Byzantium itself in the east. In Eastern Europe, small kingdoms and poor farmers played host to rival missionaries preaching the slightly-different versions of Christianity. Trade existed, but was never as strong as it had been during the days of the united empire.

Byzantium's major ongoing problem was that it faced a seemingly endless series of external threats. Byzantium was surrounded by hostile states and groups for most of its existence, and it slowly but steadily lost territory until it was little more than the city of Constantinople and its immediate territories. It is important to remember, however, that this process took many centuries, longer even than the Roman Empire itself had lasted in the west. During that time, Constantinople was one of the largest and most remarkable cities on the planet, with half a million people and trade goods and visitors from as far away as Scandinavia, Africa, and England. Its people believed that their empire and their emperor were preserved by God Himself as the rightful seat of the Christian religion. Thanks to the resilience of its people, the prosperity of its trade networks, and

the leadership of its emperors (the effective ones, anyway), Byzantium remained a major state and culture for centuries despite its long-term decline in power from the days of Justinian.

The most significant leader after Justinian was the emperor Heraclius (r. 610 – 641). He was originally a governor who returned from his post in Africa to seize the throne from a rival named Phocas in the midst of a Persian invasion. The empire was in such disarray at the time that the Persians seized Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, cutting off a huge part of the food supply to Constantinople. In the process, the Persians even seized the "True Cross," the cross on which (so Christians at the time believed) Christ Himself had been crucified, from its resting place in Jerusalem. Simultaneously, the Avars and Bulgars, steppe peoples related to the Huns, were pressing Byzantine territory from the north, and piracy was rife in the Mediterranean.

Heraclius managed to save the core of the empire, Anatolia and the Balkans, by recruiting free peasants to fight instead of relying on mercenaries. He also focused on Anatolia as the breadbasket of the empire, temporarily abandoning Egypt but keeping his people fed. He led Byzantine armies to seize back Jerusalem and the True Cross from the Persians, soundly defeating them in 628, and in 630 he personally returned the True Cross to its shrine in Jerusalem. The fighting during this period was often desperate – Constantinople itself was besieged by an allied force of Avars and Persians at one point – but in the end Heraclius managed to pull the empire back from the brink.

Despite his success in staving off disaster, however, a new threat to Byzantium was growing in the south. The very same year that Heraclius returned the True Cross to Jerusalem, the Islamic Prophet Muhammad returned to his native city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula with the first army of Muslims. Heraclius had no way of knowing it, but Byzantium would soon face a threat even greater than that of the Persians: the Arab caliphates (considered in the following chapter). Indeed, Heraclius himself was forced to lead Byzantium during the first wave of the Arab invasions, and despite his own leadership ability vital territories like Syria, Palestine, and Egypt were lost during his own lifetime (he died in 641, the same year that most of Egypt was conquered by the Arabs).

The City and the Emperors

A major factor in the success of Orthodox conversion among the Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe was the splendor of Constantinople itself. Numerous accounts survive of the sheer impact Constantinople's size, prosperity, and beauty had on visitors. Constantinople was simply the largest, richest, and most glorious city in Europe and the Mediterranean region at the time. It enjoyed a cash economy, impregnable defensive fortifications, and abundant food thanks to the availability of Anatolian grain and fish from the Aegean Sea. Silkworms were smuggled out of China in roughly 550, at which point Constantinople became the heart of a European silk industry, an imperial monopoly which generated tremendous wealth. The entire economy was regulated by the imperial government through a system of guilds, which helped ensure steady tax revenues.

Constantinople was impregnable for centuries. Strong walls protected it in the west, and it was surrounded by cliffs leading down to the sea (and its ports) on all of the other sides.

Meanwhile, in the heart of the empire, the emperor held absolute authority. A complex and formal ranking system of nobles and courtiers, clothed in garments dyed specific colors to denote their respective ranks, separated the person of the emperor from supplicants and ambassadors. This was not just self-indulgence on the part of the emperors, of showing off for the sake of feeling important; this was part of the symbolism of power, of reaching out to a largely illiterate population with visible displays of authority.

The imperial bureaucracy held enormous power in Byzantium. Provincial elites would send their sons to Constantinople to study and obtain positions. Bribery was rife and nepotism was as common as talent in gaining positions; there was even an official list of maximum bribes that was published by the government itself. That said, the bureaucracy was somewhat like the ancient Egyptian class of scribes, men who main-

tained coherence and order within the government even when individual emperors were incompetent or palace intrigue rendered an emperor unable to focus on governance.

The imperial office controlled the minting of coins, still the standard currency as far away as France and England because the coins were reliably weighted and backed by the imperial government. The emperor's office also controlled imperial monopolies on key industries like silk, which were hugely lucrative. It was illegal to try to compete with the imperial silk industry, so enormous profits were directed straight into the royal treasury.

Constantinople had as many as a million people in the late eighth century (as compared to no more than 15,000 in any "city" in western Europe), but there were many other rich cities within its empire. As a whole, Byzantium traded its high-quality finished goods to western Europe in return for raw materials like ore and foodstuffs. Despite its wars with its neighbors to the east and south, Byzantium also had major trade links with the Arab states.

Orthodox Christianity and Learning

To return to Orthodox Christianity, it was not just because Constantinople was at the center of the empire that Byzantines thought it had a special relationship with God. Its power was derived from the sheer number of churches and relics present in the city, which in turn represented an enormous amount of *potentia* (holy power). Byzantines believed that God oversaw Constantinople and that the Virgin Mary interceded before God on the behalf of the city. Many priests taught that Constantinople was the New Jerusalem that would be at the center of events during the second coming of Christ, rather than the actual Jerusalem.

The piety of the empire sometimes undermined secular learning, however. Over time, the church grew increasingly suspicious of learning that did not have either center on the Bible and religious instruction or have direct practical applications in crafts or engineering. Thus, there was a marked decline in scholarship throughout the empire. Eventually, the whole body of ancient Greek learning was concentrated in a small academic elite in Constantinople and a few other important Greek cities. What was later regarded as the founding body of thought of Western Civilization – ancient Greek philosophy and literature – was thus largely analyzed, translated, and recopied outside of Greece itself in the Arab kingdoms of the Middle Ages. Likewise, almost no one in Byzantium understood Latin well by the ninth century, so even Justinian's law code was almost always referenced in a simplified Greek translation.

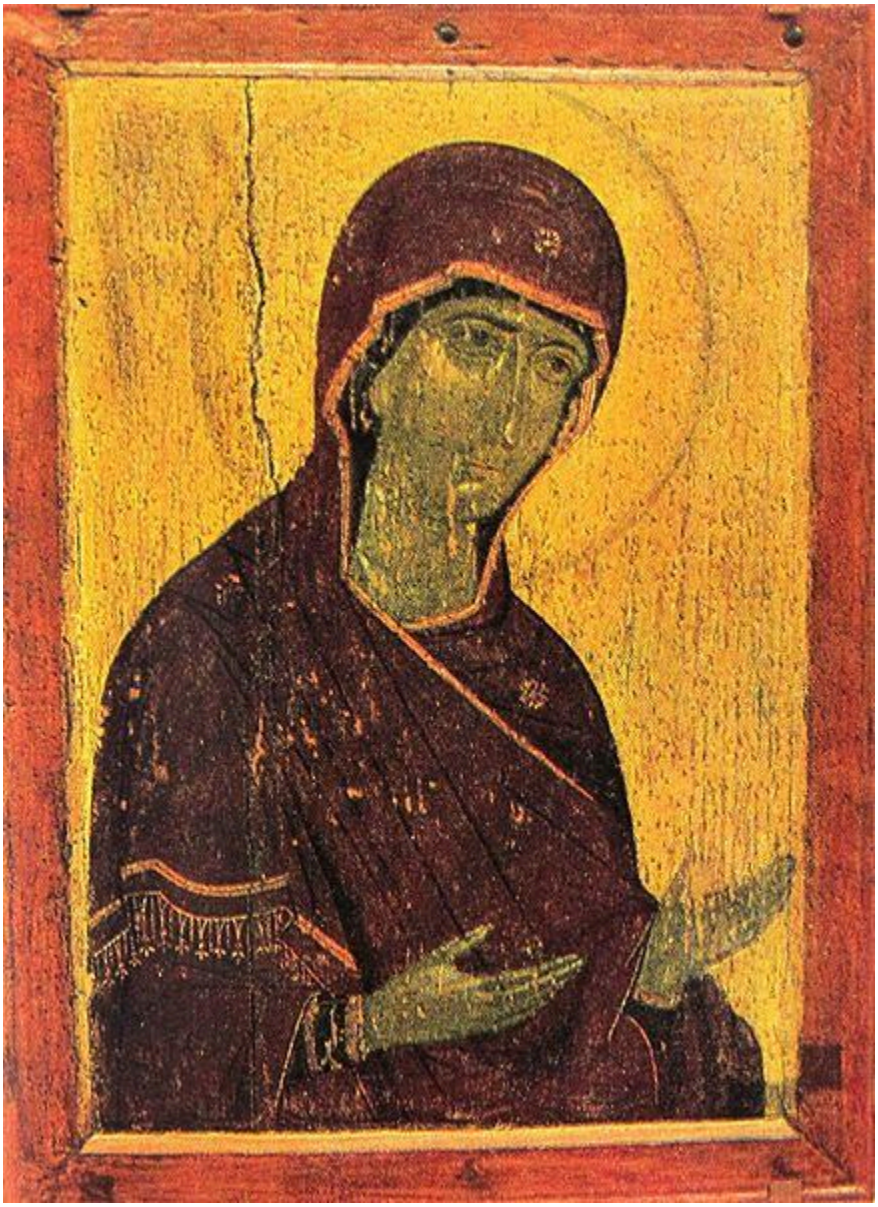
This was a period in which, in both the Arab kingdoms and in Byzantium, there was a bewildering mixture of language, place of origin, and religious affiliation. For example, a Christian in Syria, a subject of the Muslim Arab kingdoms by the eighth century, would be unable to speak to a Byzantine Christian, nor would she be welcomed in Constantinople since she was probably a Monophysite Christian (one of the many Christian heresies, at least from the Orthodox perspective) instead of an Orthodox one. Likewise, men in her family might find themselves enlisted to fight against Byzantium despite their Christian faith, with political allegiances outweighing religious ones.

Iconoclasm

One of the greatest religious controversies in the history of Christianity was iconoclasm, the breaking or destroying of icons. Iconoclasm was one of those phenomena that may seem almost ridiculously trivial in historical hindsight, but it had an enormous (and almost entirely negative) impact at the time. For people who believed in the constant intervention of God in the smallest of things, iconoclasm was an enormously important issue.

The conundrum that prompted iconoclasm was simple: if Byzantium was the holiest of states, watched over by the Virgin Mary and ruled by emperors who were the "beloved of God," why was the empire declining? Just as Rome had fallen in the west, Byzantium was beset by enemies all around it, enemies who had the depressing tendency of crushing Byzantine armies and occasionally murdering its emperors. Byzantine priests repeatedly warned their congregations to repent of their sins, because it was sin that was undermining the empire's survival. The emperor Leo III, who ruled from 717 – 741, decided to take action into his own hands. He forced communities of Jews in the empire to convert to Christianity, convinced that their presence was somehow angering God. He then went on to do something much more unprecedented than persecuting Jews: attacking icons.

Icons were (and are) one of the central aspects of Eastern Orthodox Christian worship. An icon is an image of a holy figure, almost always Christ, the Virgin Mary, or one of the saints, that is used as a focus of Christian worship both in churches and in homes. Byzantine icons were beautifully crafted and, in a largely illiterate society, were vitally important in the daily experience of most Christians. The problem was that it was a slippery slope from venerating God, Christ, and the saints "through" icons as symbols, versus actually worshiping the icons themselves as idols, something expressly forbidden in the Old Testament. Frankly, there is no question that thousands of believers did treat the icons as idols, as objects with *potentia* unto themselves, like relics.



A fourteenth-century icon of the Virgin Mary.

In 726, a volcano devastated the island of Santorini in the Aegean sea. Leo III took this as proof that icon veneration had gone too far, as some of his religious advisers had been telling him. He thus ordered the destruction of holy images, facing outright riots when workers tried to make good on his proclamation by removing icons of Christ affixed to the imperial palace. In the provinces, whole regions rose up in revolt when royal servants showed up and tried to destroy icons. In Rome, Pope Gregory II was appalled and excommunicated Leo. Leo, in turn, declared that the pope no longer had any religious authority in the empire, which for practical purposes meant the regions under Byzantine control in Italy, Sicily, and the Balkans.

The official ban of icons lasted until 843, over a century, before the emperors reversed it (it was an empress, named Theodora like the famous wife of Justinian centuries earlier, who led the charge to officially restore icons). The controversy weakened the empire by dividing it between iconoclasts loyal to the official policy of the emperors and traditionalists who venerated the icons, while the empire itself was still beset by inva-

sions. Iconoclasm also lent itself to what would eventually become a permanent split between the eastern and western churches – Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The final and permanent split between the western and eastern churches, already *de facto* in place for centuries, was in 1054, when Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael I excommunicated each other after Michael refused to acknowledge Leo's preeminence – this event cemented the "Great Schism" (schism means "break" or "split") between the western and eastern churches.

In the wake of iconoclasm, the leaders of the Orthodox church, the patriarchs of Constantinople, would claim that innovations in theology or Christian practice were heresies. This attitude extended to secular learning as well – it was acceptable to study classical literature and even philosophy, but new forms of philosophy and scholarly innovation was regarded as dangerous. The long-term pattern was thus that, while it preserved ancient learning, Byzantine intellectual culture did not lend itself to progress.

The Late Golden Age and the Final Decline

Byzantium's last period of strength was under a Macedonian dynasty, lasting from 867 – 1056. A murderous leader named Basil I, originating from Macedonia, seized the throne in 867 and initiated a line of ruthless but competent leaders who governed for about two hundred years. Under the Macedonians, Byzantine territorial lines were pushed back to part of Mesopotamia and Armenia in the east and Crete and Cyprus in the Mediterranean. The important effect of these reconquests was trade; once again, Byzantium was at the center of an international trade network stretching across Europe and the Middle East. This vastly enriched Constantinople and its region, leading to a renaissance in building and art. Under the patronage of the Macedonian dynasty, some ancient learning was revived, as scholars tried to find ways to make the work of the ancient Greek masters compatible with Orthodox Christian teachings.

During this late golden age, Constantinople's population rebounded, with food supplies guaranteed by the imperial government. Even the poor lived better lives in Constantinople than did the relatively well-off in Western Europe, much of which was barbaric by comparison. An elite class of administrators occupied a social position somewhat like the ancient Egyptian scribes and were educated in Christianized versions of Greek learning and classics; one scholar named Photius produced an encyclopedia of ancient Greek writings that is the only record of many texts that would have been otherwise permanently lost.

The provinces (themes) of the Byzantine Empire, 1025 AD
Opsikion Name of theme
Mesembria Town
Attaleia Thematic capital
Autonomous Principality

Byzantium in its late golden age – note that Constantinople remained both geographically and politically central.

These happy times for Byzantium ended when the emperor Basil II died in 1025 with no male heirs. Simultaneously, a series of bad harvests hit the empire. Byzantium's military success was based on the themes, which were in turn based on the existence of reasonably prosperous independent farmers. Bad harvests saw those farmers vanish, their lands swallowed up by the holdings of wealthy aristocrats. As had happened in the Roman Republic so long ago, the problem was that there were thus no soldiers to recruit, and the armies shrank.

Likewise, the relative calm of the Macedonian period ended with the rise of a new group of invaders from the east: the Seljuk Turks. A powerful group of nomadic raiders from the western part of Central Asia, the Turks had converted to Islam centuries earlier. Despite having no centralized leadership (the Seljuks themselves were just one of the dominant clans with no real authority over most of their fellow raiders), by about the year 1000 CE they began invading both Byzantine territories and those of their fellow Muslims, the Arabs. Over the next few centuries, the Turks grew in power, steadily encroaching on Byzantium's territories in Anatolia.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Eastern and Western Empire Map – Pixeltoo

Justinian Mosaic – Bender235

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Virgin Mary Icon – Public Domain
Late Golden Age – Cplakidas

This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 11: Byzantium in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

READING: ISLAM AND THE CALIPHATES

Christopher Brooks

Origins of Islam

The pre-Islamic Arabian peninsula, most of which is today the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was populated by the Arab people. The Arabs were herders and merchants. They were organized tribally, with tribes claiming descent from common ancestors and governing through meetings of the patriarchs of each clan. The Arabs were well known in the Roman and Byzantine world as merchants for their camel caravans that linked Europe to a part of the Spice Road, transporting goods from India and China. They were also known to be some of the most fierce and effective mercenary warriors in the eastern Mediterranean region; they rode slim, fast, agile horses and fought as light cavalry.

Arab trade, and population, was concentrated in the more fertile southern and western regions, especially in what is today the country of Yemen. By the late Roman Empire, small but prosperous Arab kingdoms were in diplomatic contact with both Rome and Persia (as well as the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, then called Aksum). As the wars between Rome and Persia became more destructive in the mid 2nd century, the Arabs emerged as important mercenaries and political clients for both empires. Persia in particular invested heavily in employing Arab soldiers and in cultivating the maritime trade route across the Indian Ocean and along the south and west coasts of Arabia. For a time, the southern coast of Arabia was ruled by Persia through Arab clients and Persia was clearly a major cultural influence (so great was the renown of the Persian Great King Khusrau that his name became the root of an Arabic word for king: *kisra*). This contact and trade enriched the Arabic economy and led to a high degree of tactical sophistication among Arab soldiers.

Arabia in 600 CE. The names in black on the map are the clan groups at the time. Mecca is spelled "Makkah," with Yathrib to its north.

The Arabs were polytheists – they worshiped a variety of gods linked to various oases in the desert. One important holy site that would take on even greater importance after the rise of Islam was the city of Mecca. Mecca had been a major center of trade for centuries, lying at the intersection of trade routes and near oases. In the center of Mecca was a shrine, called the *Ka'aba*, built around a piece of volcanic rock worshiped as a holy object in various Arabic faiths, and Mecca was a major pilgrimage site for the Arabs well before Islam.

Muhammad

Everything changed in the Arab world in the sixth century CE. A man named Muhammad was born in 570 CE to a powerful clan of merchants, the Quraysh, who controlled various trade enterprises in Mecca and surrounding cities. He grew up to be a merchant, marrying a wealthy and intelligent widow named Khadija (who was originally his employer) and traveling with caravans. He was particularly well known as a fair and per-

ceptive arbitrator of disputes among other Arab tribes and merchants. He traveled widely on business, dealing with both Christians and Jews in Palestine and Syria, where he learned about their respective religions.

An introspective man who detested greed and corruption, Muhammad was in the habit of retreating to hills near Mecca, where there was a cave in which he would camp and meditate. When he was about forty, he returned to Mecca and reported that he had been contacted by the archangel Gabriel, who informed him that he, Muhammad, was to bear God's message to the people of Mecca and the world. The core of that message was that the one true God, the God of Abraham, venerated already by the Jews and Christians, had called the Arabs to cast aside their idols and unite in a community of worshippers.

Muhammad did not meet with much success in Mecca in his initial preaching. The temples of the many gods there were rich and powerful and people resented Muhammad's attempts to get them to convert to his new religion, in large part because he was asking them to cast aside centuries of religious tradition. The real issue with Muhammad's message was its call for exclusivity – if Muhammad had just asked the Meccans to venerate the God of Abraham in addition to their existing deities, it probably would not have incited such fierce resistance, especially from the clan leaders who dominated Meccan society. Those clan leaders were fearful that if Muhammad's message caught on, it would threaten the pilgrims who flocked to Mecca to venerate the various deities: that would be bad for business.

Thus, in 622 CE, Muhammad and a group of his followers left Mecca, exiled by the powerful families that were part of Muhammad's own extended clan, and traveled to the city of Yathrib, which Muhammad later renamed Medina ("the city of the Prophet"), 200 miles north. They were welcomed there by the people of Medina who hoped that Muhammad could serve as an impartial mediator in the frequent disputes between clans and families. Muhammad's trek to Medina is called the *Hejira* (also spelled *Hijra* in English) and is the starting date of the Islamic calendar.

In Medina, Muhammad met with much more success in winning converts. He quickly established a religious community with himself as the leader, one that made no distinction between religious and political authority. His followers would regularly gather to hear him recite the *Koran,* which means "recitations": the repeated words of God Himself as spoken to Muhammad by the angel. In 624, just two years after his arrival in Medina, Muhammad led a Muslim force against a Meccan army, and then in 630 CE, he conquered Mecca, largely by skillfully negotiating with his former enemies there – he promised to make Mecca the center of Islam, to require pilgrimage, and to incorporate it into his growing kingdom. He sent missionaries and soldiers across Arabia, as well as to foreign powers like Byzantium and Persia. By his death in 632, Muhammad had already rallied most of the Arab tribes under his leadership and most willingly converted to Islam.

Islam

The word Islam means "submission." Its central tenet is submission before the will of God, as revealed to humanity by Muhammad. An aspect of Islam that distinguishes it from Judaism and Christianity is that the Koran has a single point of origin, the recitations of Muhammad himself, and it is believed by Muslims that it

cannot be translated from Arabic and remain the "real" holy book. In other words, translations can be made for the sake of education, but every word in the Koran, spoken in the classical Arabic of Muhammad's day, is believed to be that true language of God – according to traditional Islamic belief, the angels speak Arabic in paradise.

According to Islam, Muhammad was the last in the line of prophets stretching back to Abraham and Moses and including Jesus, whom Muslims consider a major prophet and a religious leader, but not actually divine. Muhammad delivered the "definitive version" of God's will as it was told to him by Gabriel on the mountainside. The core tenets of Islamic belief are referred to as the "five pillars":

There is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet.

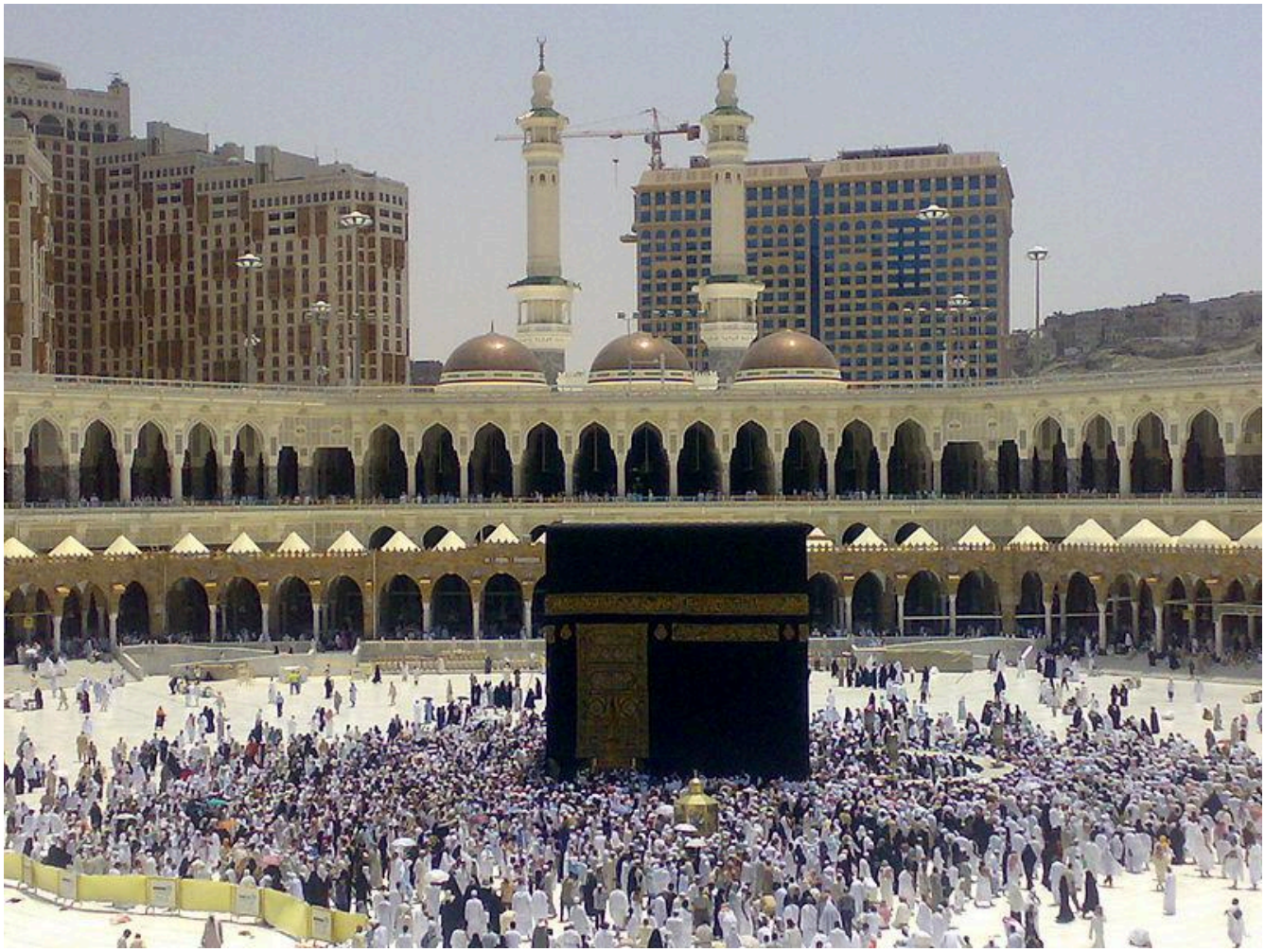
Each Muslim must pray five times a day, facing toward the holy city of Mecca.

During the holy month of Ramadan, each Muslim must fast from dawn to sundown.

Charity should be given to the needy.

If possible, at least once in his or her life, each Muslim should undertake the *Haaj*: the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca.

In turn, a central concept of Islam is that of the worldwide community of Muslims, the *Ummah*, meaning "community of believers." The Ummah was a central idea from the lifetime of Muhammad onward, referring to a shared identity among Muslims that is supposed to transcend differences of language, ethnicity, and culture. All Muslims are to follow the five pillars, just as all Muslims are to meet other members of the Ummah at least once in their lives while on pilgrimage.



The Ka'aba (contemporary photograph).

One term associated with Islam, Jihad, has sparked widespread misunderstanding among non-Muslims. The word itself simply means "struggle." It does mean "holy war" in some cases, but not in most. The concept of Jihad revolves around the struggle for Muslims to live according to Muhammad's example and by his teachings. Its most common use is the "jihad of the heart," of struggling to live morally against the myriad corrupting temptations of life.

The Koran itself was written down starting during Muhammad's life (his revelations were delivered over the course of about twenty years, and were initially transmitted orally). The definitive version was completed in the years following his death. Of secondary importance to the Koran is the *Hadith*, a collection of stories about Muhammad's life, behavior, and sayings, all of which provided a model of a righteous and ethical life. In turn, in the generations following his death, Muslim leaders created the *Sharia*, the system of Islamic law based on the Koran and Hadith.

The Political History of the Arabs After Muhammad

When Muhammad died, there were immediate problems among the Muslim Arabs. He did not name

a successor, but he had been the definitive leader of the Islamic community during his life; it seemed clear that the community was *meant* to have a leader. The Muslim elders appointed Muhammad's father in-law, Abu Bakr (r. 632 – 634), as the new leader after a period of deliberation. He became the first *Caliph,* meaning "successor": the head of the *Ummah*, the man who represented both spiritual and political authority to Muslims.

Under Abu Bakr and his successors, Umar (another of Muhammad's fathers in-law; r. 634 – 644), and Uthman (r. 644 – 655), Muslim armies expanded rapidly. This began as a means to ensure the loyalty of the fractious Arab tribes as much as to expand the faith; both Abu Bakur and Umar were forced to suppress revolts of Arab tribes, and Umar hit upon the idea of raiding Persia and Byzantium to keep the tribes loyal. For the first time in history, the Arabs embarked on a sustained campaign of conquest rather than serving others as mercenaries.

Riding their swift horses and camels and devoted to their cause, the Arab armies conquered huge amounts of territory extremely rapidly. It was the Arab army that finally conquered Persia in 637 (although it took until 650 for all Persian resistance to be vanquished), that hitherto-unconquered adversary of Rome. The Arabs conquered Syria and seized Byzantine territory in Anatolia equally quickly: Egypt was conquered by 642, with an attempted Byzantine counter-attack fought off in 645. Within twenty years of the death of Muhammad, the heartland of the Middle East was firmly in Arab Muslim hands.

Part of the success of the first decades of the Arab conquests was because of the vulnerability of Byzantium and Persia at the time, and another part was the tactical skill of Arab soldiers. The Arabs conquered Persia not just because it was weakened by its wars with Byzantium (most importantly its defeat by Heraclius in 627), but because many Arab clans had fought as mercenaries for both sides in the conflict; great wealth had been flowing into Arabia for decades, and the Arabs were already veteran soldiers. They had learned both Roman and Persian tactics and strategy and they were skilled at siegecraft, intelligence-gathering, and open battle alike.

The Arab armies were easily the match of the Byzantine and Persian forces. The Arabs were able to field armies of about 20,000 – 30,000 men, with a total force of closer to 200,000 by about 700 CE. Most were Arabs from Arabia itself, along with Arabs who had settled in Syria and Palestine and were then recruited. A smaller percentage were non-Arabs who converted and joined the armies. Tactically, the majority were infantry who fought with spears and swords and were lightly-armored.

The major tactical advantage of the Arab armies was their speed: horses and camels were important less as animals to fight from than as means of transportation for the lightly-armored and equipped armies. Soldiers were paid in coins captured as booty and whole armies were expected to buy their supplies as they marched rather than relying on heavy baggage trains. Their conquests were a kind of sustained sprint as a result. Likewise, one specific military "technology" that the Arabs used to great effect was camels, since no other culture was as adept at training and using camels as were the Arabs. Camels allowed the Arab armies to cross deserts and launch sudden attacks on their enemies, often catching them by surprise.

Finally, especially in Byzantine territories, high taxes and ongoing struggles between the official Orthodox form of Christianity and various other Christian sects led many Byzantine citizens to welcome their new Arab rulers; taxes often went *down*, and the Arabs were indifferent to which variety of Christian their new

subjects happened to be. In addition, the Arabs made little effort to convert non-Arabs to Islam for several generations after the initial conquests. To be clear, there was plenty of bloodshed during the Arab conquests, including the deaths of many civilians, but the long-term experience of Arab rule in former Byzantine territories was no more, and probably less, oppressive than it had been under Byzantium.

The Umayyad Caliphate and the Shia

The second caliph, Umar, was murdered by a slave in 644 and the Muslim leaders had to pick the next caliph. They chose an early convert and companion of Muhammad, Uthman. Many members of the Muslim community, however, supported Muhammad's cousin and son in-law Ali, claiming he should be the head of the Ummah, as someone who was part of Muhammad's direct family line. That group was known as the "party" or "faction" of Ali: the *Shia* of Ali (note that Shia is also frequently spelled "Shi'ite" in English). For Shia Muslims, the central idea was that only descendants of Muhammad should lead the Ummah. The majority of Muslims, known as Sunnis ("traditionalists"), however, argued that any sufficiently righteous and competent leader could be appointed caliph.

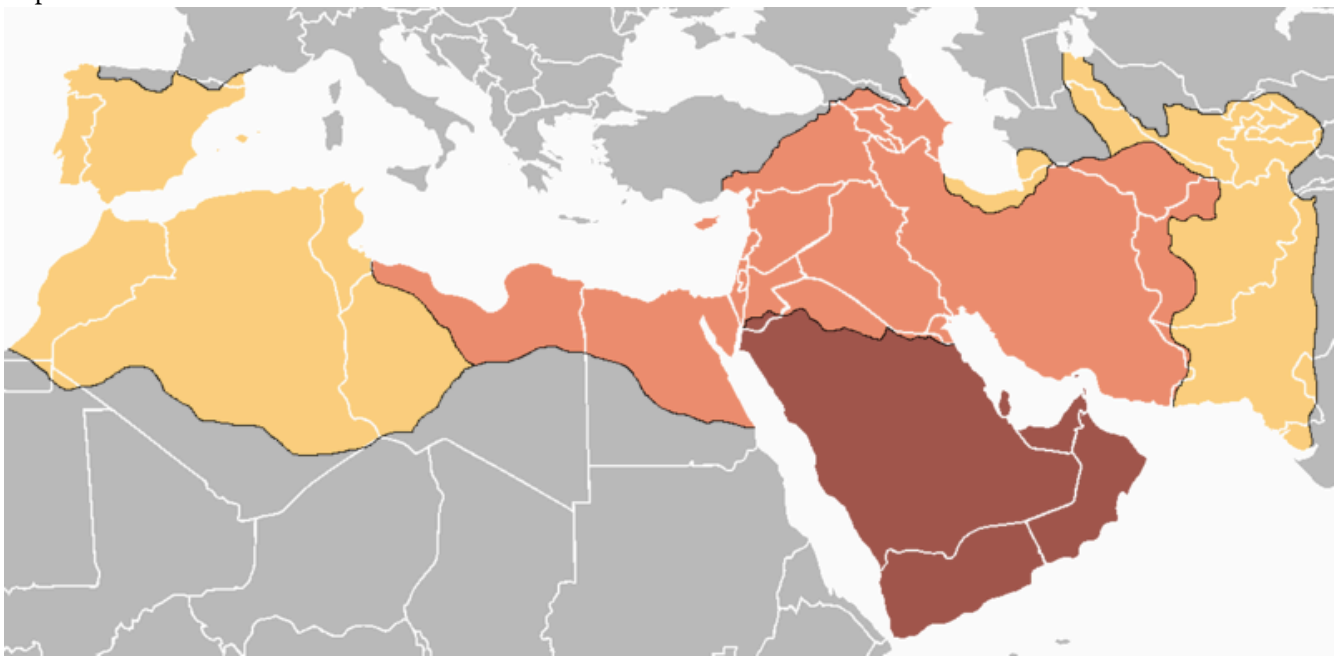
While the Shia rejected Uthman's authority in theory, there was as yet no outright violence between the two factions within the larger Muslim community. In 656 Uthman died, the victim of a short-lived Egyptian rebellion against the Arabs. Ali was elected as the next caliph, seemingly ending the dispute over who should lead the Ummah. Unfortunately for Muslim unity, however, a significant number of Arab leaders disagreed with Ali's policies and chose to support a rival would-be caliph, a relative of Uthman named Mu'awiya, a member of the Umayyad clan governing Syria. Ali was murdered by a rebel (unrelated to the power struggle over the caliphate) in 661, cementing the Umayyad claim on power, but not the doctrinal dispute between Shia and Sunni.

It was thus under the leadership of caliphs who were not themselves related to Muhammad's family line that the Arab conquests not only continued, but stabilized in the form of a true empire. The Umayyad clan created the first long-lasting and stable Muslim state: the Umayyad Caliphate. It was centered in Syria and lasted almost 100 years. It supervised the consolidation of the gains of the Arab armies to date, along with vast new conquests in North Africa and Spain. The Umayyads were capable administrators and skilled generals and the majority of Muslims saw the Umayyad rulers as the legitimate caliphs.

What they could not do, however, was destroy the Shia, despite Ali's death. Shia Muslims, representing about 10% of the population of the Ummah (then and now), viewed the Umayyad government as fundamentally illegitimate, rejecting the very idea of a caliphate and arguing instead that the faithful should be led by an *Imam*: a direct biological and spiritual descendant of Muhammad's family. When Ali's son Hussein, then the leader of the Shia and a grandson of Muhammad himself, was killed by the Umayyads in 680, the permanent breach between Sunni and Shia was cemented.

By 700 CE, the Umayyads had conquered all of North Africa as far as the Atlantic. Then, in 711, they invaded Spain and smashed the Visigothic kingdom, definitively ending Arian Christianity across both North

Africa and Spain. They were finally stopped in 732 by a Frankish army led by the Frankish lord Charles Martel at the Battle of Poitiers; this marked the end of the Arab conquests in Europe. Likewise, despite conquering large amounts of Byzantine territory, Constantinople itself withstood a huge siege in 718 and Byzantine forces then pushed back Arab forces in Anatolia.



The Arab Conquests, stretching from Persia in the east to Morocco and Spain in the west. The colors correspond to chronology: Arabia itself was united under Muhammad and his immediate successors, the regions in orange under the first four caliphs, and the regions in yellow under the Umayyads.

In Africa, Umayyad armies also attacked Nubia, still one of the richest kingdoms in the region, but were unable to defeat it. For the first time, the caliphate signed a peace treaty with a non-Muslim state; this was an important precedent because it established the idea that a Muslim state could acknowledge the political legitimacy of a non-Muslim one. Afterwards, the Umayyad Caliphate came to deal with non-Muslim powers primarily in terms of normal diplomacy rather than through the lens of holy war.

In 751, Arab forces went so far as to defeat a Chinese army in Central Asia outside of the caravan city of Samarkand (they fought an army of the Tang dynasty, which had been expanding along the Silk Road). The last Umayyad caliph had been murdered shortly before this conflict, however, and the Muslim forces thus had little reason to continue their expansion. This battle marked the furthest extent of the core Muslim-ruled territories. For several centuries to follow, the Muslim world thus consisted of the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain.

The Umayyad Government and Society

The Umayyads did not just complete and consolidate the conquests of the Arabs. They also established lasting forms of governance. They quickly abandoned the practice of having elders come together to appoint

leadership, insisting on a hereditary line of caliphs. This alone caused a civil war in the late seventh century, as some of their Muslim subjects rose up, claiming that they had perverted the proper line of leadership in the community. The Umayyads won that war, too.

The major problem for the Umayyads was the sheer size of their empire. Just like other rapid conquests, like that of Alexander the Great 1,000 years earlier, in the course of just a few decades a people found itself in control of enormous swaths of territory. The Arabs had a strong lingual and cultural identity and many of the Arab conquerors saw themselves as a people apart from their new subjects, regardless of religious belief. Thus, while non-Arabs were certainly encouraged to convert to Islam, the power structure of the Caliphate remained resolutely Arabic. As with the Greeks under Alexander, the Romans during their centuries of conquest, and the Germanic tribes that sliced up the western Roman empire, the Arabs found themselves a small minority ruling over various other groups.

To try to effectively govern this vast new empire, the Umayyads took over and adapted the bureaucracies of the people they conquered, including those of both the Byzantines and, especially, the Persians. They created new borders and provinces to better suit their administration and ensure that tax revenue made it back to the capital at Damascus, with the idiosyncratic additional factor of needing to pay an ongoing salary to all Arab soldiers, even after those soldiers had retired.

One change that was to last until the present was lingual. Unlike in the Greek case during the Hellenistic period, Arabic was to replace the vernacular of the land conquered during the Arab conquests. The only exceptions were Persian, which would eventually become the modern language of Farsi (the vernacular of the present-day country of Iran), and Spain, where Arabic and Spanish coexisted until Christian kingdoms reconquered Spain many centuries later. This lingual uniformity was a huge benefit to trade and cultural and intellectual exchange, because one could travel from Spain to India and speak a single language, as well as be protected from bandits by a single administration.

Arabs also followed the patterns of Greek and Roman conquerors by colonizing the places they conquered. At first, they settled in garrison and administrative towns, but they also set up communities within conquered cities. As Arabic became the language of daily life, not just of administration, Arabs and non-Arabs mixed more readily. Arabs also built new cities all across their empire, the most notable being a small town in Egypt that would eventually grow into Cairo. They built these cities on the Hellenistic and Roman model: planned grids of streets at right angles. In the center of each city was the mosque, which served not only as the center of worship, but in various other functions. Mosques were both figuratively and literally central to the cities of the Umayyad caliphate. They were the predominant public spaces for discussion among men. They were the courthouses and the banks. They provided schooling and instruction. They were also often attached to administrative offices and governmental functions.

The Umayyads imposed taxes across their entire empire, even insisting that their fellow Arabs pay a tax on their land, which was met with enormous resistance because, to Arabs unused to paying taxes at all, it implied subordination. By channeling taxes through their new, efficient bureaucracy, the Umayyads were able

to support a very large standing army. That allowed them not only to keep up the pressure on surrounding lands, but to quash rebellions.

The Umayyads supervised a tremendous expansion in trade and commerce across the Middle East and North Africa as well. Muhammad had been a merchant, after all, and the longstanding commercial practices and regulations of Arabic society were codified in Sharia law – in that sense, commercial law was directly linked to religious righteousness. Likewise, even from this early period, the caliphate supported maritime trade networks. Muslim traders regularly sailed all across the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, and eventually as far as China and the Philippines. In waters controlled by the caliphate, piracy was contained, so trade prospered even more.

One effect of Arab seafaring is that Islam spread along sea routes well beyond the political control of any of the Arab empires and kingdoms to come; today the single largest predominantly Muslim country is Indonesia, thanks to Muslim merchants that brought their faith along the trade routes. By the time European explorers began to establish permanent ties to Asian kingdoms and empires in the sixteenth century, Islam was established in various regions from India to the Pacific, thousands of miles from its Middle Eastern heartland.

Other Faiths

One of the noteworthy aspects of the Arab conquests is the complex role of conversion. The Koran specifically forbids the forcible conversion of Jews and Christians. It does allow that non-Muslim monotheists pay a special tax, however. For the century of Umayyad rule, only about 10% of the population was Muslim. Non-Muslims, called *dhimmis* (followers of religions tolerated by law) had to pay a head tax and were not allowed to share in governmental decision-making or in the spoils of war. Many Jews and Christians found Arab rule preferable to Byzantine rule, however, because the Byzantine government had actively persecuted religious dissenters and the Arabs did not. Likewise, taxes were lower under the Arabs as compared to Byzantium. These traditions of relative tolerance would continue all the way up to the modern era in places like the Ottoman Empire. However, even without forcible pressure, many people did convert to Islam either out of a heartfelt attraction to Islam or because of simple pragmatism; in some cases, Muslim generals rejected the attempted conversions of local people because it threatened their tax base so much.

There was also the case of the nomadic peoples of North Africa, collectively referred to as "Berbers" by the Arabs. The Berbers were hardy, warlike tribesmen living in rugged mountainous regions across North Africa. They had already seen the Romans and the Vandals come and go and simply kept up their traditions with the arrival of the Arabs. They were, however, polytheists, which the Muslims were unwilling to tolerate. Thus, faced with the choice of forcible conversion or death, the Berbers converted and then promptly joined the Arab armies as auxiliaries. This lent tremendous strength to the Arab forces and helps explain the relative ease of their conquests, especially in Spain.

The members of other monotheistic faiths who chose not to convert were often left much more free to practice their religions than they would have been in Christian lands, because the Umayyads simply did not

care about theological disagreements among their Jewish and Christian subjects so long as the taxes were paid. Over time, various sects of Christianity survived in Muslim lands that vanished in kingdoms that were officially, and rigidly, Christian. Likewise, Jews found that they were generally better off in Muslim lands than in Christian kingdoms because of their safety from official persecution. Jews became vitally important merchants, scholars, bankers, and traders all across the caliphate.

Zoroastrianism, however, declined in the long run. The first generations of Muslim rulers accepted Zoroastrians as People of the Book like Jews and Christians, but that acceptance atrophied over time. Muslims were less tolerant of Zoroastrianism because it did not venerate the God of Abraham and its traditions were markedly different from those of Judaism and Christianity. Likewise, as Muslim rule over Persia was consolidated over time, the practical necessity of respecting Zoroastrianism as the majority religion of the Persian people weakened. By the tenth century, most Zoroastrians who had not converted to Islam migrated to India, where they remain today in communities known as the Parsees.

The Abbasids

The Umayyads fell from power in 750 because of a revolutionary uprising against their rule led by the Abbasids, a clan descended from Muhammad's uncle. The Abbasids were supported by many non-Arab but Muslim subjects of the Caliphate (called *mawali*) who resented the fact that the Umayyads had always protected the status of Arabs at the expense of non-Arab Muslims in their empire. After seizing control of the Caliphate, the Abbasids went on a concerted murdering spree, trying to eliminate all potential Umayyad competitors, with only a single member of the Umayyad leadership surviving. The Abbasids lost control of some of the territories that had been held by the Umayyads (starting with Spain, which formed its own caliphate under the surviving Umayyad), but the majority of the lands conquered in the Arab conquests a century earlier remained in their control.

The true golden age of medieval Islam took place during the Abbasid Caliphate. The Abbasids moved the capital of the caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad, which they founded in part to be nearer to the heart of Persian governmental traditions. There, they combined Islam even more closely with Persian traditions of art and learning. They also created a tradition of fair rulership, in contrast to the memory of Umayyad corruption. The Abbasid caliphs were the leaders of both the political and spiritual orders of their society, seeking to make sure everything from law to trade to religious practice was running smoothly and fairly. They enforced fair trade practices and used their well-trained armies primarily to ensure good trade routes, to enforce fair tax collection, and to put down the occasional rebellion. The Abbasid rulers represented, in short, a kind of enlightened despotism that was greatly ahead of Byzantium or the Latin kingdoms of Europe in terms of its cosmopolitanism. The Abbasids abandoned Arab-centric policies and instead adopted Muslim universalism that allowed any Muslim the possibility of achieving the highest state offices and political and social importance.

Perhaps the most important phenomenon within the Abbasid caliphate was the great emphasis and

respect the caliphs placed on learning. New discoveries were made in astronomy, metallurgy, and medicine, and learned works from a variety of languages were translated and preserved in Arabic. The most significant tradition of scholarship surrounding Aristotle's works, in particular, took place in the Abbasid caliphate.

The major library in Baghdad was called the House of Wisdom; it was one of the great libraries of the world at the time. The various advances that took place in the Abbasid Caliphate included:

Medicine: far more accurate diagnoses and treatments than existed anywhere else (outside of China).

Optics: early telescopes, along with the definitive refutation of the idea that the eye sends out beams to detect things and instead receives information reflected off of objects.

Chemistry: various methods including evaporation, filtration, sublimation, and even distillation. Despite the specific ban on intoxicants in the Koran, it was Abbasid chemists who invented distilled spirits: *al-kuhl*, meaning "the essence," from which the English word alcohol derives.

Mathematics: the creation of Arabic numerals, based on Hindu characters, which were far easier to work with than the clunky Roman equivalents. In turn, the Abbasids invented algebra and trigonometry.

Geography and exploration: accurate maps of Asia and East Africa, thanks to the presence of Muslim merchant colonies as far as China, along with new navigational technologies like the astrolabe (a device that is used to determine latitude while at sea).

Banking: the invention of checks and forms of commercial insurance for merchants.

Massive irrigation systems, which made Mesopotamia nearly on par with Egypt as the richest farmland in the world.

Scholars in the House of Wisdom in Baghdad.

In addition, the Abbasid Caliphate witnessed a major increase in literacy. Not only were Muslims (men and women alike) encouraged to memorize the Koran itself, but scholars and merchants were often interchangeable; unlike medieval Christianity, Islam did not reject commerce as being somehow morally tainted. Thus, Muslims, whose literacy was due to study of specifically Islamic texts, the Koran and the Hadith especially, easily used the same skills in commerce. The overall result was a higher literacy rate than anywhere else in the world at the time, with the concomitant advantages in technological progress and commercial prosperity.

The success of the Abbasids in ruling a huge, diverse empire arose in part from their willingness to follow Persian traditions of rule (a pattern that would be repeated by later Turkic and Mongol rulers). The Abbasid caliphs employed Persian bureaucrats and ruled in a manner similar to the earlier Persian Great Kings, although they did not adopt that title. Their role as caliphs was in protecting the *ummah* and providing a political framework in which *sharia* law could prosper – it was in the Abbasid period that Islamic law was truly developed and codified. From the Persian tradition the Abbasid caliphs borrowed both practical traditions of bureaucracy and administration and an equally important tradition of political status: they were the rulers over many peoples, acknowledging local identities while expecting deference and, of course, taxes.

At its height, the Abbasid Empire was truly enormous– it covered more land area than had the Roman Empire. Its merchants traveled from Spain to China, and it maintained diplomatic relations with the rulers of territories thousands of miles from Baghdad. The Caliphate reached its peak during the rule of the caliph

Harun al-Rashid (r. 786 – 809). His palace was so enormous that it occupied one-third of Baghdad. He and the greatest early-medieval European king, Charlemagne, exchanged presents and friendly letters, albeit out of political expediency: Charlemagne was the enemy of the Cordoban Caliphate of Spain, the last vestige of Umayyad power, and the Abbasids acted as an external pressure that Charlemagne hoped would make the Byzantine emperors recognize the legitimacy of his imperial title (as an aside, one of Charlemagne's prized possessions was his pet elephant, sent to his distant court by al-Rashid as a goodwill gift).

Already by al-Rashid's reign, however, the Caliphate was splintering; it was simply too large to run efficiently without advanced bureaucratic institutions. North Africa west of Egypt seceded by 800, emerging as a group of rival Islamic kingdoms. Other territories followed suit during the rest of the ninth century, leaving the Caliphate in direct control of only the core lands of Mesopotamia. Within its remaining territory the caliphs faced uprisings as well. Even the idea of a united (Sunni) ummah was a casualty of this political breakdown – the ruler of the Spanish kingdom claimed to be the "true" caliph, with a Shia dynasty in Egypt known as the Fatimids contesting both claims since it rejected the very idea of a Sunni caliph.

The political independence of the Caliphate ended in 945 when it was conquered by Persian tribesmen, who took control of secular power while keeping the Caliph alive as a figurehead. In 1055, a Turkish group, the Seljuks (the same group then menacing Byzantium), seized control and did exactly the same thing. For the next two centuries the Abbasid caliphs enjoyed the respect and spiritual deference of most Sunni Muslims, but exercised no political power of their own.

As Seljuk power increased, that of the Caliphate itself waned. Numerous independent, and rival, Islamic kingdoms emerged across the Middle East, North Africa, and northern India, leaving even the Middle Eastern heartland vulnerable to foreign invasion, first by European crusaders starting in 1095, and most disastrously during the Mongol invasion of 1258 (under a grandson of Genghis Khan). It was the Mongols who ended the Caliphate once and for all, murdering the last caliph and obliterating much of the infrastructure built during Abbasid rule in the process.

Europe

Two parts of Europe came under Arab rule: Spain and Sicily. Spain was the last of the large territories to be conquered during the initial Arab conquests, and Sicily was eventually conquered during the Abbasid period. In both areas, the rulers, Arab and North African immigrants, and new converts to Islam lived alongside those who remained Christian or Jewish. During the Abbasid period in particular, Spain and Sicily were important as bridges between the Islamic and Christian worlds, where all faiths and peoples were tolerated. The city of Cordoba in Spain was a glorious metropolis, larger and more prosperous than any in Europe and any but Baghdad in the Arab world itself – it had a population of 100,000, paved streets, street lamps, and even indoor plumbing in the houses of the wealthy. All of the Arabic learning noted above made its way to Europe primarily through contact between people in Spain and Sicily.

The greatest period of contrast between the eastern lands of Byzantium and the caliphates, on the one hand, and most of Europe, on the other, was between the eighth and eleventh centuries. During that period, there were no cities in Europe with populations of over 15,000. The goods produced there, not to mention the

quality of scholarship, were of abysmal quality compared to their Arab (or Byzantine) equivalents, and Christian Europe thus imported numerous goods from the Arab world, often through Spain and Sicily. Europe was largely a barter economy while the Muslim world was a currency-based market economy, with Shariah law providing a sophisticated legal framework for business transactions. Especially as Byzantium declined, the Muslim kingdoms stood at the forefront of scholarship, commerce, and military power.

Conclusion

As should be clear, the civilizations of the Middle East and North Africa were transformed by Islam, and the changes that Islam's spread brought with it were as permanent as were the results of the Christianization of the Roman Empire earlier. The geographical contours of these two faiths would remain largely in place up to the present, while the shared civilization that brought them into being continued to change.

Image Citations (Creative Commons):

Map of Arabia – Murraytheb

The Kaaba – المصري الأصيل

The Arab Conquests – Brian Szymanski

House of Wisdom – Zereshk

This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 12: Islam and the Caliphates in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: EPISTLE TO THE SECRETARIES

Please use the link on Blackboard to access Abd al-Hamid: Epistle to the secretaries ca. 750.

Source:

Text abridged from: Ibn Khaldun – The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History.
Translated from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal. Abridged and edited by N. J. Dawood.
London, Routledge and Kegan Paul in association with Secker and Warburg, 1967.

PRIMARY SOURCE: PROCOPIUS ON JUSTINIAN AND THEODORA

This text is available online at the Medieval Sourcebook.

Justinian Suppresses the Nika Revolts from *The Wars*, 532

from Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, xxiv, translated by H.B. Dewing (New York: Macmillan, 1914), pp. 219-230, slightly abbridged and reprinted in Leon Barnard and Theodore B. Hodges, *Readings in European History*, (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 52-55

At this time [January 1, 532] an insurrection broke out unexpectedly in Byzantium among the populace, and, contrary to expectation, it proved to be a very serious affair, and ended in great harm to the people and to the senate, as the following account will show.

In every city the population has been divided for a long time past into the Blue and the Green factions; but within comparatively recent times it has come about that, for the sake of these names and the seats which the rival factions occupy in watching the games, they spend their money and abandon their bodies to the most cruel tortures, and even do not think it unworthy to die a most shameful death. And they fight against their opponents knowing not for what end they imperil themselves, but knowing well that, even if they overcome their enemy the fight, the conclusion of the matter for them will be to be carried off straight away to the prison, and finally, after suffering extreme torture, to be destroyed. So there grows up in them against their fellow men a hostility which has no cause, and at no time does it cease or disappear, for it gives place neither to the ties of marriage nor of relationship nor of friendship, and the case is the same even though those who differ with respect to these colours be brothers or any other kin. . . . I, for my part, am unable to call this anything except a disease of the soul. . . .

At this time the officers of the city administration in Byzantium were leading away to death some of the rioters. But the members of the two factions conspiring together and declaring a truce with each other, seized the prisoners and then straightway entered the prison and released all those who were in confinement there. . . . Fire was applied to the city as if it had fallen under the hand of an enemy. . . . The emperor and his consort , with a few members of the senate shut themselves up in the palace and remained quietly there. Now the watch-word which the populace passed to one another was Nika [i.e., "Conquer"]. . . .

....On the fifth day of the insurrection in the late afternoon the Emperor Justinian gave orders to Hypatius

and Pompeius, nephews of the late emperor, Anastasius, to go home as quickly as possible, either because he suspected that some plot was being matured by them against his own person, or, it may be, because destiny brought them to this. But they feared that the people would force them to the throne (as in fact fell out), and they said that they would be doing wrong if they should abandon their sovereign when he found himself in such danger. When the Emperor Justinian heard this, he inclined still more to his suspicion, and he bade them quit the palace instantly. . . .

On the following day at sunrise it became known to the people that both men bad quit the palace where they had been staying. So the whole population ran to them, and they declared Hypatius emperor and prepared to lead him to the market place to assume the power. But the wife of Hypatius, Mary, a discreet woman, who had the greatest reputation for prudence, laid hold of her husband and would not let go, but cried out with loud lamentation and with entreaties to all her kinsmen that the people were leading him on the road to death. But since the throng overpowered her, she unwillingly released her husband, and he by no will of his own came to the Forum of Constantine, where they summoned him to the throne; . . .

The emperor and his court were deliberating as to whether it would be better for them if they remained or if they took to flight in the ships. And many opinions were expressed favouring either course. And the Empress Theodora also spoke to the following effect: "My opinion then is that the present time, above all others, is inopportune for flight, even though it bring safety. . . . For one who has been an emperor it is unendurable to be a fugitive. May I never be separated from this purple, and may I not live that day on which those who meet me shall not address me as mistress. If, now, it is your wish to save yourself, O Emperor, there is no difficulty. For we have much money, and there is the sea, here the boats. However consider whether it will not come about after you have been saved that you would gladly exchange that safety for death. For as for myself, I approve a certain ancient saying that royalty is a good burial-shroud." When the queen had spoken thus, all were filled with boldness, and, turning their thoughts towards resistance, they began to consider how they might be able to defend themselves if any hostile force should come against them. . . .All the hopes of the emperor were centred upon Belisarius and Mundus, of whom the former, Belisarius, had recently returned from the Persian war bringing with him a following which was both powerful and imposing, and in particular he had a great number of spearmen and guards who bad received their training in battles and the perils of warfare. . . .

When Hypatius reached the hippodrome, he went up immediately to where the emperor is accustomed to take his place and seated himself on the royal throne from which the emperor was always accustomed to view the equestrian and athletic contests. And from the palace Mundus went out through the gate which, from the circling descent, has been given the name of the Snail. . . . Belisarius, with difficulty and not without danger and great exertion, made his way over ground covered by ruins and half-burned buildings, and ascended to the stadium. . . . Concluding that he must go against the populace who had taken their stand in the hippodrome-a vast multitude crowding each other in great disorder-he drew his sword from its sheatb and, commanding the others to do likewise, with a shout be advanced upon them at a run. But the populace, who were standing in a mass and not in order, at the sight of armoured soldiers who had a great reputatation for bravery and experience in war, and seeing that they struck out with their swords unsparingly, beat a hasty retreat. . . . [Mundus]

straightway made a sally into the hippodrome through the entrance which they call the Gate of Death. Then indeed from both sides the partisans of Hypatius were assailed with might and main and destroyed. . . . There perished among the populace on that day more than thirty thousand. . . . The soldiers killed both [Hypatius and Pompeius] on the following day and threw bodies into the sea. . . . This was the end of the insurrection in Byzantium.

This text is available online at the Medieval Sourcebook.

Excerpt from *The Secret History*

trans. Richard Atwater, in Procopius, *Secret History*, (Chicago: P. Covicii; New York: Covicii Friedal, 1927), reprinted by University of Michigan Press, 1961, with indication that 1927 copyright was expired.

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from Chapter VII

I think this is as good a time as any to describe the personal appearance of the man. Now in physique he was neither tall nor short, but of average height; not thin, but moderately plump; his face was round, and not bad looking, for he had good color, even when he fasted for two days. To make a long description short, he much resembled Domitian, Vespasian's son....

Now such was Justinian in appearance; but his character was something I could not fully describe. For he was at once villainous and amenable; as people say colloquially, a moron. He was never truthful with anyone, but always guileful in what he said and did, yet easily hoodwinked by any who wanted to deceive him. His nature was an unnatural mixture of folly and wickedness. What in olden times a peripatetic philosopher said was also true of him, that opposite qualities combine in a man as in the mixing of colors. I will try to portray him, however, insofar as I can fathom his complexity.

This Emperor, then, was deceitful, devious, false, hypocritical, two-faced, cruel, skilled in dissembling his thought, never moved to tears by either joy or pain, though he could summon them artfully at will when the occasion demanded, a liar always, not only offhand, but in writing, and when he swore sacred oaths to his subjects in their very hearing. Then he would immediately break his agreements and pledges, like the vilest of slaves, whom indeed only the fear of torture drives to confess their perjury. A faithless friend, he was a treacherous enemy, insane for murder and plunder, quarrelsome and revolutionary, easily led to anything, but never willing to listen to good counsel, quick to plan mischief and carry it out, but finding even the hearing of anything good distasteful to his ears.

How could anyone put Justinian's ways into words? These and many even worse vices were disclosed in him

as in no other mortal: nature seemed to have taken the wickedness of all other men combined and planted it in this man's soul. And besides this, he was too prone to listen to accusations; and too quick to punish. For he decided such cases without full examination, naming the punishment when he had heard only the accuser's side of the matter. Without hesitation he wrote decrees for the plundering of countries, sacking of cities, and slavery of whole nations, for no cause whatever. So that if one wished to take all the calamities which had befallen the Romans before this time and weigh them against his crimes, I think it would be found that more men had been murdered by this single man than in all previous history.

He had no scruples about appropriating other people's property, and did not even think any excuse necessary, legal or illegal, for confiscating what did not belong to him. And when it was his, he was more than ready to squander it in insane display, or give it as an unnecessary bribe to the barbarians. In short, he neither held on to any money himself nor let anyone else keep any: as if his reason were not avarice, but jealousy of those who had riches. Driving all wealth from the country of the Romans in this manner, he became the cause of universal poverty.

Now this was the character of Justinian, so far as I can portray it.

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *Epistle to the Secretaries* AND *Procopius on Justinian and Theodora*.

Reading Journal

For this module's journal you will focus on the selections by Procopius. His account of the Nika revolt was composed in Procopius' official capacity as a court official and historian, while the selection from *Secret History* was, as the text implied, written privately and not circulated. Does the existence of the *Secret History* compromise Procopius as a reliable source on Justinian's reign? What do you think?

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART X

MODULE NINE: THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

READING: EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Christopher Brooks

Introduction

Once the last remnants of Roman power west of the Balkans were extinguished in the late fifth century CE, the history of Europe moved into the period that is still referred to as "medieval," meaning "middle" (between). Roughly 1,000 years separated the fall of Rome and the beginning of the Renaissance, the period of "rebirth" in which certain Europeans believed they were recapturing the lost glory of the classical world. Historians have long since dismissed the conceit that the Middle Ages were nothing more than the "Dark Ages" so maligned by Renaissance thinkers, and thus this chapter seeks to examine the early medieval world on its own terms – in particular, what were the political, social, and cultural realities of post-Roman Europe?

The Latin Church

After the fall of the western Roman empire, it was the Church that united Western Europe and provided a sense of European identity. That religious tradition would persist and spread, ultimately extinguishing the so-called "pagan" religions, despite the political fragmentation left in the wake of the fall of Rome. The one thing that nearly all Europeans eventually came to share was membership in the Latin Church (a note on nomenclature: for the sake of clarity, this chapter will use the term "Latin" instead of "Catholic" to describe the western Church based in Rome during this period, because both the western and eastern "Orthodox" churches claimed to be equally "catholic": universal). As an institution, it alone was capable of preserving at least some of the legacy of ancient Rome.

That legacy was reflected in the learning preserved by the Church. For example, even though Latin faded away as a spoken language, all but vanishing by about the eighth century even in Italy, the Bible and written communication between educated elites was still in Latin. Latin went from being the vernacular of the Roman Empire to being, instead, the language of the educated elite all across Europe. An educated person (almost always a member of the Church in this period) from England could still correspond to an educated person in Spain or Italy, but that correspondence would take place in Latin. He or she would not be able to speak to their counterpart on the other side of the subcontinent, but they would share a written tongue.

Christianity displayed a remarkable power to convert even peoples who had previously proved militarily stronger than Christian opponents, from the Germanic invaders who had dismantled the western empire to the Slavic peoples that fought Byzantium to a standstill. Conversion often took place both because of the astonishing perseverance of Christian missionaries and the desire on the part of non-Christians to have bet-

ter political relationships with Christians. That noted, there were also straightforward cases of forced conversions through military force – as described below, the Frankish king Charlemagne exemplified this tendency. Whether through heartfelt conversion or force, by the eleventh century almost everyone in Europe was a Christian, a Latin Christian in the west and an Orthodox Christian in the east.

The Papacy

The Latin Church was distinguished by the at least nominal leadership of the papacy based in Rome – indeed, it was the papal claim to leadership of the Christian Church as a whole that drove a permanent wedge between the western and eastern churches, since the Byzantine emperors claimed authority over both church and state. The popes were not just at the apex of the western church, they often ruled as kings unto themselves, and they always had complex relationships with other rulers. For the entire period of the early Middle Ages (from the end of the western Roman Empire until the eleventh century), the popes were rarely acknowledged as the sovereigns of the Church outside of Italy. Instead, this period was important in the longer history of institutional Christianity because many popes at least *claimed* authority over doctrine and organization – centuries later, popes would look back on the claims of their predecessors as "proof" that the papacy had *always* been in charge.

An important example of an early pope who created such a precedent is Gregory the Great, who was pope at the turn of the seventh century. Gregory still considered Rome part of the Byzantine Empire, but by that time Byzantium could not afford troops to help defend the city of Rome, and he was keenly interested in developing papal independence. As a result, Gregory shrewdly played different Germanic kings off against each other and used his spiritual authority to gain their trust and support. He sent missionaries into the lands outside of the kingdoms to spread Christianity, both out of a genuine desire to save souls and a pragmatic desire to see wider influence for the Church.

Gregory's authority was not based on military power, nor did most Christians at the time assume that the pope of Rome (all bishops were then called "pope," meaning simply "father") was the spiritual head of the entire Church. Instead, popes like Gregory slowly but surely asserted their authority by creating mutually-beneficial relationships with kings and by overseeing the expansion of Christian missionary work. In the eighth century, the papacy produced a (forged, as it turned out) document known as the Donation of Constantine in which the Roman emperor Constantine supposedly granted authority over the western Roman Empire to the pope of Rome; that document was often cited by popes over the next several centuries as "proof" of their authority. Nevertheless, even powerful and assertive popes had to be realistic about the limits of their power, with many popes being deposed or even murdered in the midst of political turmoil.

Thus, Christianity spread not because of an all-powerful, highly centralized institution, but because of the flexibility and pragmatism of missionaries and the support of secular rulers (the Franks, considered below, were critical in this regard). All across Europe, missionaries had official instructions not to battle pagan religious practice, but to subtly reshape it. It was less important that pagans understood the nuances of Chris-

tianity and more important that they accepted its essential truth. All manner of "pagan" practices, words, and traditions survive into the present thanks to the crossover between Christianity and old pagan practices, including the names of the days of the week in English (Wednesday is Odin's, or Wotan's, day, Thursday is Thor's day, etc). and the word "Easter" itself, from the Norse goddess of spring and fertility named Eostre.

As an example, in a letter to one of the major early English Christian leaders (later a saint), Bede, Pope Gregory advised Bede and his followers not to tear down pagan temples, but to consecrate and reuse them. Likewise, the existing pagan days of sacrifice were to be rededicated to God and the saints. Clearly, the priority was not an attempted purge of pagan culture, but instead the introduction of Christianity in a way that could more easily truly take root. Monks sometimes squabbled about the nuances of worship, but the key development was simply the spread of Christianity and the growing influence of the Church.

Characteristics of Medieval Christianity

The fundamental belief of medieval Christians was that the Church as an institution was the only path to spiritual salvation. It was much less important that a Christian understand any of the details of Christian theology than it was that they participate in Christian worship and, most importantly, receive the sacraments administered by the clergy. Given that the immense majority of the population was completely illiterate, it was impossible for most Christians to have access to anything but the rudiments of Christian belief. The path to salvation was thus not knowing anything about the life of Christ, the characteristics of God, or the names of the apostles, but of two things above all else: the sacraments and the relevant saints to pray to.

The sacraments were, and remain in contemporary Catholicism, the essential spiritual rituals conducted by ordained priests. Much of the practical, day-to-day power and influence exercised by the Church was based on the fact that *only* priests could administer the sacraments, making access to the Church a prerequisite for any chance of spiritual salvation in the minds of medieval Christians. The sacraments are:

Baptism – believed to be necessary to purge original sin from a newborn child. Without baptism, medieval Christians believed, even a newborn who died would be denied entrance to heaven. Thus, most people tried to have their newborns baptized immediately after birth, since infant mortality was extremely high.

Communion – following the example of Christ at the last supper, the ritual by which medieval Christians connected spiritually with God. One significant element of this was the belief in *transubstantiation*: the idea that the wine and holy wafer literally transformed into the blood and body of Christ at the moment of consumption.

Confession – necessary to receive forgiveness for sins, which every human constantly committed.

Confirmation – the pledge to be a faithful member of the Church taken in young adulthood.

Marriage – believed to be sanctified by God.

Holy orders – the vows taken by new members of the clergy.

Last Rites – a final ritual carried out at the moment of death to send the soul on to purgatory –

the spiritual realm between earth and heaven where the soul's sins would be burned away over years of atonement and purification.

Unlike in most forms of contemporary Christianity, which tend to focus on the relationship of the individual to God directly, medieval Christians did not usually feel worthy of direct contact with the divine. Instead, the saints were hugely important to medieval Christians because they were both holy and yet still human. Unlike the omnipotent and remote figure of God, medieval Christians saw the saints as beings who cared for individual people and communities and who would potentially intercede on behalf of their supplicants. Thus, every village, every town, every city, and every kingdom had a patron saint who was believed to advocate on its behalf.

Along with the patron saints, the figures of Jesus and Mary became much more important during this period. Saints had served as intermediaries before an almighty and remote deity in the Middle Ages, but the high Church officials tried to advance veneration of Christ and Mary as equally universal but less overwhelming divine figures. Mary in particular represented a positive image of women that had never existed before in Christianity. The growing importance of Mary within Christian practice led to a new focus on charity within the Church, since she was believed to intervene on behalf of supplicants without need of reward.

Medieval Politics

While most Europeans (excluding the Jewish communities, the few remaining pagans, and members of heretical groups) may have come to share a religious identity by the eleventh century, Europe was fragmented politically. The numerous Germanic tribes that had dismantled the western Roman Empire formed the nucleus of the early political units of western Christendom. The Germanic peoples themselves had started as minorities, ruling over formerly Roman subjects. They tended to inherit Roman bureaucracy and rely on its officials and laws when ruling their subjects, but they also had their own traditions of Germanic law based on clan membership.

The so-called "feudal" system of law was one based on codes of honor and reciprocity. In the original Germanic system, each person was tied to his or her clan above all else, and an attack on an individual immediately became an issue for the entire clan. Any dishonor had to be answered by an equivalent dishonor, most often meeting insult with violence. Likewise, rulership was tied closely to clan membership, with each king being the head of the most powerful clan rather than an elected official or even necessarily a hereditary monarchy that transcended clan lines. This unregulated, traditional, and violence-based system of "law," from which the modern English word "feud" derives, stood in contrast to the written codes of Roman law that still survived in the aftermath of the fall of Rome itself.

Over time, the Germanic rulers mixed with their subjects to the point that distinctions between them were nonexistent. Likewise, Roman law faded away to be replaced with traditions of feudal law and a very complex web of rights and privileges that were granted to groups within society by rulers (to help ensure the loyalty of their subjects). Thus, clan loyalty became less important over the centuries than did the rights, privileges,

and pledges of loyalty offered and held by different social categories: peasants, townsfolk, warriors, and members of the church. In the process, medieval politics evolved over time into a hierarchical, class-based structure in which kings, lords, and priests ruled over the vast majority of the population: peasants.

Eventually, the relationship between lords and kings was formalized in a system of mutual protection (or even protection racket). A lord accepted pledges of loyalty, called a pledge of fealty, from other free men called his vassals; in return for their support in war he offered them protection and land-grants called fiefs. Each vassal had the right to extract wealth from his land, meaning the peasants who lived there, so that he could afford horses, armor, and weapons. In general, vassals did not have to pay their lords taxes (all tax revenue came from the peasants). Likewise, the Church itself was an enormously wealthy and powerful landowner, and church holdings were almost always tax-exempt; bishops were often lords of their own lands, and every king worked closely with the Church's leadership in his kingdom.

Depiction of a feudal pledge of fealty from Harold Godwinson, at the time a powerful Anglo-Saxon noble and later the king of England, to William of Normandy, who would go on to defeat Harold and replace him as king of England. William claimed that Harold had pledged fealty to him, which justified his invasion (while Harold denied ever having done so).

This system arose because of the absence of other, more effective forms of government and the constant threat of violence posed by raiders. The system was never as neat and tidy as it sounds on paper; many vassals were lords of their own vassals, with the king simply being the highest lord. In turn, the problem for royal

authority was that many kings had "vassals" who had more land, wealth, and power than they did; it was very possible, even easy, for powerful nobles to make war against their king if they chose to do so. It would take centuries before the monarchs of Europe consolidated enough wealth and power to dominate their nobles, and it certainly did not happen during the Middle Ages.

One (amusing, in historical hindsight) method that kings would use to punish unruly vassals was simply visiting them and eating them out of house and home – the traditions of hospitality required vassals to welcome, feed, and entertain their king for as long as he felt like staying. Kings and queens expected respect and deference, but conspicuously absent was any appeal to what was later called the "Divine Right" of monarchs to rule. From the perspective of the noble and clerical classes at the time the monarch had to hold on to power through force of arms and personal charisma, not empty claims about being on the throne because of God's will.

Unsurprisingly, there are many instances in medieval European history in which a powerful lord simply usurped the throne, defeated the former king's forces, and became the new king. Ultimately, medieval politics represented a "warlord" system of political organization, in many cases barely a step above anarchy. Pledges of loyalty between lords and vassals served as the only assurance of stability, and those pledges were violated countless times throughout the period. The Church tried to encourage lords to live in accordance with Christian virtue, but the fact of the matter was that it was the nobility's vocation, their very social role, to fight, and thus all too often "politics" was synonymous with "armed struggle" during the Middle Ages.

England and France

Anglo-Saxon England

By about 400 CE, the Romans abandoned Britain. Their legions were needed to help defend the Roman heartland and Britain had always been an imperial frontier, with too few Romans to completely settle and "civilize" it outside of southern England. For the next three hundred years, Germanic invaders called the Anglo-Saxons (from whom we get the name "England" itself – it means "land of the Angles") from the areas around present-day northern Germany and Denmark invaded, raided, and settled in England. They fought the native Britons (i.e. the Romanized, Christian Celts native to England itself), the Cornish, the Welsh, and each other. Those Romans who had settled in England were pushed out, either fleeing to take refuge in Wales or across the channel to Brittany in northern France. England was thus the most thoroughly de-Romanized of the old Roman provinces in the west: Roman culture all but vanished, and thus English history "began" as that of the Anglo-Saxons.

Starting in the late eighth century, the Anglo-Saxons suffered waves of Viking raids that culminated in the establishment of an actual Viking kingdom in what had been Anglo-Saxon territory in eastern England. It took until 879 for the surviving English kingdom, Wessex, to defeat the Viking invaders. For a few hundred years, there was an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in England that promoted learning and culture, producing an exten-

sive literature in Old English (the best preserved example of which is the epic poem *Beowulf*). Raids started up again, however, and in 1066 William the Conqueror, a Viking-descended king from Normandy in northern France, invaded and defeated the Anglo-Saxon king and instituted Norman rule.

France

The former Roman province of Gaul is the heartland of present-day France, ruled in the aftermath of the fall of Rome by the Franks, a powerful Germanic people who invaded Gaul from across the Rhine as Roman power crumbled. The Franks were a warlike and crafty group led by a clan known as the Merovingians. A Merovingian king, Clovis (r. 481 – 511) was the first to unite the Franks and begin the process of creating a lasting kingdom named after them: France. Clovis murdered both the heads of other clans who threatened him as well as his own family members who might take over command of the Merovingians. He then expanded his territories and defeated the last remnants of Roman power in Gaul by the end of the fifth century.

In 500 CE Clovis and a few thousand of his most elite warriors converted to Latin Christianity, less out of a heartfelt sense of piety than for practical reasons: he planned to attack the Visigoths of Spain, Arian Christians who ruled over Latin Christian former Romans. By converting to Latin Christianity, Clovis ensured that the subjects of the Goths were likely to welcome him as a liberator rather than a foreign invader. He was proved right, and by 507 the Franks controlled almost all of Gaul, including formerly-Gothic territories along the border.

The Merovingians held on to power for two hundred years. In the end, they became relatively weak and ineffectual, with another clan, the Carolingians, running most of their political affairs. It was a Carolingian, Charles Martel, who defeated the invading Arab armies at the Battle of Tours (also referred to as the Battle of Poitiers) in 732. Soon afterwards, Charles Martel's son Pepin seized power from the Merovingians in a coup, one later ratified by the pope in Rome, ensuring the legitimacy of the shift and establishing the Carolingians as the rightful rulers of the Frankish kingdom.

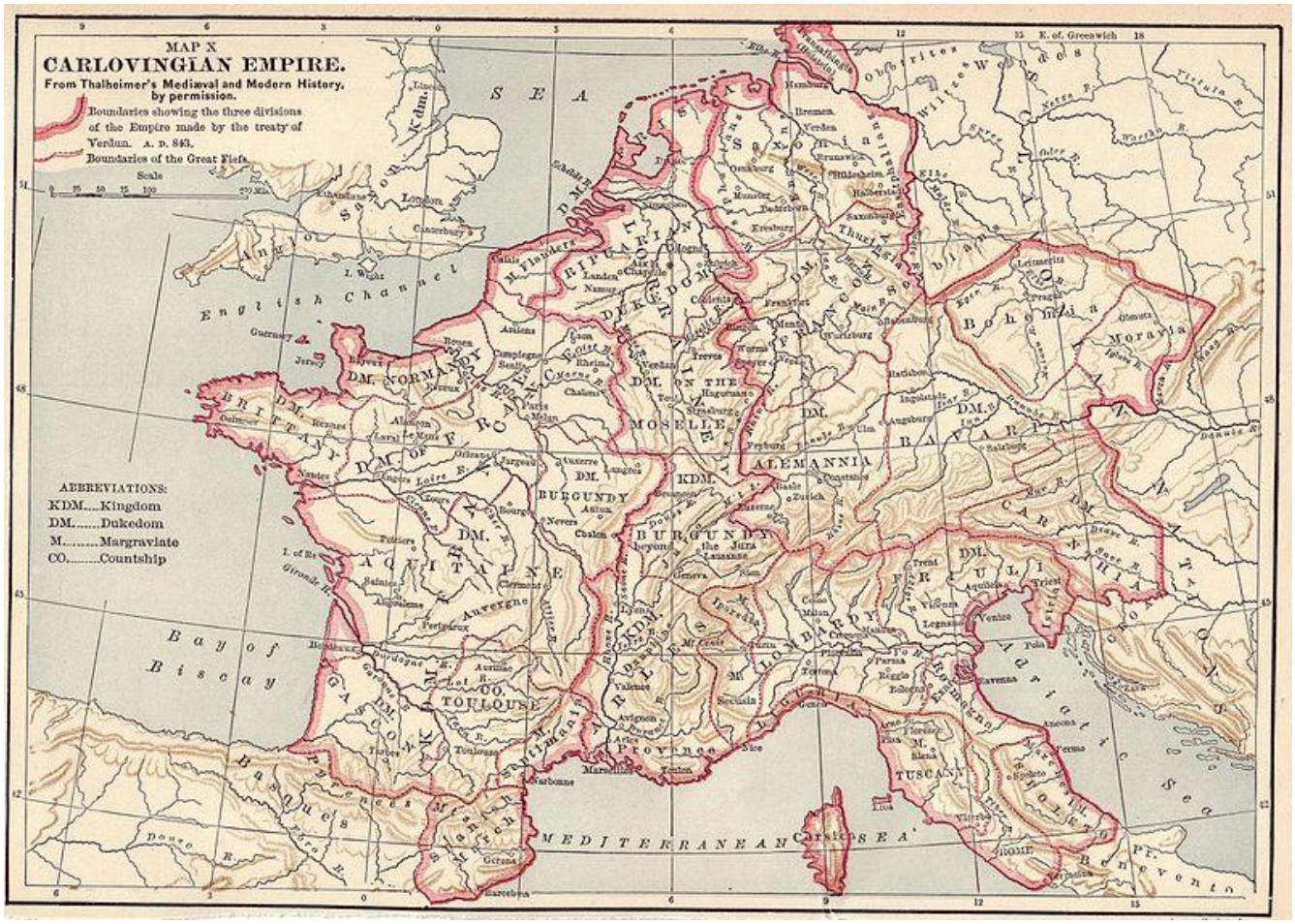
Only the first few kings in the Merovingian dynasty of the Franks were particularly smart or capable. When Pepin seized control in 750 CE, he was merely assuming the legal status that his clan had already controlled behind the scenes for years. The problem facing the Franks was that Frankish tradition stipulated that lands were to be divided between sons after the death of the father. Thus, with every generation, a family's holdings could be split into separate, smaller pieces. Over time, this could reduce a large and powerful territory into a large number of small, weak ones. When Pepin died in 768, his sons Charlemagne and Carloman each inherited half of the kingdom. When Carloman died a few years later, however, Charlemagne ignored the right of Carloman's sons to inherit his land and seized it all (his nephews were subsequently murdered).

Charlemagne (r. 768 – 814) was one of the most important kings in medieval European history. Charlemagne waged constant wars during his long reign (lasting over 40 years) in the name of converting non-Christian Germans to his east and, equally, in the name of seizing loot for his followers. From his conquests arose the concept of the Holy Roman Empire, a huge state that was nominally controlled by a single powerful

emperor directly tied to the pope's authority in Rome. In truth, only under Charlemagne was the Empire a truly united state, but the concept (with various emperors exercising at least some degree of authority) survived until 1806 when it was finally permanently dismantled by Napoleon. Thus, like the western Roman Empire that it succeeded, the Holy Roman Empire lasted almost exactly 1,000 years.

Charlemagne distinguished himself not just by the extent of the territories that he conquered, but by his insistence that he rule those territories as the new, rightful king. In 773, at the request of the pope, Charlemagne invaded the northern Italian kingdom of the Lombards, the Germanic tribe that had expelled Byzantine forces earlier. When Charlemagne conquered them a year later, he declared himself king of the Lombards, rather than forcing a new Lombard ruler to become a vassal and pay tribute. This was an unprecedented development: it was untraditional for a Germanic ruler to proclaim himself king of a different people – how could Charlemagne be "king of the Lombards," since the Lombards were a separate clan and kingdom? This bold move on Charlemagne's part established the answer as well as an important precedent (inspired by Pepin's takeover): a kingship could pass to a different clan or even kingdom itself depending on the political circumstances. Charlemagne was up to something entirely new, intending to create an empire of various different Germanic groups, with himself (and by extension, the Franks) ruling over all of them.

In 800, Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope, Leo III. While Charlemagne's biographers claimed that this came as a surprise to Charlemagne, it was anything but; Charlemagne completely dominated Leo and looked to use the prestige of the imperial title to cement his hold on power. Charlemagne had already restored Leo to his throne after Leo was run out of Rome by powerful Roman families who detested him. While visiting Italy (which was now part of his empire), Charlemagne was crowned and declared to be the emperor of Rome, a title that no one had held since the western empire fell in 476. Making the situation all the stranger was the fact that the Byzantine emperors considered themselves to be fully "Roman" – from their perspective, Leo's crowning of Charlemagne was a straightforward usurpation.



Charlemagne's empire at its height stretched from northern Spain to Bohemia (the present-day Czech Republic). His major areas of conquest were in Central Europe, forming the earliest iteration of "Germany" as a state.

Charlemagne's empire was a poor reflection of ancient Rome. He had almost no bureaucracy, no standing army, not even an official currency. He spent almost all of his reign traveling around his empire with his armies, both leading wars and issuing decrees. He did insist, eventually, that these decrees be written down, and the form of "code" used to ensure their authenticity was simply that they were written in grammatically correct Latin, something that almost no one outside of Charlemagne's court (and some members of the Church scattered across Europe) could accomplish thanks to the abysmal state of education and literacy at the time.

Charlemagne organized his empire into counties, ruled by (appropriately enough) counts, usually his military followers but sometimes commoners, all of whom were sent to rule lands they did not have any personal ties to. He protected his borders with marches, lands ruled by margraves who were military leaders ordered to defend the empire from foreign invasion. He established a group of officials who traveled across the empire inspecting the counties and marches to ensure loyalty to the crown. Despite all of his efforts, rebellions against his rule were frequent and Charlemagne was forced to war against former subjects to re-establish control on several occasions.

Charlemagne also reorganized the Church by insisting on a strict hierarchy of archbishops to supervise

bishops who, in turn, supervised priests. Likewise, under Charlemagne there was a revival of interest in ancient writings and in proper Latin. He gathered scholars from all of Europe, including areas like England beyond his political control, and sponsored the education of priests and the creation of libraries. He had flawed versions of the Vulgate (the Latin Bible) corrected and he revived disciplines of classical learning that had fallen into disuse (including rhetoric, logic, and astronomy). His efforts to reform Church training and education are referred to by historians as the "Carolingian Renaissance."

One innovation of note that arose during the Carolingian Renaissance is that Charlemagne instituted a major reform of handwriting, returning to the Roman practice of large, clear letters that are separated from one another and sentences that used spaces and punctuation, rather than the cursive scrawl of the Merovingian period. This new handwriting introduced the division between upper and lower-case letters and the practice of starting sentences with the former that we use to this day.

Ultimately, the Carolingian dynasty lasted for an even shorter period than had the Merovingian. The problem, again, was the Frankish succession law. Without an effective bureaucracy or law code, there was little cohesion to the kingdom, and areas began to split off almost immediately after Charlemagne's death in 814. The origin of "Germany" (not politically united until 1871, over a thousand years after Charlemagne's lifetime) was East Francia, the kingdom that Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious left to one of his sons. A different line, not directly descended from the Carolingians, eventually ended up in power in East Francia. Its king, Otto I, was crowned emperor in 962 by the Pope, thereby cementing the idea of the Holy Roman Empire even after Charlemagne's bloodline no longer ruled it.

Invaders

Post-Carolingian Europe was plunged into a period of disorder and violence that lasted until at least 1100 CE. Even though the specific invaders mentioned below had settled down by about 1000 CE, the overall state of lawlessness and violence lasted for centuries. In addition to attacks by groups like the Vikings, the major political problem of the Middle Ages was that the whole feudal system was one based on violence: lesser lords often had no livelihood outside of war, and they pressured their own lords to initiate raids on nearby lands. "Knights" were often little better than thugs who had the distinction of a minor noble title and the ability to afford weapons and armor. Likewise, one of the legacies of feudal law was the importance placed on honor and retribution; any insult or slight could initiate reprisals or even plunge a whole kingdom into civil war.

Meanwhile, a series of invasions began in the post-Carolingian era. Arab invaders called Saracens attacked southern European lands, even conquering Sicily in the ninth century, while a new group of steppe raiders, the Magyars, swept across Europe in the tenth century, eventually seizing land and settling in present-day Hungary. In Northern Europe, the most significant invaders of the period, however, were the Vikings.

The Vikings

Until the eighth century, the Scandinavian region was on the periphery of European trade, and Scandinavians (the Norse) themselves did not greatly influence the people of neighboring regions. Scandina-

vian tribesmen had long traded amber (petrified sap, prized as a precious stone in Rome and, subsequently, throughout the Middle Ages) with both other Germanic tribes and even with the Romans directly during the imperial period. While the details are unclear, what seems to have happened is that sometime around 700 CE the Baltic Sea region became increasingly economically significant. Traders from elsewhere in northern Europe actively sought out Baltic goods like furs, timber, fish, and (as before) amber. This created an ongoing flow of wealth coming into Scandinavia, which in turn led to Norse leaders becoming interested in the sources of that wealth. At the same time, the Norse added sails to their unique sailing vessels, longships. Sailed longships allowed the Norse to travel swiftly across the Baltic, and ultimately across and throughout the waterways of Europe.

The Oseberg ship, a surviving Viking longship discovered in a Viking burial mound in Norway and preserved in a dedicated museum in Oslo. Longships allowed the Vikings unprecedented mobility, being capable of both oceanic voyages and of sailing up rivers to raid inland communities.

The Norse, soon known as Vikings, exploded into the consciousness of other Europeans during the eighth century, attacking unprotected Christian monasteries in the 790s, with the first major raid in 793 and follow-up attacks over the next two years. The Vikings swiftly became the great naval power of Europe at the time. In the early years of the Viking period they tended to strike in small raiding parties, relying on swiftness and stealth to pillage monasteries and settlements. As the decades went on, bands of raiders gave way to

full-scale invasion forces, numbering in the hundreds of ships and thousands of warriors. They went in search of riches of all kinds, but especially silver, which was their standard of wealth, and slaves, who were equally lucrative. Unfortunately for the monks of Europe, silver was most often used in sacred objects in monasteries, making the monasteries the favorite targets of Viking raiders. The raids were so sudden and so destructive that Charlemagne himself ordered the construction of fortifications at the mouth of the Seine river and began expanding his naval defenses to try to defend against them.

The word "Viking" was used by the Vikings themselves – it either meant "raider" or was a reference to the Vik region that spanned parts of Norway and Sweden. They were known by various other names by the people they raided, from the Middle East to France: the Franks called them "pagani" or "Northmen," the Anglo-Saxons "haethene men," the Arabs "al-Majus" (sorcerers), the Germanic tribes "ascomanni" (shipmen), and the Slavs of what would become Russia the "Rus" or "Varangians" (the latter are described below.) Outside of the lands that would eventually become Russia, the Vikings were universally regarded as a terrifying threat, not least because of their staunch paganism and rapacious treatment of Christians.

At their height, the Vikings fielded huge fleets that raided many of the major cities of early medieval Europe and North Africa. By the late ninth century they were formally organized into a "Great Fleet" based in their kingdom in eastern England (they conquered the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of East Anglia in the 870s). While the precise numbers will never be known, not least because the surviving sources bear a pronounced anti-Viking bias, it is clear that their raids were on scale that dwarfed their earlier efforts. In 844 more than 150 ships sailed up the Garonne River in southern France, plundering settlements along the way. In 845, 800 ships forced the city of Hamburg in northern Germany to pay a huge ransom of silver. In 881, the Great Fleet pillaged across present-day Holland, raiding inland as far as Charlemagne's capital of Aachen and sacking it. Then, in 885, at least 700 ships sailed up the Seine River and besieged Paris (note that their initial target, a rich monastery, had evacuated with its treasure; the wine cellar was not spared, however). In this attack, they extorted thousands of pounds of silver and gold. Vikings attacked Constantinople at least three times in the ninth and tenth centuries, extracting tribute and concessions in trade, and perhaps most importantly, they came to rule over what would one day become Russia. In the end, the Vikings became increasingly knowledgeable about the places they were raiding, in some cases actually working as mercenaries for kings who hired them to defend against other Vikings.

Starting in roughly 850 CE, the Vikings started to settle in the lands they raided, especially in England, Scotland, the hitherto-uninhabited island of Iceland, and part of France. Outside of Russia, their most important settlement in terms of its historical impact was Normandy in what is today northern France, a kingdom that would go on centuries later to conquer England itself. It was founded in 911 as a land-grant to the Viking king Rollo in order to defend against other Vikings. Likewise, the Vikings settled areas in England that would help shape the English language and literary traditions (for example, though written in the language of the Anglo-Saxons, the famous epic poem *Beowulf* is about Viking settlers who had recently converted to Christianity). Ultimately, the Vikings became so rich from raiding that they became important figures in medieval trade and commerce, trading goods as far from Scandinavia as Baghdad in the Abbasid Caliphate.

The Vikings were not just raiders, however. They sought to explore and settle in lands that were in some cases completely uninhabited when they arrived, like Iceland. They appear to have been fearless in quite literally going where no one had gone before. Much of their exploration required audacity as well as planning – they were the best navigators of their age, but at times their travels led them to forge into areas completely unknown to Europeans. Vikings were the first Europeans to arrive in North America, with a group of Icelandic Vikings arriving in Newfoundland, in present-day Canada, around the start of the eleventh century. An attempt at colonization failed, however, quite possibly because of a conflict between the Vikings and the Indigenous people they encountered, and the people of the Americas were thus spared the presence of further European colonists for almost five centuries.

In what eventually became Russia, meanwhile, Viking exploration, conquest, and colonization had begun even earlier. The Vikings started traveling down Russian rivers from the Baltic in the mid-eighth century, even before the raiding period began farther west. Their initial motive was trade, not conquest, trading and collecting goods like furs, amber, and honey and transporting them south to both Byzantium and the Abbasid Caliphate. The Vikings were slavers as well, capturing Slavic peoples and selling them in the south. In turn, the Vikings brought a great deal of Byzantine and Abbasid currency to the north, introducing hard cash into the mostly barter-based economies of Northern and Western Europe. Eventually, they settled along their trade routes, often invited to establish order by the native Slavs in cities like Kiev, with the Vikings ultimately forming the earliest nucleus of Russia as a political entity. The very name "Russia" derives from "Rus," the name of the specific Viking people (originally from Sweden) who settled in the Slavic lands bordering Byzantium.

Eleventh-century illustration of the Varangian Guard, the personal bodyguards of the Byzantine emperors

starting in the tenth century. The guard was composed of warriors from the Rus, the Vikings who conquered and then settled in present-day Russia and Ukraine.

As the Vikings settled in the lands they had formerly raided and as powerful states emerged in Scandinavia itself, the Vikings ceased being raiders and came to resemble other medieval Europeans. By the mid-tenth century, the kings of the Scandinavian lands began to assert their control and to reign in Viking raids. Conversion to Christianity, becoming very common by 1000, helped end the raiding period as well. Denmark became a stable kingdom under its king Harald Bluetooth in 958, Norway in 995 under Olaf Tryggvason, and Sweden in 995 as well under Olof Skötkonung. Meanwhile, in northern France, the kingdom of Normandy emerged as the most powerful of the former Viking states, with its duke William the Conqueror conquering England itself from the Anglo-Saxons in 1066.

Conclusion

While the Vikings are important for various reasons – expanding Medieval trade, settling various regions, establishing the first European contact with North America, and founding the first Russian states – they are also included here simply for their inherent interest; their raids and expansion were one of the most striking and sudden in world history.

Far more important to the historical record were the larger patterns of state and society that formed in the early Middle Ages. Above all, the feudal system would have a long legacy in forming the basis of later political structures, and the Latin Church would be the essential European intellectual and spiritual institution for centuries to come. Early medieval Europe was defined by shared cultural traits, above all having to do with religion. Despite having lost the opulence and much of the learning of Rome, medieval Europe was not a static, completely backwards place. Instead, it slowly but surely constructed an entirely new form of society in place of what had been.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Pledge of Fealty – Myrabella

Carolingian Empire – Electionworld

Oseberg Ship – Peulle

Varangian Guard – Public Domain

This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 13: Early Medieval Europe in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: EGIL SLAYS LJOT THE PALE

This text is available online at the Icelandic Saga Database.

Egil's Saga ca. 1240

Chapter 67 – Egil slays Ljot the Pale.

Thorstein and Egil made ready for their journey so soon as they had ended their errand. They then went their way back, and when they came south over the Dovre-fell, then said Egil that he would go down to Raumsdale, and after that south by way of the sounds. 'I will,' said he, 'finish my business in Sogn and Hordaland, for I would fain in the summer take my ship out to Iceland.' Thorstein bade him settle his journey as he would. So Thorstein and Egil separated.

Thorstein went south by the dales all the way till he came to his estates. There he produced the tokens of the king and his message before the stewards, that they should give up all that property which they had taken and Thorstein claimed. No one spoke against it, and he then took all his property.

Egil went his way, they being twelve in all. They came on to Raumsdale, there got them conveyance, and then went south to Mæri. Nothing is told of their journey before they came to the island called Hod, and went to pass the night at a farm named Bindheim. This was a well-to-do homestead, in which dwelt a baron named Fridgeir. He was young in years, and had but lately inherited his father's property. His mother was named Gyda; she was a sister of lord Arinbjorn, a woman of a noble presence and wealthy. She managed the house for her son Fridgeir: they lived in grand style. There Egil and his company found good welcome. In the evening Egil sat next to Fridgeir, and his comrades outside him. There was much drink and sumptuous viands. Gyda, the house-mistress, in the evening had some talk with Egil. She inquired about Arinbjorn, her brother, and other of her kinsmen and friends who had gone to England with Arinbjorn. Egil answered her inquiries. She asked what tidings had befallen in Egil's journey. He told her plainly. Then he sang:

'Gloomy on me glowered
In gruesome wrath a king:
But cuckoo faints and fails not
For vulture flapping near.
Aid good from Arinbjorn,
As oft, and peace I gat.

He falls not whom true friends
Help forward on his way.'

Egil was very cheerful that evening, but Fridgeir and his household were rather silent. Egil saw there a maiden fair and well dressed; he was told that she was Fridgeir's sister. The maiden was sad and wept constantly that evening, which they thought strange. They were there for the night, but in the morning the wind was blowing hard, and there was no putting to sea. They need a boat to take them from the island. Then went Fridgeir and with him Gyda to Egil, and offered that he and his comrades should stay there till it was good travelling weather, and should have thence such help for the journey as they needed. This Egil accepted. They stayed there weather-bound for three nights, most hospitably entertained. After that the weather became calm.

Then Egil and his men rose up early in the morning and made ready; then went to meat, and ale was given them to drink, and they sat awhile. Then they took their clothes. Egil stood up and thanked the master and mistress of the house for their entertainment; then they went out. The master and his mother went out into the path with them. Gyda then went to speak with her son Fridgeir, and talked low with him, Egil standing the while and waiting for them.

Egil said to the maiden: 'Why weep you, maiden? I never see you cheerful.'

She could not answer, but wept the more. Fridgeir now said to his mother aloud: 'I will not now ask this. They are even now ready for their journey.'

Then Gyda went to Egil and said: 'I will tell you, Egil, how things stand here with us. There is a man named Ljot the Pale. He is a Berserk and a duellist; he is hated. He came here and asked my daughter to wife; but we answered at once, refusing the match. Whereupon he challenged my son Fridgeir to wager of battle; and he has to go to-morrow to this combat on the island called Vors. Now I wished, Egil, that you should go to the combat with Fridgeir. It would soon be shown if Arinbjorn were here in the land, that we should not endure the overbearing of such a fellow as is Ljot.'

Egil said: "Tis but my bounden duty, lady, for the sake of Arinbjorn thy kinsman that I go, if Fridgeir thinks this any help to him.'

'Herein you do well,' said Gyda. 'So we will go back into the hall, and be all together for the whole day.'

Then Egil and the rest went into the hall and drank. They sate there for the day. But in the evening came those friends of Fridgeir who had appointed to go with him, and there was a numerous company for the night, and a great banquet. On the morrow Fridgeir made ready to go, and many with him, Egil being one of the party. It was now good travelling weather.

They now start, and soon come to the island. There was a fair plain near the sea, which was to be the place of combat. The ground was marked out by stones lying round in a ring. Soon came thither Ljot and his party. Then he made him ready for the combat. He had shield and sword. Ljot was a man of vast size and strong. And as he came forward on the field to the ground of combat, a fit of Berserk fury seized him; he began to bellow hideously, and bit his shield. Fridgeir was not a tall man; he was slenderly built, comely in face, not strong. He had not been used to combats. But when Egil saw Ljot, then he sang a stave:

'It fits not young Fridgeir

To fight with this warrior,
Grim gnawer of shield-rim,
By his gods who doth curse.
I better may meet him,
May rescue the maiden;
Full fearsome he stareth,
Yet "fey" are his eyes.'

Ljot saw where Egil stood, and heard his words. He said: 'Come thou hither, big man, to the holm, and fight with me, if thou hast a wish that way. That is a far more even match than that I should fight with Fridgeir, for I shall deem me no whit the greater man though I lay him low on earth.'

Then sang Egil:

'Ljot asketh but little,
Loth were I to baulk him.
Pale wight, my hand pliant
Shall play on his mail.
Come, busk we for combat;
Nor quarter expect thou:
Strife-stirrer, in Mæri
Stern shield-cutting ours.'

After this Egil made him ready for combat with Ljot. Egil had the shield that he was wont to have, was girded with the sword which he called Adder, but in his hand he had Dragvandill. He went in over the boundary that marked the battle-ground, but Ljot was then not ready. Egil shook his sword and sang:

'Hew we with hilt-wands flashing,
Hack we shield with falchion,
Test we moony targets,
Tinge red sword in blood.
Ljot from life be sundered,
Low stern play shall lay him,
Quelled the quarrel-seeker:
Come, eagles, to your prey.'

Then Ljot came forward on the field and declared the law of combat, that he should ever after bear the name of dastard who should draw back outside the boundary stones that were set up in a ring round the field of combat. This done, they closed, and Egil dealt a blow at Ljot, which Ljot parried with his shield, but Egil then dealt blow upon blow so fast that Ljot got no chance for a blow in return. He drew back to get room for a stroke, but Egil pressed as quickly after him, dealing blows with all his vigour. Ljot went out beyond the boundary stones far into the field. So ended the first bout. Then Ljot begged for a rest. Egil let it be so. They stopped therefore and rested. And Egil sang:

'Free-handed gold-giver,
Back goeth yon champion,
In craven fear crouches
This wealth-craving wight.
Not strongly fights spearmen
His strokes who delayeth.
Lo beat by a bald-head
This bragging pest flies.'

These were the laws of wager of battle in those times, that when one man challenged another on any claim, and the challenger gained the victory, then he should have as prize of victory that which he had claimed in his challenge. But if he were vanquished, then should he ransom himself for such price as should be fixed. But if he were slain on the field, then had he forfeited all his possessions, and he who slew him in the combat should take his inheritance. This was also law, that if a foreigner died who had no heir in the land, then that inheritance fell to the king's treasury.

And now Egil bade Ljot be ready.

'I will,' he said, 'that we now try to the uttermost this combat.'

Ljot sprang swiftly to his feet. Egil bounded at him and dealt at once a blow at him. He pressed him so close, that he was driven back, and the shield shifted from before him. Then smote Egil at Ljot, and the blow came on him above the knee, taking off his leg. Ljot then fell and soon expired. Then Egil went to where Fridgeir and his party stood. He was heartily thanked for this work. Then sang Egil:

'Fall'n lies the wolf-feeder,
Foul worker of mischief:
Ljot's leg by skald sever'd
Leaves Fridgeir in peace.
From the free gold-giver
Guerdon none I seek me,
Sport I deem the spear-din,
Sport with such pale foe.'

Ljot's death was little mourned, for he had been a turbulent bully. He was a Swede by birth, and had no kin there in the land. He had come thither and amassed him wealth by duels. He had slain many worthy landowners, whom he had first challenged to wager of battle for their lands and heritages; he had now become very wealthy both in lands and chattels.

Egil went home with Fridgeir from the field of combat. He stayed there but a short time before going south to Mæri. Egil and Fridgeir parted with much affection. Egil charged Fridgeir with the securing of those lands that had belonged to Ljot. Egil went on his way and came to the Firths, whence he went into Sogn to seek Thord in Aurland. Thord received him well; he declared his errand and the message of king Hacon. These

words of Egil were taken well by Thord, who promised him his help in this matter. Egil remained there with Thord far into the spring.

Source:

1893 translation into English by W. C. Green from the original Icelandic 'Egils saga Skallagrímssonar'.

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *Egil slays Ljot the Pale*

Reading Journal

Using the selection *Egil slays Ljot the Pale*, describe in your own words what a "berserker" is. How does the concept of a "berserker" fit the Viking stereotype?

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART XI

MODULE TEN: THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

READING: THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

Christopher Brooks

Historians sometimes refer to the period between approximately 1000 and 1300 CE as the "high" Middle Ages to emphasize its dynamism, creativity, and importance in setting the stage for subsequent historical developments. During the high Middle Ages the European economy greatly expanded, leading to a revived cash economy and widespread trade and commerce. Towns and cities grew, and with them new centers of learning emerged. While still highly decentralized by the standards of later periods, kingdoms did start the gradual process of transforming into more highly organized states. Europe also re-engaged in significant ways with its neighboring regions, leading to both an influx of foreign trade goods and, unfortunately, tremendous bloodshed in the form of the crusades.

The Crusades

The Crusades were a series of invasions of the Middle East by Europeans in the name of Christianity. They went on, periodically, for centuries. They resulted in a shift in the identity of Latin Christianity, great financial benefits to certain parts of Europe, and many instances of horrific carnage. The Crusades serve as one of the iconic points of transition from the early Middle Ages to the high Middle Ages, in which the localized, barter-based economy of Europe transitioned toward a more dynamic commercial economic system.

The background to the Crusades was the power of a specific group of nomadic warriors in the Middle East, that of the Seljuk Turks. The Seljuks were fierce fighters, trained by their background as steppe nomads and raiders, who had converted to Islam prior to the eleventh century. The Seljuks were a tribal confederation, not a united kingdom or empire, and they invaded Muslim kingdoms as often as Christian ones. Despite their lack of political unity they proved even more deadly foes to the Byzantine Empire than had the Arab caliphates, and by late in the eleventh century the Byzantine emperor Alexius called for aid from the Christians of western Europe, despite the ongoing divide between the Latin and Orthodox churches.

In 1095, Pope Urban II responded by giving a sermon in France summoning the knights of Europe to holy war to protect Christians in and near the Holy Land. Urban spoke of the supposed atrocities committed by the Turks, the richness of the lands that European knights might expect to seize, and the righteousness of the cause of aiding fellow Christians. The idea caught on much faster and much more thoroughly than Urban could have possibly expected; knights from all over Europe responded when the news reached them. The idea was so appealing that not only knights, but thousands of commoners responded, forming a "people's crusade" that marched off for Jerusalem, for the most part without weapons, armor, or adequate supplies.

Much of the impulse of the Crusades came from the fact that Urban II offered unlimited penance to

the crusaders, meaning that anyone who took part in the crusade would have all of their sins absolved; furthermore, pilgrims were now allowed to be armed. Thus, the crusades were the first armed Christian pilgrimage, and in fact, the first "official" Christian holy war in the history of the religion. In addition to the promise of salvation, and equally important to many of the knights who flocked to the crusading banner, was the promise of loot (and, again, Urban's speech explicitly promised the crusaders wealth and land). Many of the crusaders were minor lords or landless knights, men who had few prospects back home but now had the chance to make something of themselves in the name of liberating the Holy Land. Thus, most crusaders combined ambition and greed with genuine Christian piety.

The backbone of the crusades were the knightly orders: organizations of knights authorized by the church to carry out wars in the name of Christianity. These orders came into being after the First Crusade, originally organized to provide protection to Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. They were made up of "monk-knights" who took monastic vows (i.e. of obedience, poverty, and chastity) but spent their time fighting as well as praying. The concept already existed at the start of the crusading period, but the orders grew quickly thanks to their involvement in the invasions. Two orders in particular, the Hospitallers and the Templars, would go on to achieve great wealth and power despite their professed vows of poverty.

The First Four Crusades

The First Crusade (1095 – 1099), which lasted only four years following the initial declaration by Pope Urban, was amazingly successful. What had once been the great power of the Middle East, the Abbasid Caliphate, had long since splintered apart, with rival kingdoms holding power in North Africa and the Middle Ages. The doctrinal differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims further divided the Muslim *ummah* (community of believers). In addition, the Arab kingdoms battled the Seljuk Turks, who were intent on conquering everything, not just Christian lands. Thus, the crusaders arrived precisely when the Muslim forces were profoundly divided. By 1099, the crusaders had captured Jerusalem and much of the Levant, forming a series of Christian territories in the heart of the Holy Land. These were called The Latin Principalities, kingdoms ruled by European knights.

The Latin Principalities at their height. Note how the Seljuk (here spelled "Seljuq") territories almost completely surrounded the principalities.

After their success in taking Jerusalem, the knightly orders became very powerful and very rich. They not only seized loot, but became caravan guards and, ultimately, money-lenders (the Templars became bankers after abandoning the Holy Land when Jerusalem was lost in 1187). Essentially, the major orders came to resemble armed merchant houses as much as monasteries, and there is no question that many of their members did a very poor job of living up to their vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Likewise, the rulers of the Latin Principalities made little effort to win over their Muslim and Jewish subjects.

Subsequent crusades were much less successful. The problem was that, once they had formed their territories, the westerners had to hold on to them with little but a series of strong forts up and down the coast. The European population centers were obviously hundreds or thousands of miles away and the local people were mostly Jews and Muslims who detested the cruel invaders. While generations of Europeans continued to

regard crusading as a worthwhile endeavor, that enthusiasm did ebb over time as the crusades came to resemble conventional invasions more so than genuine holy wars.

Attacks on the Latin Principalities resulted in the Second Crusade, which lasted from 1147 – 1149. The Second Crusade consisted of two crusades that happened simultaneously: some European knights sailed off to the Holy Land, while others fought against the Cordoban Caliphate in the Iberian Peninsula. The Europeans ultimately lost ground in the Middle East but managed to retake Lisbon in Portugal from the Muslim Caliphate there. In fact, the Second Crusade's significance is that crusaders began to wage an almost ceaseless war against the Cordoban Caliphate in Spain – in a sense, Christian Europeans, particularly the inhabitants of the Christian kingdoms of northern Spain, concluded that there were plenty of infidels much closer to home than Jerusalem and its environs. These wars of Christians against Spanish Muslims were called the Spanish "Reconquest" (*Reconquista*), and they lasted until the last Muslim kingdom fell in 1492 CE.

In 1187 an Egyptian Muslim general named Salah-ad-Din (his name is normally anglicized as Saladin) retook Jerusalem after crushing the crusaders at the Battle of Hattin. This prompted the Third Crusade (1189 – 1192), a massive invasion led by the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (Frederick Barbarossa), the king of France (Philip II), and the king of England (Richard I – known as "The Lion-Hearted"). It completely failed, with the English king negotiating a peace deal with Saladin after Frederick died (he drowned trying to cross a river) and Philip returned to France. After this, only a few small territories remained in Christian hands.

Arguably the most disastrous (in terms of failing to achieve its stated goal of controlling the Holy Land) crusade was the Fourth Crusade, lasting from 1199 – 1204. This latest attempt to seize Jerusalem began with a large group of crusaders chartering passage with Venetian sailors, long since accustomed to profiting from crusader traffic. En route, the crusaders and sailors learned of a succession dispute in Constantinople and decided to intervene. The intervention turned into an outright invasion, with the crusaders carrying out a horrendously bloody sack of the ancient city. In the end, the crusaders set up a Latin Christian government that lasted for about fifty years while completely ignoring their original goal of sailing to the Holy Land. The only lasting effect of the Fourth Crusade was the further weakening of Byzantium in the face of Turkish invaders in the future. To emphasize the point: Christian knights from Western Europe set out to attack the Muslim kingdoms of the Middle East but ended up conquering a Christian kingdom, and the last political remnant of the Roman Empire at that, instead.

Many further crusades followed; popes would continue to authorize official large-scale invasions of the Middle East until the end of the thirteenth century, and the efforts of Christian knights in Spain during the Reconquest very much carried on the crusading tradition for centuries. Later crusades were often nothing more than politically-motivated power grabs on the part of popes, launched against a given pope's political opponents (i.e. fellow European Christians who happened to be at odds with a pope). Technically, the last crusade was the Holy League, an army drawn from various kingdoms in Central and Eastern Europe dispatched to fight the Ottoman Empire in 1684. None of the latter crusades succeeded in seizing land in the Middle East, but they did inspire a relentless drive to overthrow and destroy the now centuries-old Muslim kingdom of

Spain, as noted above, and they also inspired the idea of the potential "holiness" of warfare itself among Christians.

Consequences of the Crusades

The crusades had numerous consequences and effects. Three were particularly important. First, the city-states of northern Italy, especially Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, grew rich transporting goods and crusaders back and forth between Europe and the Middle East. As the transporters, merchants, and bankers of crusading expeditions, it was northern Italians that derived the greatest financial benefit from the invasions. The crusades provided so much capital that the northern Italian cities evolved to become the banking center of Europe and the site of the Renaissance starting in the fifteenth century.

Second, the ideology surrounding the crusades was to inspire European explorers and conquerors for centuries. The most obvious instance of this phenomenon was the Reconquest of Spain, which was explicitly seen through the lens of the crusading ideology at the time. In turn, the Reconquest was completed in 1492, precisely the same year that Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas. With the subsequent invasions of South and Central America by the Spanish, the crusading spirit, of spreading Catholicism and seizing territory at the point of a sword, lived on.

Third, there was a new concern with a particularly intolerant form of religious purity among many Christian Europeans during and after the Crusades. One effect of this new focus was numerous outbreaks of anti-Semitic violence in Europe; many crusaders attacked Jewish communities in Europe while the crusaders were on their way to the Holy Land, and anti-Jewish laws were enacted by many kings and lords inspired by the fervent, intolerant new brand of Christian identity arising from the Crusades. Thus, going forward, European Christianity itself became harsher, more intolerant, and more warlike because of the Crusades.

The Northern Crusades and the Teutonic Knights

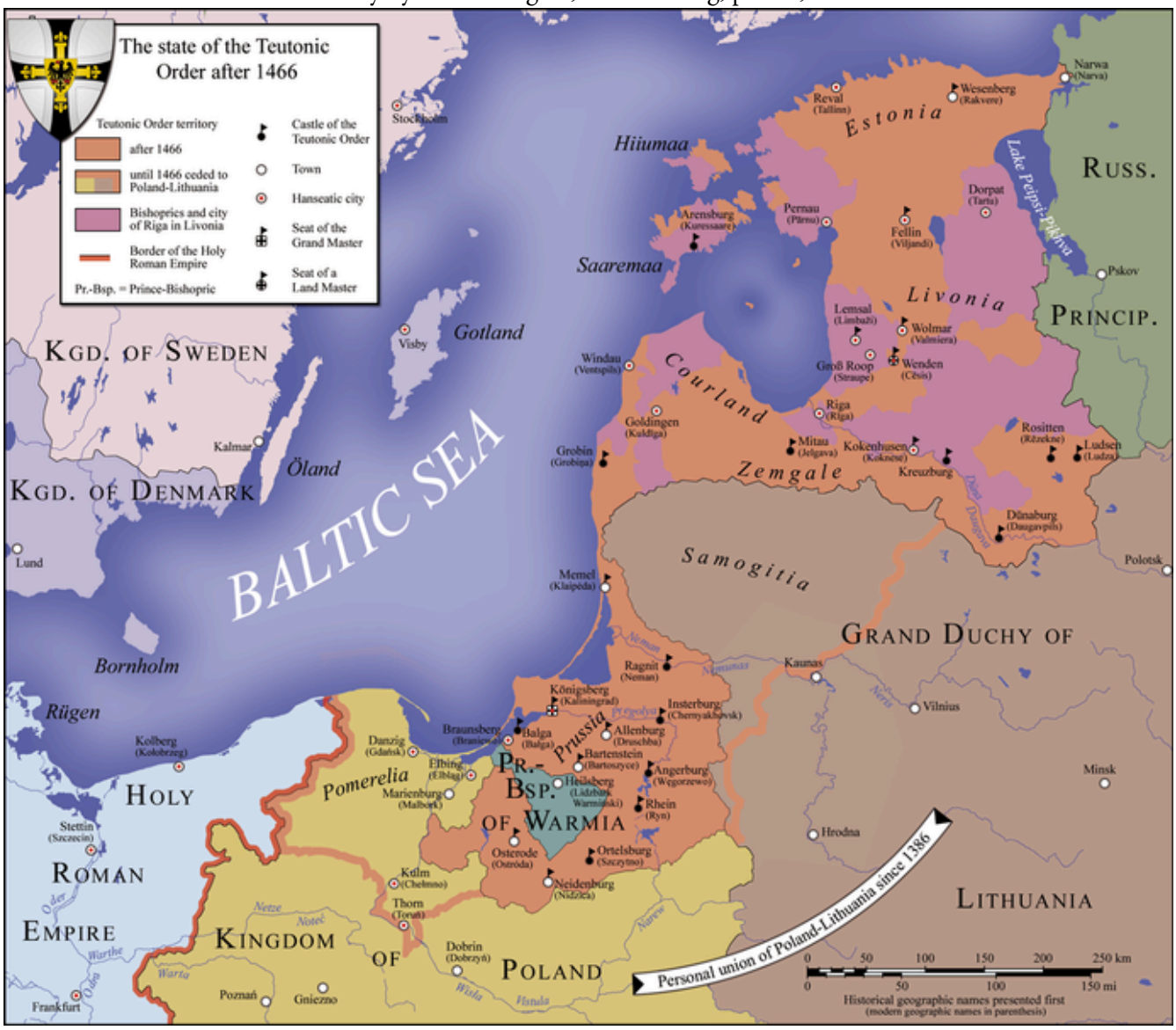
Often overlooked in considerations of the crusades were the "Northern Crusades" – invasions of the various Baltic regions of northeastern Europe (i.e. parts of Denmark, northern Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland) between 1171, when the Pope Alexander III authorized a crusade against the heathens of the east Baltic region, and the early fifteenth century, when the converted kingdoms and territories of the Baltic began to seize independence from their crusading overlords: the Teutonic Knights.

The Teutonic Knights were a knightly order founded during the Third Crusade at a hospital in the Latin city of Acre. They were closely modeled after the Templars, adopting their "rule" (their code of conduct) and spending most of the twelfth century crusading in the Holy Land. Their focus shifted, however, in the middle of the century when they began leading crusades against the pagan peoples of the eastern Baltic, including the Lithuanians, Estonians, Finns, and other groups.

The Baltic lands were the last major region of Europe to remain pagan. Neither Latin nor Orthodox

missionaries had made significant headway in converting the people of the region, outside of the border region between the lands of the Rus and the Baltic Sea. Thus, the Teutonic Knights could make a very plausible case for their Crusades as analogous to the Spanish Reconquest, and the Teutonic Knights proved very savvy at placing agents in the papal court that worked to maintain papal support for their efforts.

The Teutonic Order ultimately outlasted the other crusading orders by centuries. The order was very successful at drumming up support from European princes and knights, relying on annual expeditions of visiting warriors to do most of the fighting while the Teutonic Knights themselves literally held down the fort in newly-built castles. They were authorized by various popes not only to conquer and convert, but to rule over the peoples of the east Baltic, and thus by the thirteenth century the Teutonic Knights were in the process of conquering and ruling Prussia, parts of Estonia, and a region of southeastern Finland and present-day Lithuania called Livonia. These kingdoms lasted a remarkably long time; the Teutonic Order ruled Livonia until 1561, when it was finally ousted. Thus, for several centuries, the map of Europe included the strange spectacle of a theocratic state: one ruled directly by monk-knights, with no king, prince, or lord above them.



The theocracy of the Teutonic Knights as of 1466 (marked in orange and purple along the shores of the Baltic). Note that 1466 falls squarely into the Renaissance period – the Northern Crusades began during the Middle Ages but their influence lasted far longer.

The Northern Crusades were, in some ways, as important as the crusades to the Holy Land in that they were responsible for extinguishing the last remnants of paganism in Europe – it was truly gone by the late fourteenth century in Lithuania, Estonia, and Livonia – and in conquering a large territory that would one day be a core part of Germany itself: Prussia.

The Middle East After the Caliphates

The irony of the crusades to the Holy Land is that the vast majority of people who lived in the Middle East did not think of politics in terms of Muslim versus Christian (or Jewish) identity. The fairly brief and ephemeral period of political unity under the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates that saw most of the Middle East and North Africa united under the rule of "caliphs" (political successors to the prophet Muhammad, described in the previous volume of this textbook) was gone by the time the first European crusaders arrived. In turn, despite disrupting and transforming the Holy Land itself for time, the crusades had little overall impact on the societies of the Middle East themselves. Those societies represented a cross-section of ethnic, religious, and regional identities that underwent major transformations in the period of the High Middle Ages.

By the time the last Abbasid caliph was murdered by the Mongols in 1258 the caliphate itself had long degenerated into a legal fiction. The caliphs themselves had become honored prisoners of more powerful invading forces starting in 945, and the territories of the former caliphate were divided between numerous sultans, an Arabic word that simply means "ruler." Many of those sultans petitioned for recognition from the captive caliphs as a form of spiritual and political currency, but the bottom line is that the caliphs themselves exercised no political authority of their own.

This was not, however, a period of stagnation in the Middle East and North Africa. First and foremost, the culture of learning that had blossomed during the Abbasid period continued to prosper. Expressed in both Arabic and "New Persian," Persian (the vernacular language of Iran, which is the same thing as Persia) written in Arabic script, scholarship in fields as diverse as theology and astronomy was supported by numerous sultans. Persian became the international language of both scholarship and poetry during this period, with major works being written in Persian from northern India to Anatolia by writers of a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. In fact, it was not until the nineteenth century that writers drifted away from Persian as the "default" language of learning. In that way, Persian was something of a parallel to Latin in Europe, with the major difference being that (unlike Latin) Persian remained a living language spoken by millions of people.

In addition to scholarship and literature, commerce thrived in the post-caliphate Middle East. Almost without exception, elites went out of their way to actively encourage trade by building and policing trade routes and founding *caravanserais*, fortified waystations for mercantile travelers. In contrast to the contempt for merchants felt by most elite Europeans at the time, merchants were an honored part of Persian, Turkic,

and Arabic societies. The result was a thriving commercial economy across most of the region, although it is important to bear in mind that most people were still farmers in the Middle East just as they were everywhere else in the pre-modern world.

The Turkic Migrations and Ottoman Origins

By far the most important and far-reaching event in the Middle East during the post-caliphate period was the arrival of the Turks. As noted above, the group known as the Seljuks migrated from Central Asia starting in earnest in the tenth century CE, settling from Afghanistan to Anatolia over the course of the following centuries. The Turks were nomadic warriors organized into tribal confederations (the Seljuks were simply the leading tribe rather than the actual rulers during the first wave of migration), effective in warfare but generally poor at establishing stable governments. A series of Turkic dynasties across the region began in 998 under the Ghaznavids in Persia, but the history of those dynasties is a litany of invasion, assassination, and collapse, typically after a few generations of shaky rule.

Where Turkic dynasties were able to establish a stable rule for at least a century it was usually thanks to the infusion of Persian traditions of statecraft. The Seljuk dynasty that overthrew the Ghaznavids in 1040 drew on the long history of effective Persian administration to build up an actual government (rather than just meetings of tribal leaders) and to financially support the building projects associated with Islamic civilization like *madrasas* (schools for instruction in the Koran and Islamic law) and public baths. Likewise, as the Seljuks encroached on Byzantine territory to the west, the first stable Turkic state there – the Sultanate of Rum (Rome) – relied heavily on Persian administrators and Persian political traditions.

The greatest literary work of medieval Islam was in Persian, the poet Firdausi's (d. 1020) *Shahnamah*, a mythologized account of Persian rulers reaching back to the ancient past that suggested a single cultural and political tradition. Even though they were not ethnically Persian, Turkic rulers embraced this idea of historical sovereignty, seeing themselves as the inheritors of over a thousand years of Persian rule. Simply put, Persian political culture was crucial in creating actual states out of tribal confederations, although it is important to acknowledge that many of those states were not especially long-lived during the medieval period.

Unfortunately for the Turkic dynasties at the time and for millions of ordinary people across the Middle East, the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century devastated much of the region. By 1256 the Seljuk territories had been crushed by the Mongols and a decades-long period of brutal exploitation and pillaging ensued. The Mongols established a kingdom known as the Il-Khanate in Persia in 1256, but it took until 1295 for the Mongol ruler Ghazan, the first to convert to Islam, to shift Mongol priorities away from plundering expeditions to more conventional rulership and taxation. While Egypt fought off the Mongols, most of the rest of the Middle East either experienced harsh Mongol rule itself or political fragmentation as a side effect of the invasions.

It was in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions that the Ottoman Turks began their ascent to power. Starting as nothing more than a small Turkic *beglik* (sultanate), the Turks defeated a Byzantine army in 1302

and seized part of Anatolia. Over the next few decades they built up a formidable reputation as *ghazis*, holy warriors, but they also made a point of taking over the lands of former Byzantine subjects without inflicting excessive destruction or cruelty (to Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike). In 1352 they took control of a key fortress near Constantinople, and from there they launched a stunning series of invasions in Greece and the Balkans. In the process, Byzantium was reduced to a pitiful fragment of its former glory, holding on to the city of Constantinople and its hinterlands but otherwise surrounded by Ottoman territories.

The Emergence of the High Middle Ages in Europe

Thus, the Middle East during the period of the crusades was already a prosperous and sophisticated, albeit politically splintered, region. Europe at the time was also politically disunited, and it had much further to climb in terms of wealth, scholarship, and commerce. Europe began a long period of transformation and growth starting in about 1000 CE that resulted in significant economic expansion, demographic growth, and cultural achievement.

The early Middle Ages, from about 500 CE – 800 CE, operated largely on the basis of subsistence agriculture and a barter economy. Economies were almost entirely local; local lords and kings extracted wealth from peasants, but because there was nowhere to sell a surplus of food, peasants tended to grow only as much as they needed to survive, using methods that went unchanged for centuries. There was a limited market for luxury goods even among those wealthy enough to afford them, and the only sources of reliable minted coins were over a thousand miles away, in Byzantium, Persia, and the Arab kingdoms.

This descent into subsistence had happened for various reasons over the course of the earlier centuries. The fall of the western empire of Rome had strangled the manufacture and trade in high-quality consumer goods (a trade that had been very extensive in Rome). Centuries of banditry, raids, and wars made long-distance travel perilous. In turn, the simple lack of markets meant that there was no incentive to grow more than was needed, and the nobility sought to become more wealthy and powerful not by concerning themselves with agricultural productivity (let alone commerce), but by raiding one another's lands.

Europe had enjoyed brief periods of relative stability earlier, culminating around 800 CE during Charlemagne's rise to power. During the rest of the ninth and tenth centuries, however, the invasions of the Magyars, Saracens, and Vikings had undermined the stability of the fragile political order created by the Carolingians. Many accounts written at the time, almost exclusively by priests and monks, decried the constant warfare of the period, including the wars caused by invaders from beyond the European heartland and those between European rulers themselves. Historians now believe that market exchange was growing as a component of the European economy by about 800 CE, but the period between 800 – 1000 was still one of political instability and widespread violence.

Things started to change around the year 1000 CE. The major causes for these changes were twofold: the end of full-scale invasions from outside of the core lands of Europe, and changes in agriculture that seem very simple from a contemporary perspective, but were revolutionary at the time.

The Medieval Agricultural Revolution

In 600 CE, Europe had a population of approximately 14 million. By 1300 it was 74 million. That 500% increase was due to two simple changes: the methods by which agriculture operated and the ebb in large-scale violence brought about by the end of foreign invasions. The first factor in the dramatic increase in population was the simple cessation of major invasions. With relative social stability, peasants were able to consistently plant and harvest crops and not see them devoured by hungry troops or see their fields trampled. Those invasions stopped because the Vikings went from being raiders to becoming members of settled European kingdoms, the Magyars likewise took over and settled in present-day Hungary, and the Saracens were beaten back by increasingly savvy southern-European kingdoms. Warfare between states in Europe remained nearly constant, and banditry still commonplace in the countryside, but it appears that the overall levels of violence did drop off over the course of the eleventh century.

Simultaneously, important changes were underway in agricultural technology. Early medieval farmers had literally scratched away at the soil with light plows, usually drawn by oxen or donkeys. Plows were like those used in ancient Rome: the weight of the plow was carried in a pole that went across the animal's neck. Thus, if the load was too heavy the animal would simply suffocate. In turn, that meant that only relatively soft soils could be farmed, limiting the amount of land that could be made arable.

A series of inventions led to dramatic changes. Someone (we have no way of knowing who) developed a new kind of collar for horses and oxen that rested on the shoulders of the animal and thus allowed it to draw much heavier loads, enabling the use of heavier plows. Those plows were called *carruca*: a plow capable of digging deeply into the soil and turning it over, bringing air into the topsoil and refreshing its mineral and nutrient content. Simultaneously, iron horseshoes became increasingly common, which dramatically increased the ability of horses to produce usable muscle power, and iron plowshares proved capable of digging through the soil with greater efficiency.

In addition to the increase in available animal power thanks to those innovations, farmers started to take advantage of new techniques that greatly increased the output of the fields themselves. Up to that point, European farmers tended to employ two-field crop rotation, planting a field while leaving another "fallow" to recover its fertility for the next year. This system was sustainable but limited the amount of crops that could be grown. Starting around 1000 CE, farmers became more systematic about employing three-field crop rotation: working with three linked fields, they would plant one with wheat, one either with legumes (peas, beans, lentils) or barley, and leave one fallow, allowing animals to graze on its weeds and leftover stalks from the last season, with their manure helping to fertilize the soil. After harvest, farmers would rotate: the fallow field would be planted with grain, the grain with legumes, and the legume field left fallow. This process dramatically enriched the soil by returning nutrients to it directly with legumes or at least allowing it to naturally recover while it lay fallow. Thus, the overall yields of edible crops dramatically increased. Likewise, with the greater variety, the actual nutritional content of food became better.

Finally, starting in earnest in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, windmills and watermills became

increasingly common for grinding grain into usable flour. The difference in speed between hand-grinding grain and using a mill was dramatic – it could take most of a day to grind enough flour to bake bread for a family, but a mill could grind fifty pounds of grain in less than a half hour. While peasants resented having to pay for access to mills (which were generally controlled by landowners, often nobles or the Church), the enormous increase in productivity meant that much more food was available overall. Thus, mills were still cost effective for peasants, and milled flour became the norm across most of Europe by the end of the twelfth century.

The medieval agricultural revolution had tremendous long-term consequences for peasants and, ultimately, for all of European society Thanks to the increase in animal power and the effects of crop rotation, existing fields became far more productive. Whole new areas were opened to cultivation, thanks to the ability of the *carruca* to cut through rocky soil As a result, there was a major expansion between 1000 – 1300 from the middle latitudes of Europe farther north and east, as the farming population took advantage of the new technology (and growing population) to clear and cultivate what had been forest, scrub, or swamp. In turn, the existence of a surplus encouraged lords to convert payment in kind (i.e. taxes and rents paid in actual foodstuffs and livestock) to cash rent. Likewise, the relative stability allowed smaller kingdoms to mint their own coins, and over the course of a century or so (c. 1000 – 1100) much of Europe became a cash economy rather than a barter economy. This gave peasants an added incentive to cultivate as much as possible.

Peasants actually did very well for themselves in these centuries; they were often able to bargain with their lords for stabilized rents, and a fairly prosperous class of landowning peasants emerged that enjoyed traditional rights vis-à-vis the nobility. Thus, the centuries between 1000 CE – 1300 CE were relatively *good* for many European peasants. Later centuries would be much harder for them. As an aside, it is important to bear in mind that the progressive view of history, namely the idea that "things always get better over time" is actually factually *wrong* for much of history, as reflected in the lives of peasants in the Middle Ages and early modern period.

Cities and Economic Change

The increase in population tied to the agricultural revolution had another consequence: beyond simply improving life for peasants and increasing family size, it led to the growth of towns and cities. Even though most peasants never left the area they were born in, many did migrate to the nearest towns and cities and try to make a life there; serfs (unfree peasants) who made it to a town and stayed a year and day were even legally liberated from having to return to the farm. Likewise, whole families and even villages migrated in search of new lands to farm, generally speaking to the east and north as noted above.

This period saw the rebirth of urban life. Not since the fall of Rome had most towns and cities consisted of more than just central hubs of local trade with a few thousand inhabitants. By the twelfth century, however, many cities were expanding rapidly, sometimes by as much as six times in the course of a few centuries. Likewise, the leaders of these cities were often merchants who grew rich on trade, rather than traditional landowning lords.

Even as the agricultural revolution laid the foundation for growth and the cities took advantage of it, other factors led to the economic boom of this period. Lords created new roads and repaired Roman ones from 1,000 years earlier, which allowed bulk trade to travel more cheaply and effectively. More important than bulk goods, however, were luxury goods, a trade almost entirely controlled by the Italian cities during this period. Caravans arrived in the Middle East from China and Central Asia and sold goods to Italian merchants waiting for them. From the Black Sea Region and what was left of Byzantium, the Italians then transported these goods back to the west. Silk and spices were worth far more than their weight in gold, and their trade created the foundation for early financial markets and banks.

Trade networks emerged not only linking Italy to the Middle East but southern to northern Europe. In the Champagne region of France annual fairs brought merchants together to trade their goods. German rivers saw the growth of towns and cities on their banks where goods were exchanged. Starting in the twelfth century, the German city of Lubeck became the capital of the Hanseatic League, a group of cities engaged in trade that came together to regulate exchange and maintain monopolies on goods.

The social consequences were dramatic and widespread, yet the status of merchants in European society was troubled. They were resented by the poor (still the vast majority of the population), often held in contempt by traditional land-owning nobles, and frequently condemned by the Church. *Usury*, the practice of lending money and charging interest, was classified as a sin by the Church even though the Church itself had to borrow money and pay interest constantly. Likewise, anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jews as greedy and ruthless arose from the simple fact that dealing in money and money-lending was one of the only professions Jews were allowed to pursue in most medieval kingdoms and cities. Christian Europeans needed loans (as it happens, loans and banking are essential to a functioning cash economy), but despised the Jews they got those loans from – hence the origins of some of the longest-lasting anti-Semitic stereotypes.

Even though cities did not "fit" in the medieval worldview very well, even the most conservative kings had to recognize the economic strength of the new cities. Just as peasants had been able to negotiate for better treatment, large towns and cities received official town charters from kings in return for stable taxation. In many cases, cities were practically politically independent, although they generally had to acknowledge the overall authority of the king or local lord.

The growth in trade did not, however, create a real "market economy" in the modern sense. For one thing, skilled trades were closely regulated by craft guilds, which maintained legal monopolies. Monopolies were granted to guilds by kings, lords, or city governments, and anyone practicing a given trade who was not a member of the corresponding guild could be fined, imprisoned, or expelled. Guilds jealously guarded the skills and tools of their trades – everything from goldsmithing to barrel making was controlled by guilds. Guilds existed to ensure that their members produced quality goods, but they also existed to keep out outsiders and to make the "masters" who controlled the guilds wealthy.

Medieval Politics

The feudal system flourished in the High Middle Ages. While it had its origins in the centuries after the collapse of the western Roman Empire, the formal system of vassals receiving land grants by pledging military service to kings (or, increasingly, in return for cash payments in lieu of military service) really came of age in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The lords themselves presided over a rigidly hierarchical social and political system in which one's vocation was largely determined by birth, and the vocation of the nobility was clearly defined by landowning and making war.

Lords – meaning land-owning nobles – lived in "manors," a term that denoted not only their actual houses but the lands they owned. All of the peasants on their lands owed them rent, originally in the form of crops but eventually in cash, as well as a certain amount of labor each year. Peasants were subdivided into different categories, including the relatively-well off independent yeomen and freeholders, who owned their own plots of land, down to the serfs, semi-free peasants tied to the land, and then the cottagers, who were the landless peasants worse-off even than serfs. The system of land-ownership and the traditional rights enjoyed by not just lords, but serfs and freeholders who lived under the lords, is referred to as "manorialism," the rural political and economic system of the High Middle Ages as a whole.

One of the traditional rights, and a vital factor in the lives of peasants, were the commons: lands not officially controlled by anyone that all people had a right to use. The commons provided firewood, grazing land, and some limited trapping of small animals, collectively serving as a vital "safety net" for peasants living on the edge of subsistence. Access to the commons was not about written laws, but instead the traditional, centuries-old agreements that governed the interactions between different social classes. Eventually, peasants would find their access to the commons curtailed by landowning nobles intent on converting them to cash-producing farms, but for the medieval period itself, the peasants continued to enjoy the right to their use.

The kingdoms of Europe up to this point were barely unified. In many cases, kings were simply the most powerful nobles, men who extracted pledges of loyalty from their subjects but whose actual authority was limited to their personal lands. Likewise, kings in the early Middle Ages were largely itinerant, moving from place to place all year long. They had to make an annual circuit of their kingdoms to ensure that their powerful vassals would stay loyal to them; a vassal ignored for too long could, and generally did, simply stop acknowledging the lordship of his king. Those patterns started to change during the High Middle Ages, and the first two kingdoms to show real signs of centralization were France and England.

In France, a series of kings named Philip (I through IV) ruled from 1060 to 1314, building a strong administrative apparatus complete with royal judges who were directly beholden to the crown. The kings ruled the region around Paris (called the *Île-de-France*, meaning the "island of France"), but their influence went well beyond it as they extended their holdings. Philip IV even managed to seize almost complete control of the French Church, defying papal authority. He also proved incredibly shrewd at creating new taxes and in attacking and seizing the lands and holdings of groups like the French Jewish community and the Knights Templar, both of whom he ransacked (the assault on the Knights Templar started in 1307).

In England, the line descending from William the Conqueror (following his invasion in 1066) was also effective in creating a relatively stable political system. All land was legally the king's, and his nobles received their lands as "fiefs," essentially loans from the crown that had to be renewed for payments on the death of a landholder before it could be inherited. Henry II (r. 1154 – 1189) created a system of royal sheriffs to enforce his will, created circuit courts that traveled around the land hearing cases, and created a grand jury system that allowed people to be tried by their peers.

In 1215, a much less competent king named John signed the Magna Carta ("great charter") with the English nobility that formally acknowledged the feudal privileges of the nobility, towns and clergy. The important effect of the Magna Carta was its principle: even the king had to respect the law. Thereafter English kings began to call the Parliament, a meeting of the Church, nobles, and well-off commoners, in order to get authorization and money for their wars.

Women and Gender

Gender standards in medieval Europe were based on a combination of centuries-old social traditions, ancient medical theories, and biblical standards. Greek and Roman medical ideas, very much the basis of the medieval understanding of human biology, held that women were essentially inferior versions of men: weaker, less intelligent, and suffering from an excess of moist "humors" (the bodily fluids that supposedly formed the foundation of health). Biblical stories taught that women were inherently more credulous and sinful, with Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden both the origin and the model of female wickedness. When male writers bothered to write about women, they generally did so with predictable misogyny. A handful of women writers emerged over the course of the Middle Ages, but since there were almost no opportunities for women to learn Latin (the great exception being the education afforded to some nuns) they were cut off from the world of medieval scholarship.

That being noted, on a practical level medieval women exercised at least some forms of genuine agency (meaning the ability to make meaningful choices about their own lives). Legally, women could inherit and own property independently, and in most cases they retained control of the dowry brought to marriage. Women almost always married younger than men did, meaning there were large numbers of widows in medieval society who generally retained control of their property. Marriage itself was regarded as a sacred duty: it was one of the seven sacraments that the Church held were essential to spiritual salvation. Marriages were only valid if both parties entered into the marriage willingly, and it is clear that many medieval marriages were genuinely affectionate partnerships despite the fact that medieval society was explicitly patriarchal and despite the prevalence of misogynistic theories about women's supposed weakness and sinfulness. Likewise, at least some male authors were clearly aware that women were more than capable of wit, independence, and competence.

In daily life women performed a host of crucial economic and social functions. Medieval society was, after all, completely dependent on agriculture and the vast majority of the population were peasants, with men and women both obliged to work from childhood to old age (which for most people was their late 30s

– life expectancy was the early 40s for both men and women). Farm work was divided between men's and women's labor. Men plowed fields, tended the large farm animals, and performed maintenance and construction. Women gardened, tended the small animals (e.g. poultry), made cheese and ale, and were almost completely responsible for cooking, cleaning, and childcare. This gendered division of labor was never absolute, of course, especially since women did "men's work" out of necessity whenever men were away in war, were injured or sick, or were otherwise unavailable. One area that had an obvious negative impact on medieval women was that their work was never done – a man's workday ended when he returned from the fields, but a woman *always* had work that needed to be done around the house.

Women in more elite social categories also performed important economic tasks, but they were increasingly excluded from the formal institutions of organization and power like craft guilds (i.e. more women worked as skilled artisans *before* craft guilds cemented their control of production). The wives of artisans were often artisans themselves, but their work was simply regarded as part of their husbands' output. Married noblewomen managed their estates, a necessity considering how closely noblemen's social identity revolved around warfare, while noble widows sometimes served as formal feudal vassals to more powerful lords, even occasionally leading troops when called into service. Still, the expectation was that women in general were to defer to men in almost every case, and even widows often found themselves pressured to remarry (and in the process hand over much of their former independence). Even queens were usually limited in their access to genuine political power, serving as "queens consort," wives of kings, with the latter possessing complete political control, far more often than "queens regnant," rulers in their own right who were able to share power with their royal spouse.

Monasticism

One special social category within medieval society deserves added attention: the monks and nuns. Monks and nuns took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience when they left their normal lives and joined (respectively) monasteries and convents. They did not, however, have to spend their time attending to the spiritual needs of laypeople (i.e. people outside of the Church), which was the primary function of priests. Instead, they were to devote themselves to prayer and to useful works, activities that were thought to encourage piety and devotion among the monks and nuns, and which often proved to be extremely profitable to the monasteries and convents themselves.

Monasteries and convents grew to become some of the most important economic institutions in medieval Europe, despite their stated intention of housing people whose full-time job was to pray for the souls of Christians everywhere. Monasteries and convents had to be economically self-sustaining, overseeing both agriculture and crafts on their lands. Over time, activities like overseeing agriculture on monastery lands, brewing beer or making wine, or painstakingly copying the manuscripts of books often became a major focus of life in monasteries and convents. In essence, many monasteries and convents became the most dynamic and commercially successful institutions in their home regions. Monks and nuns encouraged innovative new forms

of agriculture on their lands, sold products (including textiles and the above-mentioned beer and wine) at a healthy profit, and despite their vows of poverty, successful monasteries and convents became lavishly decorated and luxurious for their inhabitants.

Simultaneously, one way that medieval elites tried to shore up their chances of avoiding eternal damnation was leaving land and wealth in their wills to monasteries and convents. Generations of European elites granted land, in particular, to monasteries and convents during life or as part of their posthumous legacy. The result was the astonishing statistic that monasteries owned a full 20% of the arable land of Western Europe by the late Middle Ages.

Corruption

Monasteries and convents were not alone in their wealth. The upper ranks of the Church – bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and the popes themselves – were almost exclusively drawn from the European nobility. Lower-ranking churchmen were, in turn, commoners, often drawn from the ranks of the same peasants that they ministered to from one of the small parish churches that dotted the landscape. All of the wealth that went into the Church, from an obligatory tax called the tithe, was siphoned up to the upper reaches of the institutional Church, and many of the high-level priests lived like princes as a result.

Morality in this setting was, predictably, lax. Despite the nominal requirement not to marry, many high-level priests lived openly with concubines and equally openly supported their children, seeing their sons set up as landowners or members of the Church in their own right and marrying off daughters to noble families. Despite the injunction to live simply and avoid luxury, many priests (and monks, and nuns) were greedy and ostentatious; one notorious practice was of bishops or archbishops who controlled and received incomes from many different territories (called "bishoprics") at once but never actually visited them. Another practice was of noblemen literally buying positions in the Church for their sons – teenage boys might find themselves appointed bishops thanks to the financial intervention of their fathers, with Church officials pocketing the bribe. Medieval depictions of hell were full of the image of priests, monks, and nuns all plummeting into the fire to face eternal torment for what a profoundly poor job they had done while alive in living up to the moral demands of their respective vocations. In other words, medieval laypeople were well aware of how corrupt many in the Church actually were.

In addition, while medieval education and literacy was almost entirely confined to the Church as an institution, many rural priests were at best semi-literate. All Church services were conducted in Latin, and yet some priests understood Latin only poorly, if at all (it had long since vanished as a vernacular language in Europe). Thus, some of the very caretakers of Christian belief in medieval society often had a very shallow understanding of what that belief was supposed to consist of theologically.

For all of the Middle Ages, however, the fact that the lay public knew that the Church was corrupt and that many of its members were incompetent was of limited practical importance. There was no alternative. Without the Church, without the sacraments only it could offer, without the prayers issued by monks and

nuns for the souls of believers, and without its reassurance of a life to come after death, medieval Christians were certain that their eternal souls were damned to hell.

Medieval Learning

Despite the biases of later Renaissance thinkers that the medieval period was nothing but the "dark ages," bereft of learning and culture, there were very important intellectual achievements in the period of 1000 – 1400 CE. Most of these had to do with foreign influences that were taken and reshaped by European thinkers, from the ancient Greeks and Romans to innovations originating in the Islamic empires to the south and east of Europe.

Likewise, despite the problems of corruption and ignorance among members of the clergy, scholarship *did* continue and even prosper within the church during the late Middle Ages. Numerous priests were not only literate in Latin and deeply knowledgeable about Christian theology, but made major strides in considering, debating, and explaining the nuances of Christian thought. Thus, it is a mistake to consider the medieval church as nothing more than a kind of "scam" – it did provide meaningful guidance and comfort to medieval Christians, and some of its members were exemplary thinkers and major intellectuals.

Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages

A symptom of the growth of intellectual life in the High Middle Ages was the fact that literacy (which, at the time, meant the ability to read, not necessarily to write) finally revived, at least a bit, following the real nadir of literacy that had lasted from the collapse of the western Roman Empire until about 1050. As of 1050, perhaps 1% of the population could read, most of whom were priests, some of the latter only being able to stumble through the Latin liturgy without fully comprehending it. While it is impossible to calculate anything close to the exact literacy rates at any point before the modern era, it is still clear that literacy started to climb following that eleventh-century low point, with many regular merchants and even a few peasants acquiring at least basic reading knowledge by the fourteenth century. The explanation for this growth in literacy is an expansion of educational institutions that had only existed in a few pockets earlier in the Middle Ages.

The two forms of educational institutions available were tutoring offered within monasteries and schools associated with cathedrals. Both were, obviously, part of the Church, and cathedral schools in particular focused on training future priests. Monasteries offered basic education in literacy (in Latin) to laypeople as well as the monks themselves, and even some prosperous farmers achieved a basic degree of literacy as a result. Cathedral schools in cities offered the same, and they increasingly trained not only local elites, but even the children of artisans and merchants.

While they did offer basic education to laypeople, the official focus of cathedral schools was in training priests. They began to expand after 1000 CE, offering a more focused and rigorous grounding in sacred texts and, to an extent, ancient texts from Rome, to help educate Church leaders and laypeople. The cathedral

schools were supposed to be turning out not just spiritual leaders, but skilled bureaucrats, and that required a rigorous form of education that encouraged the study not just of the Bible, but of classics of Latin literature like the speeches of the great Roman politician Cicero and ancient Rome's great epic poem, Virgil's *Aeneid*. Thus, those priests-in-training who were lucky enough to attend one of the better cathedral schools acquired a strong command of classical Latin and were made aware of the high intellectual standards that had prospered in the glory days of Rome.

Scholasticism

If there was a single event that changed education and scholarship in the late Middle Ages, it was the arrival of the lost works of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle was one of the greatest geniuses of the ancient world, producing learned works on philosophy, astronomy, physics, biology, literary criticism and, most importantly for medieval Europe, logic. Some of Aristotle's works had survived in Europe after the fall of Rome, but most of it had vanished. Over the course of the eleventh century, translations of Aristotle's work on formal philosophical logic re-emerged in Europe. Most had been preserved in the Arab world, where Aristotle was considered the single most important pre-Islamic philosopher and was studied with great rigor by Arab scholars. Enterprising scholars – many of them Jewish philosophers who lived in North Africa and Spain – translated Aristotle's work on logic from Arabic into Latin. Later, Greeks from Byzantium came to Europe with the originals in Greek and they, too, translated it into Latin.

The importance of this rediscovery of Aristotle is that his work on logic offered a formal system for evaluating complicated bodies of work like the Christian Bible itself. The inherent problem facing believers of any religion based on a single major text is figuring out what that text fundamentally *means*. To wit: the Christian Bible is full of parables, stories, and accounts of events that are often terrifically difficult to interpret. Even in the four gospels that describe the life of Christ, not all of Christ's actions or sayings are easy to understand, and the gospels sometimes offer conflicting accounts. What did Christ mean when he said "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24)? What did he mean with "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34)? Not to mention, how was a Christian to make sense of the stern, vengeful God described in the Old Testament and the deity of peace and forgiveness represented by Christ? Most medieval Christians were content to simply accept the sacraments and offer prayers to the saints without worrying about the theological details, but increasingly, educated priests themselves wanted to understand the nuances of their own religion.

Thus, Aristotle's formal approach to logic proved invaluable to the interpreters of the Bible. Armed with his newly-rediscovered system of logical interpretation, key figures within the Church began to analyze the Bible and the works of early Christian thinkers with new energy and focus. The result was scholasticism, which was the major intellectual movement of the High Middle Ages. Scholasticism was the rigorous application of methods of logic, originally developed by Aristotle, to Christian scriptures. And, because the cathedral

schools of the late Middle Ages increasingly relied on scholasticism to train and teach new priests, it spread rapidly across all of Europe.

By roughly 1100 CE, a new form of formal education based on scholasticism was the method of instruction in cathedral schools. The instructor would read a short passage from the Bible or an early Christian intellectual leader, then cite various authorities on the meaning of the passage. This was called the lecture, which simply means the "reading." Students would then consider the possible meanings of the passage in a period of meditation. Finally, and most importantly, students would be called on to debate their respective interpretations. In debates, students were expected to cite not only the passage itself but any supporting evidence they could come up with from the vast body of sacred and ancient writings. The result was that, at least at the better cathedral schools, large numbers of newly-minted priests emerged with a strong understanding of Christian thought and an equally strong grasp of rhetoric, debate, and logic.

The importance to scholasticism of what was called at the time "disputation" – the debating technique described above – cannot be overstated. Rather than merely presenting an interpretation of Christian thought and expecting students to absorb it verbatim, scholastic teachers used disputation with students to hone their students' argumentative skills, insight, and logical analysis. One obvious example of a field that benefited from formal disputation was law: disputation as a technique easily transitioned from biblical questions to legal ones, and by the twelfth century new generations of lawyers (starting in Italy) used scholastic techniques both to revive aspects of Roman law and to hone their own skills as lawyers.

Some teachers in the scholastic tradition became minor intellectual celebrities, the most celebrated being Peter Abelard (1079 – 1142), a brilliant teacher and debater in Paris who gave extensive lectures exploring both the pros and cons of various important questions that had been considered by the Church fathers. Abelard's major focus was the use and application of reason to faith – he was of the belief that ultimate truth could and should sustain reasoned investigation of its precepts, a stance that got him into considerable trouble with some Church leaders. Abelard's point was that educated Christians *should* challenge their own beliefs and try to understand them; to him, since Christians were safe in the assumption that the Bible would always be the ultimate source of truth, their own attempts to understand its apparent contradictions and ambiguities only strengthened the Christian religion as a whole.

The new rigor of education and the expansion of cathedral schools, helped in part by the popularity of figures like Abelard, led in turn to the emergence of the first true universities. Initially, they were comparable to craft guilds, with organizations of students and teachers negotiating over the cost of classes and preventing unauthorized lecturers from stealing students. A princely charter was granted to the law students of Bologna in northern Italy in 1158, which marks it as the first recognized university. The most significant medieval university was, however, the Sorbonne of Paris in 1257. It grew out of the cathedral school of Notre Dame, at which Abelard had taught, and it is usually considered the oldest large university in the western world (it is still very much in operation today).

Medieval universities created a number of practices that live on to the present in higher education. They drew up a curriculum, established graduation requirements and exams, and conferred degrees. The robes

and distinctive hats of graduation ceremonies are directly descended from the medieval models. Teachers were all members of the clergy, "professing" religion, hence the term "professor." The core disciplines, which date back to Roman times, were divided between the liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic (called the trivium) and what might now be described as a more "technical" set of disciplines: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (the quadrivium) – this division was the earliest version of a curriculum of "arts and sciences." Finally, the four kinds of doctorates, the PhD (doctor of philosophy), the JD (doctor of jurisprudence, that is to say of law), theThD (doctor of theology, a priest), and the MD (doctor of medicine), are all derived from medieval degrees.

All students and professors were male, since the assumption was that the whole purpose of studies was to create better church officials; while some women did become important medieval thinkers, they were either exceptional individuals who had been tutored by men or were nuns who had access to the (often excellent) education of the convents. One outstanding example of a medieval woman who was known in her own lifetime as a major intellectual figure was Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1179), abbess of a German convent. While not formally educated in the scholastic tradition, Hildegard was nevertheless the author of several works of theological interpretation and of medicine. She was a musician and composer as well, writing music and musical plays performed by both nuns and laypeople. She carried on a voluminous correspondence with other learned people during her lifetime and was eventually sainted by the Church. While Hildegard was exceptional in her range of intellectual production, many other women within the Church also contributed to medieval learning and scholarship as a whole.

Conclusion

While it is tempting to characterize European intellectual life before about 1000 CE as part of a "dark age," that was obviously no longer the case by the eleventh century. Educational institutions multiplied, diversified, and expanded, and the quality of education and scholarship increased along with that expansion. While most people – by definition, peasants – remained illiterate and largely ignorant of the world beyond their own villages, there was at least a current of real intellectual curiosity and rigorous scholarship expanding in the cities, monasteries, and convents of the High Middle Ages.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Latin Principalities – MapMaster

Teutonic Theocracy – S. Bollmann

This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 14: The High Middle Ages in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: GESTA FRANCORUM

This text is available at the Medieval Sourcebook.

Gesta Francorum, excerpts

Circa 1100-1101, an anonymous writer connected with Bohemund of Antioch wrote the Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymytanorum *(The Deeds of the Franks) This text was used by the later writers as a source.*

Urban II: Speech at Clermont

When now that time was at hand which the Lord Jesus daily points out to His faithful, especially in the Gospel, saying, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me," a mighty agitation was carried on throughout all the region of Gaul. (Its tenor was) that if anyone desired to follow the Lord zealously, with a pure heart and mind, and wished faithfully to bear the cross after Him, he would no longer hesitate to take up the way to the Holy Sepulchre.

And so Urban, Pope of the Roman see, with his archbishops, bishops, abbots, and priests, set out as quickly as possible beyond the mountains and began to deliver sermons and to preach eloquently, saying: "Whoever wishes to save his soul should not hesitate humbly to take up the way of the Lord, and if he lacks sufficient money, divine mercy will give him enough." Then the apostolic lord continued, "Brethren, we ought to endure much suffering for the name of Christ – misery, poverty, nakedness, persecution, want, illness, hunger, thirst, and other (ills) of this kind, just as the Lord saith to His disciples: 'Ye must suffer much in My name,' and 'Be not ashamed to confess Me before the faces of men; verily I will give you mouth and wisdom,' and finally, 'Great is your reward in Heaven."' And when this speech had already begun to be noised abroad, little by little, through all the regions and countries of Gaul, the Franks, upon hearing such reports, forthwith caused crosses to be sewed on their right shoulders, saying that they followed with one accord the footsteps of Christ, by which they had been redeemed from the hand of hell.

The March to Jerusalem

Accordingly, we left the fortified town and came to Tripoli on the sixth day of the week on the thirteenth day of incoming May, and we stayed there for three days. At length, the King of Tripoli made an agreement with the leaders, and he straightway loosed to them more than three hundred pilgrims who had been captured there and gave fifteen thousand *besants* and fifteen horses of great value; he likewise gave us a great market of

horses, asses and all goods, whence the whole army of Christ was greatly enriched. But he made an agreement with them that if they could win the war which the Emir of Babylon was getting ready against them and could take Jerusalem, he would become a Christian and would recognize his land as (a gift) from them. In such manner it was settled.

We left the city on the second day of the week in the month of May and, passing along a narrow and difficult road all day and night, we came to a fortress, the name of which was Botroun. Then we came to a city called Gibilet near the sea, in which we suffered very great thirst, and, thus worn out, we reached a river named Ibrahim. Then on the eve of the day of the Ascension of the Lord we crossed a mountain in which the way was exceedingly narrow, and there we expected to find the enemy lying in ambush for us. But God favoring us, none of them dared to appear in our way. Then our knights went ahead of us and cleared the way before us, and we arrived at a city by the sea which called Beirut, and thence we went to another city called Sidon, thence to another called Tyre, and from Tyre to the city of Acre. But from Acre we came to a fortified place the name of which was Cayphas, and then we came near Caesarea. There was celebrated Pentecost on the third day of outgoing May. Then we came to Ramlah, which through fear of the Franks the Saracens had left empty. Near it was the famous church in which rested the most precious body of St. George, since for the name of Christ he there happily received martyrdom from the treacherous pagans. There our leaders held a council to choose a bishop who should have charge of this place and erect a church. They gave tithes to him and enriched him with gold and silver, and with horses and other animals, that be might live the more devoutly and honorably with those who were with him. He remained there with joy.

The Fall of Jerusalem

At length, our leaders decided to beleaguer the city with siege machines, so that we might enter and worship the Saviour at the Holy Sepulchre. They constructed wooden towers and many other siege machines. Duke Godfrey made a wooden tower and other siege devices, and Count Raymond did the same, although it was necessary to bring wood from a considerable distance. However, when the Saracens saw our men engaged in this work, they greatly strengthened the fortifications of the city and increased the height of the turrets at night. On a certain Sabbath night, the leaders, after having decided which parts of the wall were weakest, dragged the tower and the machines to the eastern side of the city. Moreover, we set up the tower at earliest dawn and equipped and covered it on the first, second, and third days of the week. The Count of St. Gilles erected his tower on the plain to the south of the city.

While all this was going on, our water supply was so limited that no one could buy enough water for one *denarius* to satisfy or quench his thirst. Both day and night, on the fourth and fifth days of the week, we made a determined attack on the city from all sides. However, before we made this assault on the city, the bishops and priests persuaded all, by exhorting and preaching, to honor the Lord by marching around Jerusalem in a great procession, and to prepare for battle by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Early on the sixth day of the week we again attacked the city on all sides, but as the assault was unsuccessful, we were all astounded and fearful. However, when the hour approached on which our Lord Jesus Christ deigned to suffer on the Cross for us, our knights began to fight bravely in one of the towers – namely, the party with Duke Godfrey and his

brother, Count Eustace. One of our knights, named Lethold, clambered up the wall of the city, and no sooner had he ascended than the defenders fled from the walls and through the city. Our men followed, killing and slaying even to the Temple of Solomon, where the slaughter was so great that our men waded in blood up to their ankles....

Count Raymond brought his army and his tower up near the wall from the south, but between the tower and the wall there was a very deep ditch. Then our men took counsel how they might fill it, and had it proclaimed by heralds that anyone who carried three stones to the ditch would receive one *denarius.* The work of filling it required three days and three nights, and when at length the ditch was filled, they moved the tower up to the wall, but the men defending this portion of the wall fought desperately with stones and fire. When the Count heard that the Franks were already in the city, he said to his men, "Why do you loiter? Lo, the Franks are even now within the city." The Emir who commanded the Tower of St. David surrendered to the Count and opened that gate at which the pilgrims had always been accustomed to pay tribute. But this time the pilgrims entered the city, pursuing and killing the Saracens up to the Temple of Solomon, where the enemy gathered in force. The battle raged throughout the day, so that the Temple was covered with their blood. When the pagans had been overcome, our men seized great numbers, both men and women, either killing them or keeping them captive, as they wished. On the roof of the Temple a great number of pagans of both sexes had assembled, and these were taken under the protection of Tancred and Gaston of *Beert.* Afterward, the army scattered throughout the city and took possession of the gold and silver, the horses and mules, and the houses filled with goods of all kinds.

Rejoicing and weeping for joy, our people came to the Sepulchre of Jesus our Saviour to worship and pay their debt [i.e. fulfil crusading vows by worshiping at the Sepulchre]. At dawn our men cautiously went up to the roof of the Temple and attacked Saracen men and women, beheading them with naked swords. Some of the Saracens, however, leaped from the Temple roof. Tancred, seeing this, was greatly angered.

Source:

August. C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, (Princeton: 1921)

PRIMARY SOURCE: USMAH IBN MUNQIDH, AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This text is available at the Medieval Sourcebook.

Usmah Ibn Munqidh (1095-1188): *Autobiography*, excerpts on the Franks

Usamah (1095-1188), was a Muslim warrior and courtier, who fought against the Crusaders with Saladin. Yet as a resident of the area around Palestine, he also had a chance to befriend a number of them. His autobiography dates from around 1175.

Mysterious are the works of the Creator, the author of all things! When one comes to recount cases regarding the Franks, he cannot but glorify Allah (exalted is he!) and sanctify him, for he sees them as animals possessing the virtues of courage and fighting, but nothing else; just as animals have only the virtues of strength and carrying loads. I shall now give some instances of their doings and their curious mentality.

In the army of King Fulk, son of Fulk, was a Frankish reverend knight who had just arrived from their land in order to make the holy pilgrimage and then return home. He was of my intimate fellowship and kept such constant company with me that he began to call me "my brother." Between us were mutual bonds of amity and friendship. When he resolved to return by sea to his homeland, he said to me:

My brother, I am leaving for my country and I want you to send with me thy son (my son, who was then fourteen years old, was at that time in my company) to our country, where he can see the knights and learn wisdom and chivalry. When he returns, be will be like a wise man.

Thus there fell upon my ears words which would never come out of the head of a sensible man; for even if my son were to be taken captive, his captivity could not bring him a worse misfortune than carrying him into the lands of the Franks. However, I said to the man:

By thy life, this has exactly been my idea. But the only thing that prevented me from carrying it out was the fact that his grandmother, my mother, is so fond of him and did not this time let him come out with me until she exacted an oath from me to the effect that I would return him to her.

Thereupon he asked, "Is thy mother still alive?" "Yes." I replied. 'Well," said he, "disobey her not." A case illustrating their curious medicine is the following:

The lord of al-Munaytirah wrote to my uncle asking him to dispatch a physician to treat certain sick persons among his people. My uncle sent him a Christian physician named Thabit. Thabit was absent but ten days when be returned. So we said to him, "How quickly has thou healed thy patients!" He said:

They brought before me a knight in whose leg an abscess had grown; and a woman afflicted with imbecility. To the knight I applied a small poultice until the abscess opened and became well; and the woman I put on diet and made her humor wet. Then a Frankish physician came to them and said, "This man knows nothing about treating them." He then said to the knight, "Which wouldst thou prefer, living with one leg or dying with two?" The latter replied, "Living with one leg." The physician said, "Bring me a strong knight and a sharp ax." A knight came with the ax. And I was standing by. Then the physician laid the leg of the patient on a block of wood and bade the knight strike his leg with the ax and chop it off at one blow. Accordingly he struck it-while I was looking on-one blow, but the leg was not severed. He dealt another blow, upon which the marrow of the leg flowed out and the patient died on the spot. He then examined the woman and said, "This is a woman in whose head there is a devil which has possessed her. Shave off her hair." Accordingly they shaved it off and the woman began once more to cat their ordinary diet-garlic and mustard. Her imbecility took a turn for the worse. The physician then said, "The devil has penetrated through her head." He therefore took a razor, made a deep cruciform incision on it, peeled off the skin at the middle of the incision until the bone of the skull was exposed and rubbed it with salt. The woman also expired instantly. Thereupon I asked them whether my services were needed any longer, and when they replied in the negative I returned home, having learned of their medicine what I knew not before.

I have, however, witnessed a case of their medicine which was quite different from that.

The king of the Franks bad for treasurer a knight named Bernard, who (may Allah's curse be upon him!) was one of the most accursed and wicked among the Franks. A horse kicked him in the leg, which was subsequently infected and which opened in fourteen different places. Every time one of these cuts would close in one place, another would open in ancther place. All this happened while I was praying for his perdition. Then came to him a Frankish physician and removed from the leg all the ointments which were on it and began to wasb it with very strong vinegar. By this treatment all the cuts were healed and the man became well again. He was up again like a devil. Another case illustrating their curious medicine is the following: In Shayzar we had an artisan named abu-al-Fath, who had a boy whose neck was afflicted with scrofula. Every time a part of it would close, another part would open. This man happened to go to Antioch on business of his, accompanied by his son. A Frank noticed the boy and asked his father about him. Abu-al-Fath replied, "This is my son." The Frank said to him, 'Wilt thou swear by thy religion that if I prescribe to you a medicine which will cure thy boy, thou wilt charge nobody fees for prescribing it thyself? In that case, I shall prescribe to you a medicine which will cure the boy." The man took the oath and the Frank said:

Take uncrushed leaves of glasswort, burn them, then soak the ashes in olive oil and sharp vinegar. Treat the scrofula with them until the spot on which it is growing is eaten up. Then take burnt lead, soak it in ghee butter and treat him with it. That will cure him.

The father treated the boy accordingly, and the boy was cured. The sores closed and the boy returned to his normal condition of health.

I have myself treated with this medicine many who were afflicted with such disease, and the treatment was successful in removing the cause of the complaint.

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The Franks are void of all zeal and jealousy. One of them may be walking along with his wife. He meets another man who takes the wife by the hand and steps aside to converse with her while the husband is standing on one side waiting for his wife to conclude the conversation. If she lingers too long for him, he leaves her alone with the conversant and goes away.

Here is an illustration which I myself witnessed:

When I used to visit Nablus, I always took lodging with a man named Mu'izz, whose home was a lodging house for the Muslims. The house had windows which opened to the road, and there stood opposite to it on the other side of the road a house belonging to a Frank who sold wine for the merchants. He would take some wine in a bottle and go around announcing it by shouting, "So and so, the merchant, has just opened a cask full of this wine. He who wants to buy some of it will find it in such and such a place." The Frank's pay for the announcement made would be the wine in that bottle. One day this Frank went home and found a man with his wife in the same bed. He asked him, "What could have made you enter into my wife's room?" The man replied, "I was tired, so I went in to rest." "But how," asked he, "didst thou get into my bed?" The other replied, "I found a bed that was spread, so I slept in it." "But," said be, "my wife was sleeping together with you!" The other replied, "Well, the bed is hers. How could I therefore have prevented her from using her own bed?"

"By the truth of my religion," said the husband, "if thou shouldst do it again, thou and I would have a quarrel." Such was for the Frank the entire expression of his disapproval and the limit of his jealousy. . . .

Another illustration: I entered the public bath in Sur [Tyre] and took my place in a secluded part. One of my servants thereupon said to me, "There is with us in the bath a woman." When I went out, I sat on one of the stone benches and behold! the woman who was in the bath had come out all dressed and was standing with her father just opposite me. But I could not be sure that she was a woman. So I said to one of my companions, "By Allah, see if this is a woman," by which I meant that he should ask about her. But he went, as I was looking at him, lifted the end of her robe and looked carefully at her. Thereupon her father turned toward me and said, "This is my daughter. Her mother is dead and she has nobody to wash her hair. So I took her in with me to the bath and washed her head." I replied, "Thou hast well done! This is something for which thou shalt be rewarded [by Allah]!"

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Among the Franks are those who have become acclimatized and have as- sociated long with the Muslims. These are much better than the recent comers from the Frankish lands. But they constitute the exception and cannot be treated as a rule.

Here is an illustration. I dispatched one of my men to Antioch on business. There was in Antioch at that time al-Ra'is Theodoros Sophianos, to whom I was bound by mutual ties of amity. His influence in Antioch

was supreme. One day he said to my man, "I am invited by a friend of mine who is a Frank. Thou shouldst come with me so that thou mayest see their fashions." My man related the story in the following words:

I went along with him and we came to the home of a knight who belonged to the old category of knights who came with the early expeditions of the Franks. He had been by that time stricken off the register and exempted from service, and possessed in Antioch an estate on the income of which he lived. The knight presented an excellent table, with food extraordinarily clean and delicious. Seeing me abstaining from food, he said, "Eat, be of good cheer! I never eat Frankish dishes, but I have Egyptian women cooks and never eat except their cooking. Besides, pork never enters my home." I ate, but guardedly, and after that we departed.

As I was passing in the market place, a Frankish woman all of a sudden hung to my clothes and began to mutter words in their language, and I could not understand what she was saying. This made me immediately the center of a big crowd of Franks. I was convinced that death was at hand. But all of a sudden that same knight approached. On seeing me, he came and said to that woman, "What is the matter between you and this Muslim?" She replied, "This is he who has killed my brother Hurso." This Hurso was a knight in Afiimiyah who was killed by someone of the army of Hamah. The Christian knight shouted at her, saying, "This is a bourgeois (i.e., a merchant) who neither fights nor attends a fight." He also yelled at the people who had assembled, and they all dispersed. Then he took me by the hand and went away. Thus the effect of that meal was my deliverance from certain death.*

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *Gesta Francorum* AND *Usmah Ibn Munqidh, Autobiography.*

Reading Journal

For this module's reading journal, you will focus on the selections from the *Gesta Francorum*. Describe the perspective of the author. How does the author characterize the Crusaders (the knights who participated) as well as the Crusade? Use specific examples (quotes) from the text selection to support your analysis.

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART XII

MODULE ELEVEN: THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

READING: THE CRISES OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Christopher Brooks

From a very "high level" perspective, the years between about 1000 CE – 1300 CE were relatively good ones for Europe. The medieval agricultural revolution sparked an expansion of population, urbanization, and economics, advances in education and scholarship paid off in higher literacy rates and a more sophisticated intellectual life, and Europe was free of large-scale invasions. Starting in the mid-thirteenth century in Eastern Europe, and spreading to Western Europe in the fourteenth century, however, a series of crises undermined European prosperity, security, and population levels. Historians refer to these events as the "crises of the Middle Ages."

The Mongols

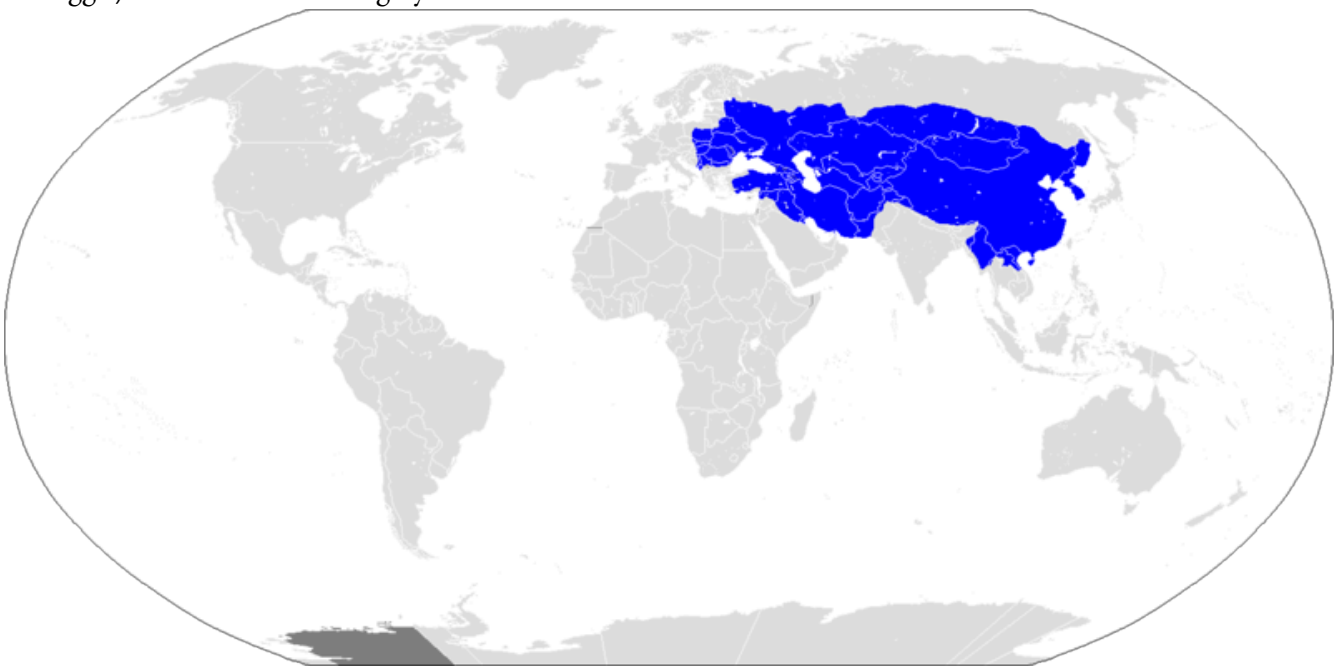
The Mongols are not always incorporated into the narrative of Western Civilization, because despite the enormous breadth of their empire under Chinggis (also Anglicized as Genghis, although the actual pronunciation in Mongolian is indeed Chinggis) Khan and his descendants, most of the territories held by the Mongols were in Asia. The Mongols, however, are entirely relevant to the history of Western Civilization, both because they devastated the kingdoms of the Middle East at the time and because they ultimately set the stage for the history of early-modern Russia.

The Mongols and the Turks are related peoples from Central Asia going back to prehistory. They were nomads and herders with very strong traditions of horse riding, archery, and warfare. In general, the Turks lived in the western steppes (steppe is the term for the enormous grasslands of Central Asia) and the Mongols in the eastern steppes, with the Turks threatening the civilizations of the Middle East and Eastern Europe and the Mongols threatening China. A specific group of Turks, the Seljuks, had already taken over much of the Middle East by the eleventh century, and over the next two hundred years they deprived the Byzantine Empire of its remaining holdings outside of Constantinople and its immediate surroundings.

Meanwhile, in 1206 the Mongols elected a leader named Temujin (b. 1167) "Khan," which simply means "lord" or "warlord." The election was the culmination of years of battles and struggles between Temujin and various rival clan leaders. By the time he united the Mongols under his rule, he had already overcome numerous setbacks and betrayals, described years later in a major history commissioned by the Mongol rulers, the *Secret History of the Mongols*. After his election as Khan, he set his sites on the lands beyond Mongolia and

eventually became known as Chinngis Khan, meaning "universal lord." He united both the Mongols and various Turkic clans, then launched the single most successful campaign of empire-building in world history.

Chinngis personally oversaw the beginning of the expansion of the "Mongol Horde" across all of Central Asia as far as the borders of Russia and China. Over the following decades, Mongol armies conquered all of Central Asia itself, Persia (in 1221), northern China (in 1234), Russia (in 1241), the Abbasid Caliphate (in 1258), and southern China (in 1279). Importantly, most of these conquests occurred under Chinngis's sons and grandsons (he died in 1227), demonstrating that Mongol military prowess was not dependent on his personal genius. Ultimately, the Mongol empires (a series of "Khanates" divided between the sons and grandsons of Chinggis) stretched from Hungary to Anatolia and from Siberia to the South China Sea.



The Mongol Empire at its height, under Temujin's grandson Kublai Khan, was the largest land empire in world history.

Mongol military discipline was extraordinary by pre-modern standards. Starting with Chinngis himself, all Mongols were beholden to a code of conduct and laws called the *Yasa* (historians debate whether or not the Yasa was a codified set of laws or just a set of traditions). They were divided into units divisible by ten, from hundred-man companies to ten-thousand-man armies called *Tumen*. Since clan divisions had always undermined Mongol unity in the past, Chinngis deliberately placed members of a given clan in different Tumen to water-down clan loyalty and encourage his warriors to think of themselves as part of something greater than their clans.

Mongols had strict regulations for order of march, guard duty, and maintenance of equipment. All men were expected to serve in the armies, and the Mongols quickly and efficiently plundered the areas they conquered to supply their troops. Mongols trained relentlessly; during the brief periods of peace they took part in great hunts of animals which were then critiqued by their commanders. Each warrior had several horses, all trained to respond to voice commands, and in battle Mongol armies were coordinated by signal flags.

The Mongols also made extensive use of spies and intelligence to gather information about areas they planned to attack, interviewing merchants and travelers before they arrived. They were noteworthy for being willing to change their tactics to suit the needs of a campaign, using siege warfare, terror tactics, even biological warfare (flinging plague-ridden corpses over city walls) as necessary. Once the Mongols had conquered a given territory, they would deport and use soldiers and engineers from the conquered peoples against new targets: Persian siege engineers were used to help the conquest of China, and later, Chinese officials were used to help extract taxes from what was left of Persia.

The Mongol horde often devastated the lands it conquered. Some, like the Central Asian kingdom of Khwarizm, were so devastated that the areas it encompassed never fully recovered. Chinngis himself believed that civilization was a threat that might soften his men, so he had whole cities systematically exterminated; in some of their invasions the Mongols practiced a medieval form of what we might justifiably call genocide. Fortunately for the areas conquered by the Mongols, however, under Chinngis's sons and grandsons this policy of destruction gave way to one of (often still vicious) economic exploitation and political dominance.

The Mongols in Eastern Europe

In 1236, after years of careful planning, the Mongols attacked Russia. Russia was not a united kingdom – instead, each major city was ruled by a prince, and the princes often fought one another. When the Mongols arrived, the Russian principalities were divided and refused to fight together, making them easy prey for the unified and highly-organized Mongol army. By 1240, all of the major Russian cities had been either destroyed or captured – the city of Vladimir was burned with its population still inside.

In 1241 the Mongols invaded Poland and Hungary simultaneously. Here, too, they triumphed over tens of thousands of European knights and peasant foot-soldiers. Both kingdoms would have been incorporated into the Mongol empire if not for the simple fact that the Great Khan Ogodei (Chinngis's third son, who had become Great Khan following Chinngis) died, and the European *Tumen* were recalled to the Mongol capital of Karakorum. This event spared what very well could have been a Mongol push into Central Europe itself; the pope at the time called an anti-Mongol crusade and those Europeans who understood the scope of the threat were terrified of the prospect of the Mongols marching further west. As it happens, the Mongols never came back.

The Mongols were finally stopped militarily by the Mamluk Turks, the rulers of Egypt as of the thirteenth century, who held back a Mongol invasion in 1260. By then, the inertia of the Mongol conquests was already slowing down as the great empire was divided between different grandsons of Temujin; the Mamluk victory did not represent the definitive defeat of the Mongol horde as a whole, just a check on Mongol expansion in one corner of the vast Mongol empire. By then, the Mongol khanates had become truly independent from one another, with Mongol rule eventually collapsing over time (a process that happened in just a few decades in some places, but took centuries in others – Russia was not free of Mongol rule until the second half of the fifteenth century).

Mongol rule had mixed consequences for both Asian and European history. There was a beneficial stabilization in the trade that crossed the west – east axis in Eurasia as a continent, as Silk Road traders enjoyed a relatively peaceful and stable route. It also terrified Europeans, who heard travelers' tales of the non-Christian "Tatars" in the east who had crushed all opposition, and in Russia it created a complex political situation in which the native Slavic peoples were forced to pay tribute to Mongol lords. To this day, the period of Mongol rule is often taught in Russia as the period of the "Tatar Yoke," when any hope of progress for Russia was suspended for centuries while the rest of Europe advanced; while that may be a bit of an exaggeration, it still has a kernel of truth.

The Black Death

Historians have now arrived at a consensus that the deadliest epidemic in medieval and early-modern history began in the Mongol khanates and spread west: the Black Death, or simply "the plague," of the fourteenth century. The plague devastated the areas it affected, none more so than Europe. That devastation was in large part due to the vulnerability of the European population to disease thanks both to poor harvests and the lack of practical medical knowledge.

A series of bad harvests led to periods of famine in Europe starting in the early fourteenth century. Conditions in some regions were so desperate that peasants reportedly resorted to cannibalism on occasion. When harvests were poor, Europeans not only died outright from famine, but those who survived were left even more vulnerable to epidemics because of weakened immune systems. By the time the plague arrived in 1348, generations of people were malnourished and all the more susceptible to infection as a result.

Medicine was completely ineffective in holding the plague in check. Europeans did not understand contagion – they knew that disease spread, but they had absolutely no idea how to prevent that spread. The prevailing medical theory was that disease was spread by clouds of foul-smelling gases called "miasmas," like those produced by stagnant water and decay. Thus, people sincerely believed that if one could avoid the miasmas (which of course never actually existed), they could avoid sickness. Over the centuries, doctors advocated various techniques that were meant to dispel the miasmas by introducing other odors, including leaving piles of onions on the streets of plague-stricken neighborhoods and, starting in the seventeenth century, wearing masks that resembled the heads of birds, with the "beaks" stuffed with flower petals.

A later depiction of a doctor in the midst of a plague epidemic.

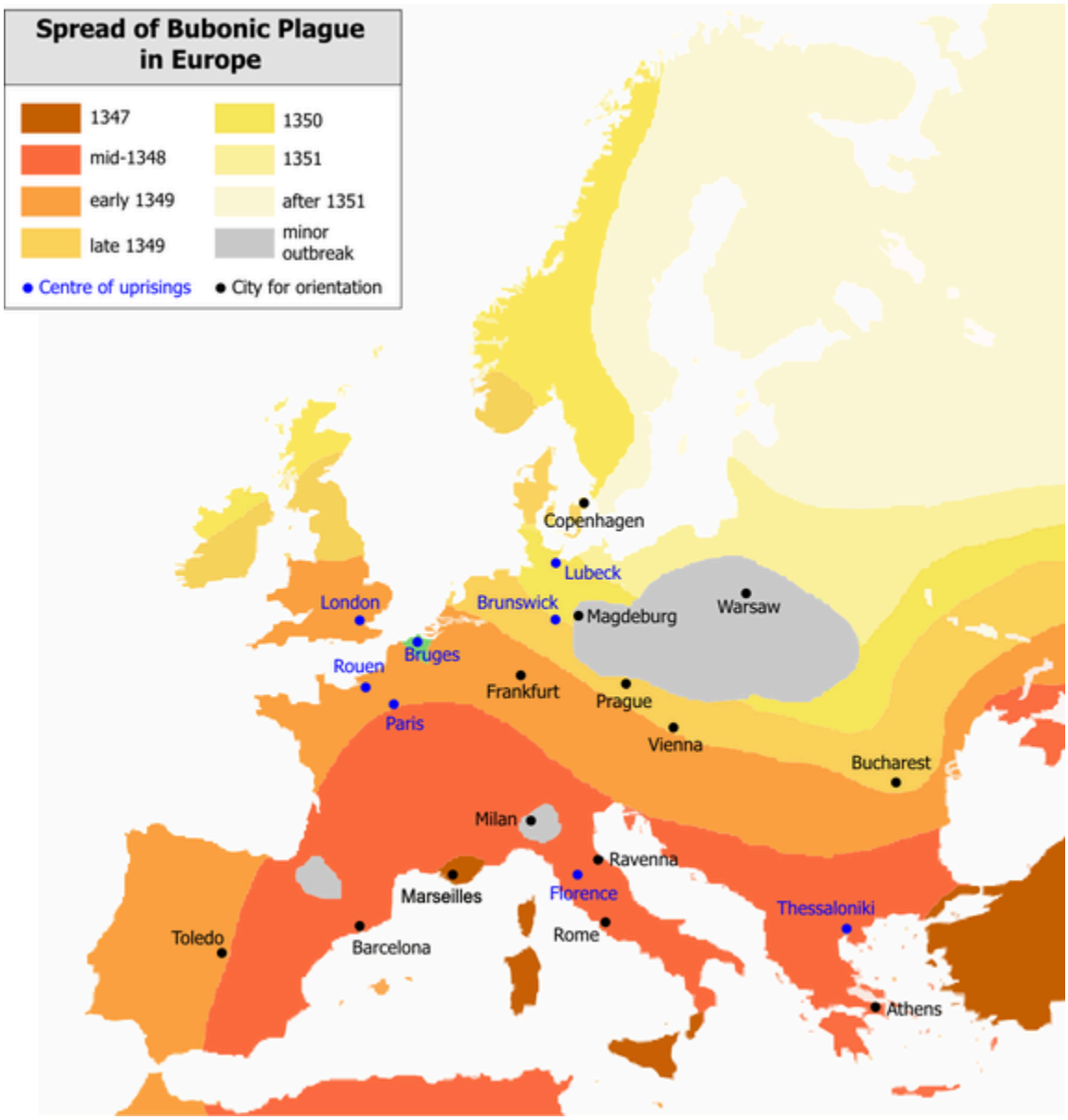
Not surprisingly, given the dearth of medical knowledge, epidemics of all kinds regularly swept across Europe. When harvests failed, the poor often went to the cities in search of some kind of respite, either work or church-based charity. In 1330, for instance, the official population of the northern Italian city of Florence was 100,000, but a full 20,000 were paupers, most of whom had come from the countryside seeking relief. The cities became incubators for epidemics that were even more intense than those that affected the countryside.

Thus, a vulnerable and, in terms of medicine, ignorant population fell victim to the virulence of the Black Death from 1348 to 1351. Historians still debate as to exactly which (identifiable with contemporary medical knowledge) disease or diseases the the Black Death consisted of, but the prevailing theory is that it was bubonic plague. Bubonic plague is transmitted by fleas, both those carried by rats and transmitted to humans, and on fleas exclusive to humans. In the unsanitary conditions of medieval Europe, there were both rats and fleas everywhere. In turn, many victims of bubonic plague developed the "pneumonic" form of the disease,

spread by coughing, which made it both incredibly virulent and lethal (about 90% of those who developed pneumonic plague died).

The theory the Black Death was the bubonic plague runs into the problem that modern outbreaks of bubonic plague do not seem to travel as quickly as did the Black Death, although that almost certainly has much to do with the vastly more effective sanitation and treatment available in the modern era as compared to the medieval setting of the Black Death. One hypothesis is that those with bubonic plague may have caught pneumonia as a secondary infection, and that pneumonia was thus another lethal component of the Black Death. Regardless of whatever disease or combination of diseases the Black Death really was, the effects were devastating.

The plague exploded across Europe starting at the end of the 1340s. All of Southern Europe was affected in 1348; it spread to Central Europe and England by 1349 and Eastern Europe and Scandinavia by 1350. It went on to spread even further and continued to fester until 1351, when it had killed so many people that the survivors had developed a resistance to it. The death toll was astonishing: in the end, the Black Death killed about one-third of the population of Europe in just three years (that is a conservative estimate – some present-day historians have calculated that it was closer to half!). Some cities lost over half of their population; there are even cases of villages where there was only a single survivor. This was an enormous demographic shift in a very short amount of time that had lasting consequences for European society, thanks mostly to the labor shortage that it introduced.



The plague's spread, from south to north, over the course of just a few years. The section marked in grey is incorrectly labeled "minor outbreak": in fact, while data is difficult to come by for that region, it seems clear that the plague hit just as hard there as elsewhere in Europe.

The only somewhat effective response to the Black Death was the implementation of quarantines. The more fast-acting city governments of Europe locked those who had plague symptoms in their homes, often for more than a month, and sometimes whole neighborhoods or districts were placed under quarantine. In the countryside, people refused to travel to larger cities and towns out of fear of infection. Even though quarantines slowed the spread of the plague in some cases, overall they did little but delay it.

More common than practical measures like quarantines, however, was prayer and the search for scapegoats to blame for the devastation. The spiritual reaction to the plague was, among Christian Europeans, to implore God for relief, beg for forgiveness, and to look to outsiders to blame. Building on the murderous anti-Semitism that had begun in earnest during the period of the crusades, Jews were often the victims of this

phenomenon. There was a huge spike in anti-Semitic riots during plague outbreaks, as Jews were blamed for somehow bringing the plague (a frequent accusation was that Jews had poisoned wells), and thousands of Jews were massacred as a result.

Religious movements emerged in response to the plague as well, like the Flagellants: groups of penitents who roamed the countryside, villages, and towns whipping themselves and begging God for forgiveness. Many people sincerely believed that the Black Death was the opening salvo of the End Times, since the history of Europe in the fourteenth century so clearly involved both famine and pestilence – two of the four "horsemen" that were to accompany the end times according to the Bible (the others, war and death, were ever-present as well).

The Black Death ended in 1351, but the plague returned roughly every twenty years in some form. Some cases were as devastating, at least in limited areas, as the Black Death had been. The plague did not stop entirely until the early eighteenth century – to this day it is not clear what brought an end to large-scale plague outbreaks, although one theory is that a species of brown rat that was not as vulnerable to the plague overwhelmed the older black rats that had infested Europe.

Effects of the Plague's Aftermath

Ironically, the immediate economic effects of the plague after it ended were largely positive for many people. The demographic consequences of the Black Death, namely its enormous death toll, resulted in a labor shortage across all of Europe. The immediate effect was that lords tried to keep their peasants from fleeing the land and to keep wages at the low levels they had been at before the plague hit, sparking various peasant uprisings. Even though those uprisings were generally bloodily put down in the end, the overall trend was that laborers *had* to be paid more; their labor was simply more valuable. In the decades that followed, then, many peasants benefited from higher prices for their labor and their crops.

Another group that benefited was women. For roughly a century after the plague, women had more legal rights in terms of property ownership, the right to participate in commerce, and land ownership, than they had enjoyed before the plague's outbreak. Women were even able to join certain craft guilds for a time, something that was almost unheard of earlier. The reason for this temporary improvement in the legal and economic status of women was precisely the same as that of peasants: the labor shortage.

The plague also ushered in a cultural change that came about because of the prevalence of death in the fourteenth century. Europeans became so used to death that they often depicted it graphically and quite terribly in art. Paintings, stories, and theatrical performances emerged having to do with the "dance of death," a depiction of the futility of worldly possessions and status vis-à-vis the inevitability of death. Likewise, graves and mausoleums came to be decorated with statues of grotesque skeletons and writhing bodies. When people were dying, their families and friends were supposed to come and view them, inoculating everyone present against the temptation to enjoy life too much and encouraging them to greater focus on preparing their souls for the afterlife.

The dance of death, with this image produced decades after the Black Death had already run its course.

The 100 Years' War

The plague happened near the beginning of the conflict between England and France remembered as the Hundred Years' War, which lasted from 1337 – 1453. That conflict was not really one war, but instead consisted of a series of battles and shorter wars between the crowns of England and France interrupted by (sometimes fairly long) periods of peace.

The war began because of simmering resentments and dynastic politics. The root of the problem was that the English kings were descendants of William the Conqueror, the Norman king who had sailed across the English Channel in 1066 and defeated the Anglo-Saxon king who then ruled England. From that point on, the royal and noble lines of England and France were intertwined, and as marriage between both nobles and royalty often took place across French – English lines, the inheritance of lands and titles in both countries was

often a point of contention. The culture of nobility in both countries was so similar that the "English" nobles generally spoke French instead of English in day-to-day life.

This confusion very much extended to the kings themselves. The English royal line (the Plantagenets) often enjoyed pledges of fealty from numerous "French" nobles, and "English" kings often thought of themselves as being as much French as English – the English King Richard the Lion-Hearted, for instance, spent most of his career in France battling for control of more French territory. Likewise, a large region in southwestern France, Aquitaine, was formally the property of the English royal line, with the awkward caveat that, while a given English king might be sovereign in England, his lordship of Aquitaine technically made him the vassal of whoever the French king happened to be. Thus, hundreds of years after William's conquest, the royal and noble lines of England and France were often hard to distinguish from one another.

The war began in the aftermath of the death of the French King Charles IV in 1328. The king of England, Edward III, was next in line for succession, but powerful members of the French nobility rejected his claim and instead pledged to give the crown to a French noble of the royal line named Philip VI. When Philip began passing judgments to do with the English-controlled territory of Aquitaine, Edward went to war, sparking the Hundred Years' War itself.

The war itself consisted of a series of raids and invasions by English forces punctuated by the occasional large battle. English kings and knights kept the war going because it was a way to enrich themselves – they would arrive in France with a moderately-sized force of armed men to loot and pillage. English forces tended to be better organized than were their French counterparts, so even France's much greater wealth and size did prevent major English victories. The most famous of those victories was the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, in which a smaller English force decimated the elite French cavalry through effective use of longbows, a weapon that could transform an English peasant into more than the equal of a mounted French knight. The aftermath of Agincourt saw most of the French nobility accept the English king, Henry V, as the king of France. Henry V promptly died, however, and the conflict exploded into a series of alliances and counter-alliances between rival factions of English and French nobles (one French territory, Burgundy, even declared its independence from France and became a staunch English ally for a time).

Decades into the war, the French received an unexpected boost in their fortunes thanks to the intervention of one of the future patron saints of France itself: Joan of Arc. Joan was a peasant girl who walked into the middle of the conflict in 1429, supporting the French Dauphin (heir) Charles VII. Joan reported that she had received a vision from God commanding her to help the French achieve victory against the invading English. French forces rallied around Joan, with Joan herself leading the French forces in several battles. Remarkably, despite being a teenage peasant with no military background, she proved capable at aiming catapults, making tactical decisions, and rallying the French troops to victory. Buoyed by the sense that God was on their side, French forces prevailed. Even though she was soon captured and handed over to the English for trial and execution as a witch by the Burgundians, Joan became a martyr to the French cause and, eventually, one of the most significant French nationalist symbols. By 1453, the French forces finally ended the English threat.

An illustration of Joan of Arc from 1505, just under 60 years after the end of the war.

The war had a devastating effect on France. Between the fighting and the plague, its population

declined by half. Many French regions suffered economically as luxury trades shut down and whole regions were devastated by the fighting. The French crown introduced new taxes, such as the *Gabelle* (a tax on salt) and the *Taille* (a household tax) that further burdened commoners. On the cultural front, the English monarchy and nobility severed their ties with France and high English culture began to self-consciously reshape itself as distinctly *English* rather than French, leading among other things to the use of the English language as the language of state and the law for the first time.

The Babylonian Captivity and the Great Western Schism

Even as the French and English were at each other's throats, the Catholic Church fell into a state of disunity, sometimes even chaos. The cause was one of the most peculiar episodes in late medieval European history: the "Babylonian Captivity" of the popes in the fourteenth century. The term originally referred to the Biblical story of the Jews' enslavement by the Babylonian Empire in the sixth century BCE, but the late-medieval Babylonian Captivity refers instead to the period during which the popes no longer lived in their traditional residence in Rome.

The context for this strange event was the state of the Catholic Church as of the early fourteenth century. The Church was a very diverse, and somewhat diffuse, institution. Due to the simple geographical distance between Rome and the kingdoms of Europe, the popes did not exercise much practical authority over the various national churches, and high-level churchmen in European kingdoms were often more closely associated with their respective kings than with Rome. Likewise, there were many times during the Middle Ages when individual popes were weak and ineffectual and could not even command obedience within the church hierarchy itself.

Over the centuries the papacy struggled, and often failed, to assert its control over the Church as an institution and to hold the pretensions of kings in check. Those weaknesses were reflected in a simple fact: there had been a number of times over the centuries in which there were rival popes, generally appointed by compliant church officials who answered to kings. Obviously, having rival popes undermined the central claim of the papacy to complete authority over the Church itself and over Christian doctrine in the process (let alone the occasional insistence by popes that their authority superseded that of kings – see below).

The Babylonian Captivity began when Pope Boniface VIII issued a papal bull (formal commandment) in 1303 to the effect that all kings had to acknowledge his authority over even their own kingdoms, a challenge he issued in response to the taxes kings levied on church property. Unfortunately for Boniface, he lacked both influence with the monarchs of Europe and the ability to defend himself. Infuriated, the French king, Philip IV, promptly had the pope arrested and thrown in prison; he was released months later but promptly died.

Philip supported the election of a new pope, Clement V, in 1305. Clement was a Frenchman with strong ties to the French nobility. At the time, Rome was a very dangerous city, with rival noble families literally fighting in the streets over various feuds, so Clement moved himself and the papal office to the French city of Avignon, which was much more peaceful. This created enormous concern among non-French church officials

(most of them Italian), who feared that the French king, then the most powerful ruler in Europe, would have undue influence over the papacy. Their fears seemed confirmed when Clement started appointing new cardinals, a pattern that ultimately saw 113 French cardinals out of the 134 who were appointed in the following decades.

From 1305 to 1378, the popes continued to live and work in Avignon (despite the English invasions of the 100 Years' War). They were not directly controlled by the French king, as their opponents had feared, but they were definitely influenced by French politics. They also came to accept bribes and kickbacks for the appointment of priests and bishops, along with shady schemes with Church lands. This situation was soon described as a new Babylonian Captivity by clerics and laypeople alike (especially in Italy), comparing the presence of the papacy in France to the enslavement of the ancient Jews in Babylon.

In 1378, the new pope, Urban VI, announced his intention to move the papacy back to Rome. As rival factions developed within the upper levels of the Church hierarchy, a group of French cardinals elected another, French, pope (Clement VII), and Europe thus was split between two rival popes, both of whom excommunicated each other as a heretic and impostor (the term used at the time was "antipope.") This led to the Great Western Schism, a period from 1378 to 1417 during which there were as many as *three* rival popes vying for power. For almost forty years, the church was a battlefield between both rival popes and their respective followers, and laypeople and monarchs alike were generally able to go about their business with little fear of papal intervention.

The Great Western Schism finally ended after a series of church councils, the Conciliar Movement, succeeded in establishing the authority of a single pope in 1417. The movement elected a new pope, Martin V, and made the claim that church councils could and should hold the ultimate authority over papal appointments – this concept was known as the *via consilii*, the existence of a great council with binding powers over the church's leadership. This, however, undermined the very concept of what the papacy *was*: the "Doctrine of the Keys" held that the pope's authority was passed down directly from Christ, and that even if councils could play a role in the practical maintenance of the church, the pope's authority was not based on their approval. Ultimately, a powerful pope, Eugene IV, reconfirmed the absolute power of the papacy in 1431. Thus, this attempt at reform failed in the end, inadvertently setting the stage for more radical criticisms of papal power in the future.

The most important consequence of the Babylonian Captivity and the Great Western Schism was simple: the moral and spiritual authority of the church hierarchy was seriously undermined. While no one (yet) envisioned rejecting the authority of the Church altogether, many people regarded the Church's leadership as just another political institution.

Conclusion

Some of the trends, patterns, and phenomena that were to take shape during the Renaissance era which began around 1300 began in the midst of the crises of the Middle Ages. France and England emerged from the

100 Years War to become stronger, more centralized states (although it took a civil war in England to get there, described in a subsequent chapter). The labor shortage in the aftermath of the Black Death spurred a period of modest economic growth. And, while European culture may have become more pessimistic and xenophobic as a whole, one region was rising to wealth and prominence precisely because of its long-distance trade and cultural connections: Northern Italy. It was there that the Renaissance began.

Image Citations (Creative Commons):

Mongol Empire – Spesh531

Plague Doctor – Ian Spackman

Plague Map – Bunchofgrapes

Dance of Death – Il Dottore

Joan of Arc – Public Domain

This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 2: The Crises of the Middle Ages in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: BOCCACCIO, THE DECAMERON

This source is available at the Medieval Sourcebook.

Boccaccio: *THE DECAMERON* , "INTRODUCTION" (ca. 1348-1353)

Thirteen hundred and forty-eight years had passed since the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God, when there came into the noble city of Florence, the most beautiful of all Italian cities, a deadly pestilence, which, either because of the operations of the heavenly bodies, or because of the just wrath of God mandating punishment for our iniquitous ways, several years earlier had originated in the Orient, where it destroyed countless lives, scarcely resting in one place before it moved to the next, and turning westward its strength grew monstrously. No human wisdom or foresight had any value: enormous amounts of refuse and manure were removed from the city by appointed officials, the sick were barred from entering the city, and many instructions were given to preserve health; just as useless were the humble supplications to God given not one time but many times in appointed processions, and all the other ways devout people called on God; despite all this, at the beginning of the spring of that year, that horrible plague began with its dolorous effects in a most awe-inspiring manner, as I will tell you. And it did not behave as it did in the Orient, where if blood began to rush out the nose it was a manifest sign of inevitable death; but rather it began with swellings in the groin and armpit, in both men and women, some of which were as big as apples and some of which were shaped like eggs, some were small and others were large; the common people called these swellings gavoccioli. From these two parts of the body, the fatal gavaccioli would begin to spread and within a short while would appear over the entire body in various spots; the disease at this point began to take on the qualities of a deadly sickness, and the body would be covered with dark and livid spots, which would appear in great numbers on the arms, the thighs, and other parts of the body; some were large and widely spaced while some were small and bunched together. And just like the gavaciolli earlier, these were certain indications of coming death.

To cure these infirmities neither the advice of physicians nor the power of medicine appeared to have any value or profit; perhaps either the nature of the disease did not allow for any cure or the ignorance of the physicians (whose numbers, because men and women without any training in medicine invaded the profession, increased vastly) did not know how to cure it; as a consequence, very few were ever cured; all died three days after the appearance of the first outward signs, some lasted a little bit longer, some died a little bit more quickly, and some without fever or other symptoms. But what gave this pestilence particularly severe force was that whenever the diseased mixed with healthy people, like a fire through dry grass or oil it would rush upon the healthy. And this wasn't the worst of the evil: for not only did it infect healthy persons who conversed or

mixed with the sick, but also touching bread or any other object which had been handled or worn by the sick would transport the sickness from the victim to the one touching the object. It is a wondrous tale that I have to tell: if I were not one of many people who saw it with their own eyes, I would scarcely have dared to believe it, let alone to write it down, even if I had heard it from a completely trustworthy person. I say that the pestilence I have been describing was so contagious, that not only did it visibly pass from one person to another, but also, whenever an animal other than a human being touched anything belonging to a person who had died from the disease, I say not only did it become contaminated by the sickness, but also died literally within the instant. Of all these things, as I have said before, my own eyes had experience many times: once, the rags of a poor man who had just died from the disease were thrown into the public street and were noticed by two pigs, who, following their custom, pressed their snouts into the rags, and afterwards picked them up with their teeth, and shook them against their cheeks: and within a short time, they both began to convulse, and they both, the two of them, fell dead on the ground next to the evil rags.

Because of all these things, and many others that were similar or even worse, diverse fears and imaginings were born in those left alive, and all of them took recourse to the most cruel precaution: to avoid and run away from the sick and their things; by doing this, each person believed they could preserve their health. Others were of the opinion that they should live moderately and guard against all excess; by this means they would avoid infection. Having withdrawn, living separate from everybody else, they settled down and locked themselves in, where no sick person or any other living person could come, they ate small amounts of food and drank the most delicate wines and avoided all luxury, refraining from speech with outsiders, refusing news of the dead or the sick or anything else, and diverting themselves with music or whatever else was pleasant. Others, who disagreed with this, affirmed that drinking beer, enjoying oneself, and going around singing and ruckus-raising and satisfying all one's appetites whenever possible and laughing at the whole bloody thing was the best medicine; and these people put into practice what they heartily advised to others: day and night, going from tavern to tavern, drinking without moderation or measure, and many times going from house to house drinking up a storm and only listening to and talking about pleasing things. These parties were easy to find because everyone behaved as if they were going to die soon, so they cared nothing about themselves nor their belongings; as a result, most houses became common property, and any stranger passing by could enter and use the house as if he were its master. But for all their bestial living, these people always ran away from the sick. With so much affliction and misery, all reverence for the laws, both of God and of man, fell apart and dissolved, because the ministers and executors of the laws were either dead or ill like everyone else, or were left with so few officials that they were unable to do their duties; as a result, everyone was free to do whatever they pleased. Many other people steered a middle course between these two extremes, neither restricting their diet like the first group, nor indulging so liberally in drinking and other forms of dissolution like the second group, but simply not going beyond their needs or satisfying their appetite beyond the necessary, and, instead of locking themselves away, these people walked about freely, holding in their hands a posy of flowers, or fragrant herbs, or diverse exotic spices, which sometimes they pressed to their nostrils, believing it would comfort the brain with smells of that sort because the stink of corpses, sick bodies, and medicines polluted the air all about the city. Others

held a more cruel opinion, one that in the end probably guaranteed their safety, saying that there was no better or more effective medicine against the disease than to run away from it; convinced by this argument, and caring for no-one but themselves, huge numbers of men and women abandoned their rightful city, their rightful homes, their relatives and their parents and their things, and sought out the countryside, as if the wrath of God would punish the iniquities of men with this plague based on where they happened to be, as if the wrath of God was aroused against only those who unfortunately found themselves within the city walls, or as if the whole of the population of the city would be exterminated in its final hour.

Of all these people with these various opinions, not all died, nor did they all survive; on the contrary, many from each camp fell ill in all places, and having, when they were healthy, set an example to all those who remained healthy, they languished in their illness completely alone, having been abandoned by everybody. One citizen avoided another, everybody neglected their neighbors and rarely or never visited their parents and relatives unless from a distance; the ordeal had so withered the hearts of men and women that brother abandoned brother, and the uncle abandoned his nephew and the sister her brother and many times, wives abandoned their husbands, and, what is even more incredible and cruel, mothers and fathers abandoned their children and would refuse to visit them. As a result, of that innumerable number of those, men and women, who fell ill, there remained no-one to care for them except for friends, which were very few, or avaricious servants, who, despite the high salaries and easy service, became very scarce. And there were some men and women of such vulgar mind, that most of them were not accustomed to service, and did nothing other than serve things whenever the sick person asked and watch while they died; and the wages of this service was often death. And some of the sick were totally abandoned by neighbors, relatives, and friends, and, on account of the scarcity of servants, turned to a custom no-one had ever heard of before: no sick woman, even if she were a svelte, beautiful, and gentle lady, would care if she were being served by a man, young or otherwise, and would have no shame exposing every part of her body to him as if he were another woman, if the necessity of her sickness required her to; and this is why the women who were cured were a little less chaste afterwards. Moreover, many people died by chance who would have survived had they been helped. And so, because of the shortage of people to care for the sick, and the violence of the disease, day and night such a multitude died that it would dumbfound any to hear of it who did not see it themselves. As a result, partly out of necessity, there arose customs among those surviving that were contrary to the original customs of the city.

There used to be a custom, which is today still followed, where the women relatives and neighbors of a dead person would gather in the house and there mourn; on the other hand, there would gather at the front of the dead man's house neighbors and other citizens as well, whose numbers followed from the quality of the deceased man, and along with these priests in their finery, and with all the funeral pomp and candles and singing, he would be carried by those closest to him to the church of his choice. When the ferocity of the pestilence began to mount, for the most part people ceased with this custom and replaced it with a far different one. For not only did many people die without women surrounding them, most passed away from this life without anyone there to witness it at all; there were very few who departed amid the pious wailing and beloved tears of those close to them, far from this, most took up the custom of laughing and partying while their loved ones

died; this latter usage, the women, who formerly had been so merciful and concerned with the health of the deceased one's soul, especially mastered. Also, it became rare for the body to be born to the church accompanied by more than ten or twelve men, who were not noble and cherished citizens, but a kind of grave-digger fraternity made up of the least men of the city (they demanded to be called sextons, and demanded high wages) who would bear them away; and these would bear the body quickly away, not to the church the dead man had asked for, but to the nearest one they could find, with four to six priests, maybe with a candle but sometimes not, in front; and with the help of these sextons, without fatiguing themselves with any long ceremony or rite, in any old tomb that they found unoccupied they'd dump the corpse.

As for the lesser people, who were for the most part middle class, they presented the most miserable spectacle: for these, who had no hope or who were seized with poverty, had to remain in the area, and fell ill by the thousands every day, and since they had no servants or any other kind of help, almost without exception all of them died. And many would meet their end in the public streets both day and night, and many others, who met their ends in their own houses, would first come to the attention of their neighbors because of the stench of their rotting corpses more than anything else; and with these and others all dying, there were corpses everywhere. And the neighbors always followed a particular routine, more out of fear of being corrupted by the corpse than out of charity for the deceased. These, either by themselves or with the help of others when available, would carry the corpse of the recently deceased from the house and leave it lying in the street outside where, especially in the morning, a countless number of corpses could be seen lying about. Funeral biers would come, and if there was a shortage of funeral biers, some other flat table or something or other would be used to place the corpses on. Nor did it infrequently happen that a single funeral bier would carry two or three people at the same time, but rather one frequently saw on a single bier a husband and a wife, two or three brothers, a father and a son, or some other relatives. And an infinite number of times it happened that two priests bearing a cross would be going to bury someone when three or four other biers, being born by bearers, would follow behind them; the priests would believe themselves to be heading for a single burial, and would find, when they arrived at the churchyard, that they had six or eight more burials following behind them. Nor were there ever tears or candles or any company honoring the dead; things had reached such a point, that people cared no more for the death of other people than they did for the death of a goat: for this thing, death, which even the wise never accept with patience, even though it occur rarely and relatively unobtrusively, had appeared manifestly to even the smallest intellects, but the catastrophe was so unimaginably great that nobody really cared. There was such a multitude of corpses that arrived at all churches every day and every hour, that sacred burial ground ran out, which was especially a problem if each person wanted their own plot in accordance with ancient custom. When the cemeteries were for the most part full, they excavated great pits in which they'd place hundreds of newly arrived corpses, and each corpse would be covered with a thin layer of dirt until the pit was filled.

And beyond all the particulars we suffered in the city, I will tell you not only about the ill times passing through the city, but also mention that the countryside was not spared these circumstances. For here, in the fortified towns, similar things occurred but on a lesser scale than in the city, through the small villages and through the camps of the miserable and poor laborers and their families, without any care from physicians or help from

servants, and in the highways and the fields and their houses, day and night at whatever hour, not like humans but more like animals they died; and because of this, they came to neglect their customs, as did the people in the city, and had no concern for their belongings. Beyond all this, they began to behave as if every day were the day of their certain death, and they did no work to provide for their future needs by caring for their fields or their animals, but rather consumed everything they owned. Because of this, it happened that oxen, asses, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, and dogs, the most faithful human companions, were driven from the houses, and in the fields, where the crops had been abandoned, not even reaped let alone gathered, they would wander about at their pleasure; and many, as if they possessed human reason, after they had pastured all day long, would return satiated to their houses without any guidance from any shepherd.

Let us leave the countryside and return to the city.

How much more can be said of the cruelty of heaven, and possibly, in part, that of humanity, which between March and July of that year, because of the ferocity of the pestilence and the fact that many of the sick were poorly cared for or abandoned in their hour of need by people frightened for their health, killed off one hundred thousand human creatures for certain within the walls of the city of Florence Who, before this fatal calamity, would have thought there were so many within the city? Oh, how many grand palaces, how many beautiful homes, how many noble dwellings, filled with families, with lords and ladies, became completely emptied even of children! Oh, how many famous families, how many vast estates, how many renowned fortunes remained without any rightful successors! How many noble men, how many beautiful ladies, how many light-hearted youth, who were such that Galen, Hippocrates, or Asclepius would declare them the healthiest of all humans, had breakfast in the morning with their relatives, companions, or friends, and had dinner that evening in another world with their ancestors! As I think over these miseries, sorrow grows inside me . . .

PosyA posy of flowers was thought to ward off the contagion; the children's song, "London Bridge is Falling Down" is a song about the plague: the "pocketful of posies" refers to the posies of flowers people would carry around during epidemics.

Sexton A sexton is a paid laborer who buries corpses; like most occupations in the Middle Ages, it was a profession and had its own guild (see our textbook). The fellows here, however, would be considered by Boccaccio's audience as "non-professional" opportunists.

Ancient Physicians These are the three great physicians of antiquity. Galen wrote several works on science including one on medicine; Hippocrates lived in Ancient Greece and a number of medical writings, mostly written by his followers, were collected under his name; Asclepius is a legendary figure who cured death and was punished by Apollo for going to far with his medical knowledge. The standard medical textbook in Boccaccio's time was Galen's.

Source:

Translated from the Italian by Richard Hooker ((c)1993)

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *The Decameron.*

Reading Journal

While Boccaccio might not have been in Florence when the plague hit the city, he had both family and friends who perished from the disease. In your own words, how would you characterize his depiction of the city and its inhabitants impacted by the Black Death? What in his description was the most striking or stood out the most to you?

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART XIII

MODULE TWELVE: CULTURE AND POLITICS DURING THE AGE OF THE RENAISSANCE

READING: THE RENAISSANCE

Christopher Brooks

The Renaissance, meaning "rebirth," was a period of innovation in culture, art, and learning that took place between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, starting in Italy and then spreading to various other parts of Europe. It produced a number of artists, scientists, and thinkers who are still household names today: Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Donatello, Botticelli, and others. The Renaissance is justly famous for its achievements in art and learning, and even though some of its thinkers were somewhat conceited and off-base in dismissing the prior thousand years or so as being nothing but the "Dark Ages," it is still the case that the Renaissance was enormously fruitful in terms of intellectual production and creation.

"The" Renaissance lasted from about 1300 – 1500. It ended in the early sixteenth century in that its northern Italian heartland declined in economic importance and the pace of change and progress in the arts and learning slowed, but in a very real sense the Renaissance never truly ended – its innovations and advances had already spread across much of Europe, and even though Italy itself lost its prominence, the patterns that began in Italy continued elsewhere. That was true not only of art, but of education, architecture, scholarship, and commercial practices.

The timing of the Renaissance coincided with some of the crises of the Middle Ages. The overlap in dates is explained by the fact that most of Europe remained resolutely "medieval" during the Renaissance's heyday in Italy: the ways of life, forms of technology, and political structure of the Middle Ages did not suddenly change with the flowering of the Renaissance, not least because it took so long for the innovations of the Renaissance to spread beyond Italy. Likewise, in Italy itself, the lives of most people (especially outside of the major cities) were all but identical in 1500 to what they would have been centuries earlier.

Background

Simply put, the background of the Renaissance was the prosperity of northern Italy. Italy did not face a major, ongoing series of wars like the Hundred Years' War in France. It was hit hard by the plague, but no more so than most of the other regions of Europe. One unexpected "benefit" to Italy was actually the Babylonian Captivity and Great Western Schism: because the popes' authority was so limited, the Italian cities found it easy to operate with little papal interference, and powerful Italian families often intervened directly in the election of popes when it suited their interests. Likewise, the other powers of Europe either could not or had no interest in troubling Italy: England and France were at war, the Holy Roman Empire was weak and fragmented, and Spain was not united until the late Renaissance period. In short, the crises of the Middle Ages actually *benefited* Italy, because they were centered elsewhere.

In this relatively stable social and political environment, Italy also enjoyed an advantage over much of the rest of Europe: it was far more urbanized. Because of its location as a crossroads between east and west, Italian cities were larger and there were simply more of them as compared to other kingdoms and regions of Europe, with the concomitant economic prosperity and sophistication associated with urban life. By 1300, northern Italy boasted twenty-three city-states with populations of 20,000 or more, each of which would have constituted an enormous metropolis by medieval standards.

Italian cities, clustered in the north, represented about 10% of Italy's overall population. While that means that 90% of the population was either rural or lived in small towns, there was still a far greater concentration of urban dwellers in Italy than anywhere else in Europe. Among those cities were also several that boasted populations of over 100,000 by the fifteenth century, including Florence and Milan, which served as centers of banking, trade, and craftsmanship. Italian cities had large numbers of very productive craft guilds and workshops producing luxury goods that were highly desirable all over Europe.

Economics

Italy lay at the center of the lucrative trade between Europe and the Middle East, a status determined both by its geography and the role Italians had played in transporting goods and people during the crusading period. Along with the trade itself, it was in Italy that key mercantile practices emerged for the first time in Europe. From the Arab world, Italian merchants learned about and ultimately adopted a number of commercial practices and techniques that helped them (Italians) stay at the forefront of the European economy as a whole. For example, Italian accountants adopted double-entry bookkeeping (accounts payable and accounts receivable) and Italian merchants invented the *commenda*, a way of spreading out the risk associated with business ventures among several partners – an early form of insurance for expensive and risky commercial projects. Italian banks had agents all over Europe and provided reliable credit and bills of exchange, allowing merchants to travel around the entire Mediterranean region to trade without having to literally cart chests full of coins to pay for new wares.

One other noteworthy innovation first employed in Europe by Italians was the use of Arabic numerals instead of Roman numerals, since the former are so much easier to work with (e.g. imagine trying to do complicated multiplication or division using Roman numerals like "CLXVIII multiplied by XXXVIII," meaning "168 multiplied by 38" in Arabic numerals...it was simply far easier to introduce errors in calculation using the former). Overall, Italian merchants, borrowing from their Arab and Turkic trading partners, pioneered efforts to rationalize and systematize business itself in order to make it more predictable and reliable.

Benefiting from the fragmentation of the Church during the era of the Babylonian Captivity and the Great Western Schism, Italian bankers also came to charge interest on loans, becoming the first Christians to defy the church's ban on "usury" in an ongoing, regular fashion. The stigma associated with usury remained, but bankers (including the Medici family that came to completely dominate Florentine politics in the fifteenth century) became so wealthy that social and religious stigma alone was not enough to prevent the spread of the

practice. This actually led to *more* anti-Semitism in Europe, since the one social role played by Jews that Christians had grudgingly tolerated – money-lending – was increasingly usurped by Christians.

Much of the prosperity of northern Italy was based on the trade ties (not just mercantile practices) Italy maintained with the Middle East, which by the fourteenth century meant both the remains of the Byzantine Empire in Constantinople as well as the Ottoman Turkish empire, the rising power in the east. From the Turks, Italians (especially the great mercantile empire controlled by Venice) bought precious cargo like spices, silks, porcelain, and coffee, in return for European woolens, crafts, and bullion. The Italians were also the go-betweens linking Asia and Europe by way of the Middle East: Italy was the European terminus of the Silk Road.

The Italian city-states were sites of manufacturing as well. Raw wool from England and Spain made its way to Italy to be processed into cloth, and Italian workshops produced luxury goods sought after everywhere else in Europe. Italian luxury goods were superior to those produced in the rest of Europe, and soon even Italian weapons were better-made. Italian farms were prosperous and, by the Renaissance period, produced a significant and ongoing surplus, feeding the growing cities.

One result of the prosperity generated by Italian mercantile success was the rise of a culture of conspicuous consumption. Both members of the nobility and rich non-nobles spent lavishly to display their wealth as well as their culture and learning. All of the famous Renaissance thinkers and artists were patronized by the rich, which was how the artists and scholars were able to concentrate on their work. In turn, patrons expected "their" artists to serve as symbols of cultural achievement that reflected well on the patron. The fluorescence of Renaissance art and learning was a consequence of that very specific use of wealth: mercantile and banking riches translated into social and political status through art, architecture, and scholarship.

Political Setting

Even though the western Roman Empire had fallen apart by 476 CE, the great cities of Italy survived in better shape than Roman cities elsewhere in the empire. Likewise, the feudal system had never taken as hold as strongly in Italy – there were lords and vassals, but especially in the cities there was a large and strong independent class of artisans and merchants who balked at subservience before lords, especially lords who did not live in the cities. Thus, by 1200, most Italian cities were politically independent of lords and came to dominate their respective hinterlands, serving as lords to "vassal" towns and villages for miles around.

Instead of kings and vassals, power was in the hands of the *popoli grossi*, literally meaning the "fat people," but here meaning simply the rich, noble and non-noble alike. About 5% of the population in the richest cities was among them. The culture of the *popoli grossi* was rife with flattery, backstabbing, and politicking, since so much depended on personal connections. Since noble titles meant less, more depended on one's family reputation, and the most important thing to the social elite was honor. Any perceived insult had to be met with retaliation, meaning there was a great deal of bloodshed between powerful families – Shakespeare's famous play *Romeo and Juliet* is set in Renaissance Italy, featuring rival elite families locked in a blood feud over honor.

There was no such thing as a police force, after all, just the guards of the rich and powerful and, usually, a city guard that answered to the city council. The latter was often controlled by powerful families on those councils, however, so both law enforcement and personal vendettas were generally carried out by private mercenaries.

Another aspect of the identify of the *popoli grossi* was that, despite their penchant for feuds, they required a peaceful political setting on a large scale in order for their commercial interests to prosper. Thus, they were often hesitant to embark on large-scale war in Italy itself.

Likewise, the focus on education and culture that translated directly into the creation of Renaissance art and scholarship was tied to the identity of the *popoli grossi* as people of peace: elsewhere in Europe noble identity was still very much associated with war, whereas the *popoli grossi* of Italy wanted to show off both their mastery of arms *and* their mastery of thought (along with their good taste).

Portrait of a young Cosimo de Medici, who would become the de facto ruler of Florence in the fifteenth century. He is depicted holding a book and wearing a sword: symbols of his learning and his authority.

The central irony of the prosperity of the Renaissance was that even in northern Italy, the vast majority of the population benefited only indirectly or not at all. While the lot of Italian peasants was not significantly worse than that of peasants elsewhere, poor townsfolk had to endure heavy taxes on basic foodstuffs that made it especially miserable to be poor in one of the richest places in Europe at the time. A significant percentage of the population of cities were "paupers," the indigent and homeless who tried to scrape by as laborers or sought charity from the Church. Cities were especially vulnerable to epidemics as well, adding to the misery of urban life for the poor.

Humanism

The starting point with studying the intellectual and artistic achievements of the Renaissance is recognizing what the word means: rebirth. But what was being reborn? The answer is the culture and ideas of classical Europe, namely ancient Greece and Rome. Renaissance thinkers and artists very consciously made the claim that they were reviving long-lost traditions from the classical world in areas as diverse as scholarship, poetry, architecture, and sculpture. The feeling among most Renaissance thinkers and artists was that the ancient Greeks and Romans had achieved truly incredible things, things that had not been, and possibly could never be, surpassed. Much of the Renaissance began as an attempt to mimic or copy Greek and Roman art and scholarship (correspondence in classical Latin, for example), but over the decades the more outstanding Renaissance thinkers struck out on new paths of their own – still inspired by the classics, but seeking to be creators in their own right as well.

Of the various themes of Renaissance thought, perhaps the most important was humanism, an ancient intellectual paradigm that emphasized both the beauty and the centrality of humankind in the universe. Humanists held that humankind was inherently rational, beautiful, and noble, rather than debased, wicked, or weak. They sought to celebrate the beauty of the human body in their art, of the human mind and human achievements in their scholarship, and of human society in the elegance of their architectural design. Humanism was, among other things, an optimistic attitude toward artistic and intellectual possibility that cited the achievements of the ancient world as proof that humankind was the crowning achievement of God's creation.

Renaissance humanism was the root of some very modern notions of individuality, along with the idea that education ought to arrive at a well-rounded individual. The goal of education in the Renaissance was to realize as much of the human potential as possible with a robust education in diverse disciplines. This was a true, meaningful change over medieval forms of learning in that education's major purpose was no longer believed to be the clarification of religious questions or better intellectual support for religious orthodoxy; the point of education was to create a more competent and well-rounded person instead.

Along with the idea of a well-rounded individual, Renaissance thinkers championed the idea of civic humanism: one's moral and ethical standing was tied to devotion to one's city. This was a Greek and Roman

concept that the great Renaissance thinker Petrarch championed in particular. Here, the Medici of Florence are the ultimate example: there was a tremendous effort on the part of the rich and powerful to invest in the city in the form of building projects and art. This was tied to the prestige of the family, of course, but it was also a heartfelt dedication to one's home, analogous to the present-day concept of patriotism.

Practically speaking, there was a shift in the practical business of education from medieval scholasticism, which focused on law, medicine, and theology, to disciplines related to business and politics. Princes and other elites wanted skilled bureaucrats to staff their merchant empires; they needed literate men with a knowledge of law and mathematics, even if they themselves were not merchants. City governments began educating children (girls and boys alike, at least in certain cities like Florence) directly, along with the role played by private tutors. These schools and tutors emphasized practical education: rhetoric, math, and history. Thus, one of the major effects of the Italian Renaissance was that this new form of education, usually referred to as "humanistic education" spread from Italy to the rest of Europe by the late fifteenth century. By the sixteenth century, a broad cross-section of European elites, including nobles, merchants, and priests, were educated in the humanistic tradition.

A "Renaissance man" (note that there *were* important women thinkers as well, but the term "Renaissance man" was used exclusively for men) was a man who cultivated classical virtues, which were not quite the same as Christian ones: understanding, benevolence, compassion, fortitude, judgment, eloquence, and honor, among others. Drawing from the work of thinkers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Virgil, Renaissance thinkers came to support the idea of a virtuous life that was not the same thing as a specifically *Christian* virtuous life. And, importantly, it was possible to become a good person simply through studying the classics – all of the major figures of the Renaissance were Christians, but they insisted that one's moral status could and should be shaped by emulation of the ancient virtues, combined with Christian piety. While the Renaissance case for the debasement of medieval culture was overstated (medieval intellectual life prospered during the late Middle Ages) there was definitely a distinct kind of intellectual courage and optimism that came out of the return to classical models over medieval ones during the Renaissance.

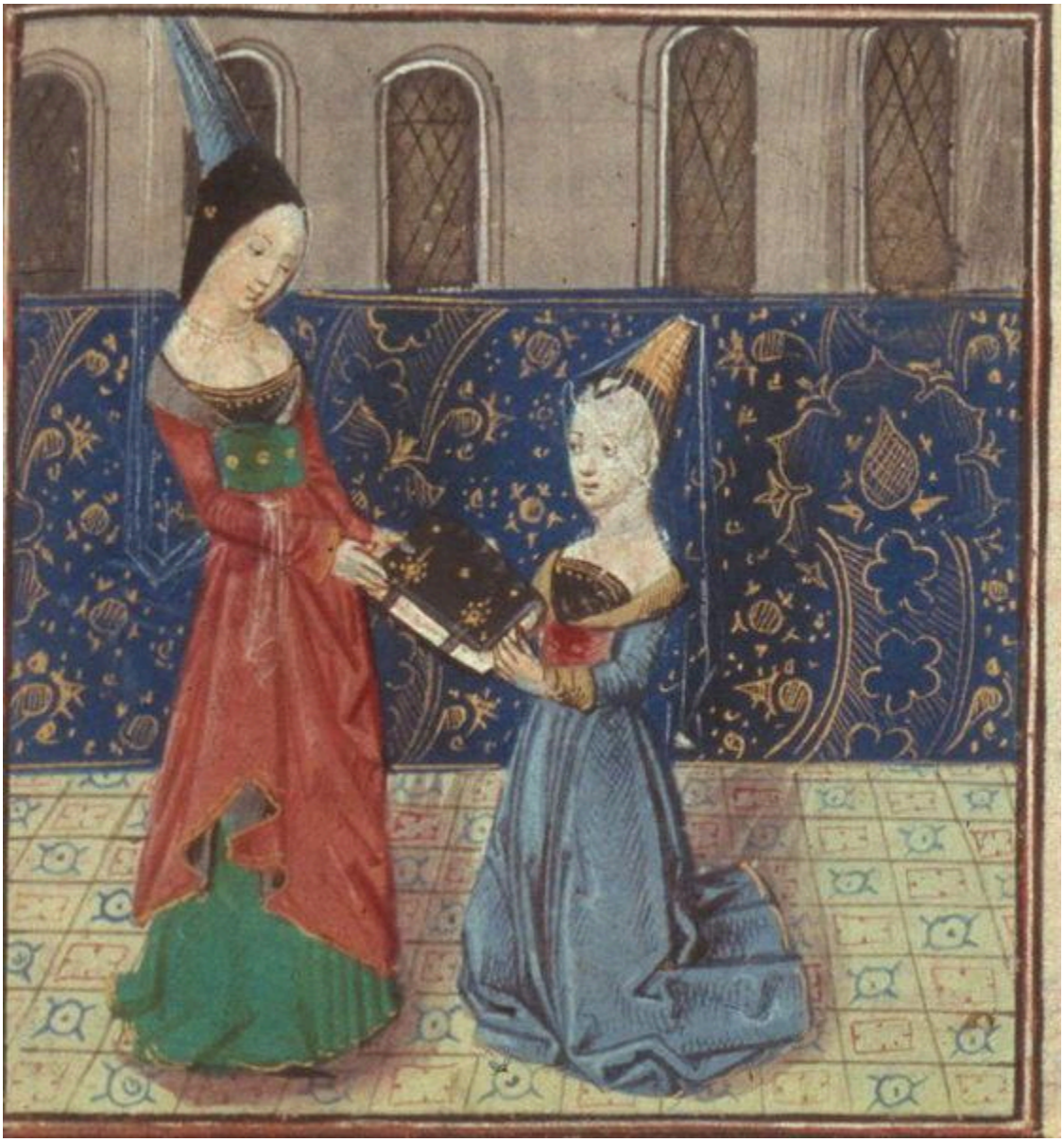
One important caveat must be included in discussing humanistic education, however. While most male humanists supported education for girls, they insisted that it was to be very different than that offered to boys. Girls were to read specific texts drawn from the Bible, the "Church Fathers" (important theologians in the early history of the Church), and from classical Greek and Roman writers that emphasized morality, modesty, and obedience. An educated girl was trained to be an obedient, companionable wife, not an independent thinker in her own right. That theme would remain in place in the male-dominated realm of education in Europe for centuries to come, although it is clear from the number of independent, intellectually courageous women writers throughout the early modern period that girls' education did *not* always succeed in creating compliant, deferential women in the end.

Likewise, humanism contributed to an important, ongoing public debate that lasted for centuries: the *querelles des femmes* ("debates about women"). Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries various intellectuals in universities, churches, and aristocratic courts and salons wrote numerous essays and books contest-

ing whether or not women were naturally immoral, weak, and foolish, or if instead education and environment could lead to intelligence and morality comparable with those of men. While men had dominated these debates early on, women educated in the humanist tradition joined in the *querelles* in earnest during the Renaissance, arguing both that education was key to elevating women's competence and that women shared precisely the same spiritual and moral nature as did men. Unfortunately, while a significant minority of male thinkers came to agree, most remained adamant that women were biologically and spiritually inferior, destined for their traditional roles and ill-served by advanced education.

Christine de Pizan (1364 – 1430)

Christine de Pizan was the most famous and important woman thinker and writer of the Renaissance era. Her father, the court astrologer of the French king Charles V, was exceptional in that he felt it important that his daughter receive the same quality of education afforded to elite men at the time. She went on to become a famous poet and writer in her own right, being patronized (i.e. receiving commissions for her writing) by a wide variety of French and Italian nobles. Her best-known work was *The Book of the City of Ladies*, in which she attacked the then-universal idea that women were naturally unintelligent, sinful, and irrational; it was a key text in the *querelles des femmes* noted above. Instead, she argued, history provided a vast catalog of women who had been moral, pious, intelligent, and competent, and that it was men's pride and the refusal of men to allow women to be properly educated that held women back. In many ways, the *City of Ladies* was the first truly feminist work in European history, and it is striking that she was supported by, and listened to by, elite men due to her obvious intellectual gifts despite their own deep-seated sexism.



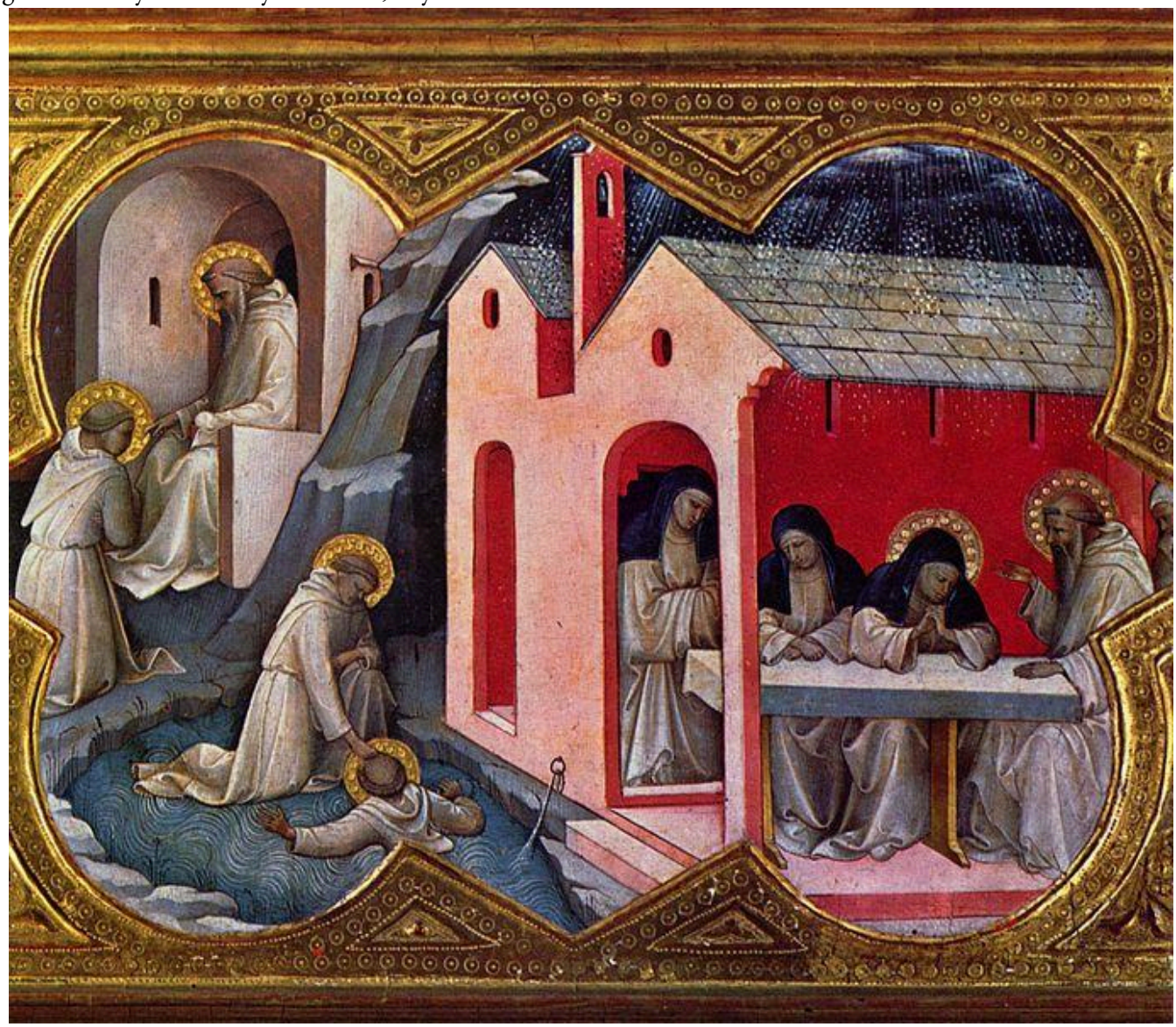
In the illustration above, Christine de Pizan presents a copy of The City of Ladies *to a French noblewoman, Margaret of Burgundy. The illustration itself is in the pre-Renaissance "Gothic" style, without linear perspective, despite its approximate date of 1475. This is one example of the relatively slow spread of Renaissance-inspired artistic innovations.*

Art and Artists

Perhaps the most iconic aspect of the Renaissance as a whole is its tremendous artistic achievements – figures like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti are household names in a way that Petrarch is not, despite the fact that Petrarch should be credited for creating the very concept of the Renaissance. The fame of

Renaissance art is thanks to the incredible creativity of the great Renaissance artists themselves, who both imitated classical models of art and ultimately forged entirely new artistic paths of their own.

Medieval art (called "Gothic" after one of the Germanic tribes that had conquered the Roman Empire) had been unconcerned with realistic depictions of objects or people. Medieval paintings often presented things from several angles at once to the viewer and had no sense of three-dimensional perspective. Likewise, Gothic architecture tended to be bulky and overwhelming rather than refined and delicate; the great examples of Gothic architecture are undoubtedly the cathedrals built during the Middle Ages, often beautiful and inspiring but a far cry from the symmetrical, airy structures of ancient Greece and Rome.



Another example of Gothic art. The artist, Lorenzo Monaco, painted during the Renaissance period, but the work was created before linear perspective had replaced the "two-dimensional" style of Gothic painting.

In contrast, Renaissance artists studied and copied ancient frescoes and statues in an attempt to learn how to realistically depict people and objects.

This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 3: The Renaissance in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

READING: RENAISSANCE ERA STATES

Christopher Brooks

The Renaissance was originally an Italian phenomenon, due to the concentration of wealth and the relative power of the city-states of northern Italy. Renaissance thought spread, however, thanks to interactions between the kings and nobility of the rest of Europe and the elites of the Italian city-states, especially after a series of wars at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century saw the larger monarchies of Europe exert direct political control in Italy.

The End of the Italian Renaissance

Detailed below, a new regional power arose in the Middle East and spread to Europe starting in the fourteenth century: the Ottoman Turks. In 1453, the ancient Roman city of Constantinople fell to the Turks, by which time the Turks had already seized control of the entire Balkan region (i.e. the region north of Greece including present-day Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Albania, and Macedonia). The rise in Turkish power in the east spelled trouble for the east-to-west trade routes the Italian cities had benefited from so much since the era of the crusades, and despite deals worked out between Venice and the Ottomans, the profits to be had from the spice and luxury trade diminished (at least for the Italians) over time.

By the mid-fifteenth century, northern manufacturing began to compete with Italian production as well. Particularly in England and the Netherlands, northern European crafts were produced that rivaled Italian products and undermined the demand for the latter. Thus, the relative degree of prosperity in Italy vs. the rest of Europe declined going into the sixteenth century.

The real killing stroke to the Italian Renaissance was the collapse of the balance of power inaugurated by the Peace of Lodi. The threat to Italian independence arose from the growing power of the Kingdom of France and of the Holy Roman Empire, already engaged in intermittent warfare to the north. The French king, Charles VIII, decided to seize control of Milan, citing a dubious claim tied up in the web of dynastic marriage, and a Milanese pretender invited in the French to help him seize control of the despotism in 1494. All of the northern Italian city-states were caught in the crossfire of alliances and counter-alliances that ensued; the Medici were exiled from Florence the same year for offering territory to the French in an attempt to get them to leave Florence alone.

The result was the Italian Wars that ended the Renaissance. The three great powers of the time, France, the Holy Roman Empire, and Spain, jockeyed with one another and with the papacy (which behaved like just another warlike state) to seize Italian territory. Italy became a battleground and, over the next few decades, the independence of the Italian cities was either compromised or completely extinguished. Between 1503 – 1533,

one by one, the cities became territories or puppets of one or the other of the great powers, and in the process the Italian countryside was devastated and the financial resources of the cities were drained. In the aftermath of the Italian Wars, only the Papal States of central Italy remained truly politically independent, and the Italian peninsula would not emerge from under the shadow of the greater powers to its north and west until the nineteenth century.

That being noted, the Renaissance did not *really* end. What "ended" with the Italian Wars was Italian financial and commercial dominance and the glory days of scholarship and artistic production that had gone with it. By the time the Italian Wars started, all of the patterns and innovations first developed in Italy had already spread north and west. In other words, "The Renaissance" was already a European phenomenon by the late fifteenth century, so even the end of Italian independence did not jeopardize the intellectual, commercial, and artistic gains that had originally blossomed in Italy.

The greatest achievement of the Italian Renaissance, despite the higher profile given to Renaissance art, was probably humanistic education. The study of the classics, a high level of literary sophistication, and a solid grounding in practical commercial knowledge (most obviously mathematics and accounting) were all combined in humanistic education. Royal governments across Europe sought out men with humanistic education to serve as bureaucrats and officials, even as merchants everywhere adopted Italian mercantile practices for their obvious benefits (e.g. the superiority of Arabic numerals over Roman ones, the crucial importance of accurate bookkeeping, etc.). Thus, while not as glamorous as beautiful paintings or soaring buildings, the practical effects of humanistic education led to its widespread adoption almost everywhere in Europe.

Politics: The Emergence of Strong States

While the city-states of northern Italy were enjoying the height of their prosperity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, northern and western Europe was divided between a large number of fairly small principalities, church lands, free cities, and weak kingdoms. As described in previous chapters, the medieval system of monarchy was one in which kings were really just the first among nobles; their power was based primarily on the lands they owned through their family dynasty, *not* on the taxes or deference they extracted from other nobles or commoners. In many cases, powerful nobles could field personal armies that were as large as those of the king, especially since armies were almost always a combination of loyal knights (by definition members of the nobility) on horseback, supplemented by peasant levies and mercenaries. Standing armies were almost nonexistent and wars tended to be fairly limited in scale as a result.

During the late medieval and Renaissance periods, however, monarchs began to wield more power and influence. The long-term pattern from about 1350 – 1500 was for the largest monarchies to expand their territory and wealth, which allowed them to fund better armies, which led to more expansion. In the process, smaller states were often absorbed or at least forced to do the bidding of larger ones; this is true of the Italian city-states and formerly independent kingdoms like Burgundy in eastern France.

The New Kingdoms: Spain, England, France, and the Holy Roman Empire

Spain

In the Middle Ages, Spain had been divided between small Christian kingdoms in the north and larger Muslim ones in the south. The Crusades were part of a centuries-long series of wars the Christian Spaniards called the Reconquest, which reached its culmination in the late fifteenth century. Spain became a powerful and united kingdom for the first time when the monarchs of two of the Christian kingdoms were married in 1479: Queen Isabella of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragon. During their own lifetimes Aragon and Castile remained independent of one another, though obviously closely allied, but the marriage ensured that Isabella and Ferdinand's daughter Joanna and her son Charles V would go on to rule over Spain as a single, unified kingdom.

The "Catholic monarchs" as they were called were determined to complete the Reconquest of the Iberian peninsula, and in 1492 they succeeded in doing so, capturing Grenada, the last Muslim kingdom. Full of crusading zeal, they immediately set about rooting out "heretics" like the kingdom's large Jewish population, forcing Jews to either convert to Catholicism or leave the kingdom that same year. In 1502 they gave the same ultimatum to the hundreds of thousands of Muslims as well. Most Jews and Muslims chose to go into exile, most to the relatively tolerant and economically prosperous kingdoms of North Africa or the (highly tolerant by the standards of European kingdoms at the time) Ottoman Empire.

The Spanish monarchs also attacked the privileges of their own nobility, in some cases literally destroying the castles of defiant nobles and forcing nobles to come and pay homage at court (in the process neutralizing them as a threat to their authority). After Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the New World in 1492, recalcitrant nobles were often shipped off as governors of islands thousands of miles away. They also succeeded in reforming the tax system to get access to more revenue, especially by taxing trade, and so by 1500 the Spanish army was the largest and most feared in Europe.

Queen Isabella deserves special attention. She was unquestionably one of the most significant "queens regnant" (a queen with genuine political power, not merely the royal wife of a king) of the entire Renaissance era. She tended to rule with more boldness and vision than did Ferdinand, personally leading Castilian troops during the last years of the Reconquest, sponsoring Columbus's voyage, and presiding over the larger and richer of the two major Spanish kingdoms. Simply put, Isabella exemplified the trend of Renaissance rulers asserting greater power over their respective kingdoms than had the monarchs of earlier eras.

In many ways, the sixteenth century was "the Spanish century," when Spain was the most prosperous and powerful kingdom in Europe, especially after the flow of silver from the Americas began. Spain went from a disunited, war-torn region to a powerful and relatively centralized state in just a few decades.

England

It initially seemed like England would follow a very different path than did Spain; while Spain was becoming stronger and more unified, England plunged into decades of civil war before a strong monarchy emerged. After the end of the Hundred Years' War, English soldiers and knights returned with few prospects at home. They enlisted in the service of rival nobles houses, ultimately fueling a conflict within the royal family between two different branches, the Lancasters and the Yorks. The result was a violent conflict over the crown called the War of the Roses, lasting from 1455 – 1485. Ultimately, a Welsh prince named Henry Tudor who was part of the extended family of Lancasters defeated Richard III of York and claimed the throne as King Henry VII.

Henry VII proved extremely adept at controlling the nobility, in large part through the Star Court, a royal court used to try nobles suspected of betraying him or undermining the king's authority. The Star Court's judges were royal officials appointed by Henry, and it regularly used torture to obtain confessions from the accused. Henry also seized the lands of rebellious lords and banned private armies that did not ultimately report to him. The result was a streamlined political system under his control and a nobility that remained loyal to him as much out of fear as genuine allegiance. The sixteenth century saw Henry's line, the Tudors, establish an increasingly powerful English state, largely based on a pragmatic alliance between the royal government and the gentry, the landowning class who exercised the lion's share of political power at the local level.

That alliance was shored up by staggering levels of official violence through law enforcement and the brutal suppression of popular uprisings. For example, roughly 20,000 people were executed in England in the 30 years between 1580 and 1610, a rate which if applied to the present-day United States would amount to 46,000 executions a year. Criminals who were not hanged or beheaded were routinely whipped, branded, or mutilated in order to inspire (in so many words from magistrates at the time) terror among other potential law-breakers or rebels. Nevertheless, despite that violence and its relatively small population, England did emerge as a powerful and centralized kingdom by the middle of the sixteenth century.

France

France emerged at the same time as the only serious rival to Spain. The French king Charles VII (r. 1422 – 1461), the same king who finally won the 100 Years' War for France and expelled the English, created the first French professional army that was directly loyal to the crown. He funded it with the *taille*, the direct tax on both peasants and nobles that had originally been authorized by the nobility and rich merchants of France during the latter part of the Hundred Years' War, and the *gabelle*, the salt tax. Each of these taxes were supposed to be temporary sources of revenue to support the war effort.

Charles's successor Louis XI (r. 1431 – 1483), however, managed to make the new taxes permanent. In other words, he converted what had been an emergency wartime revenue stream into a permanent source of money for the monarchy. He was called "The Spider" for his ability to trap weak nobles and seize their

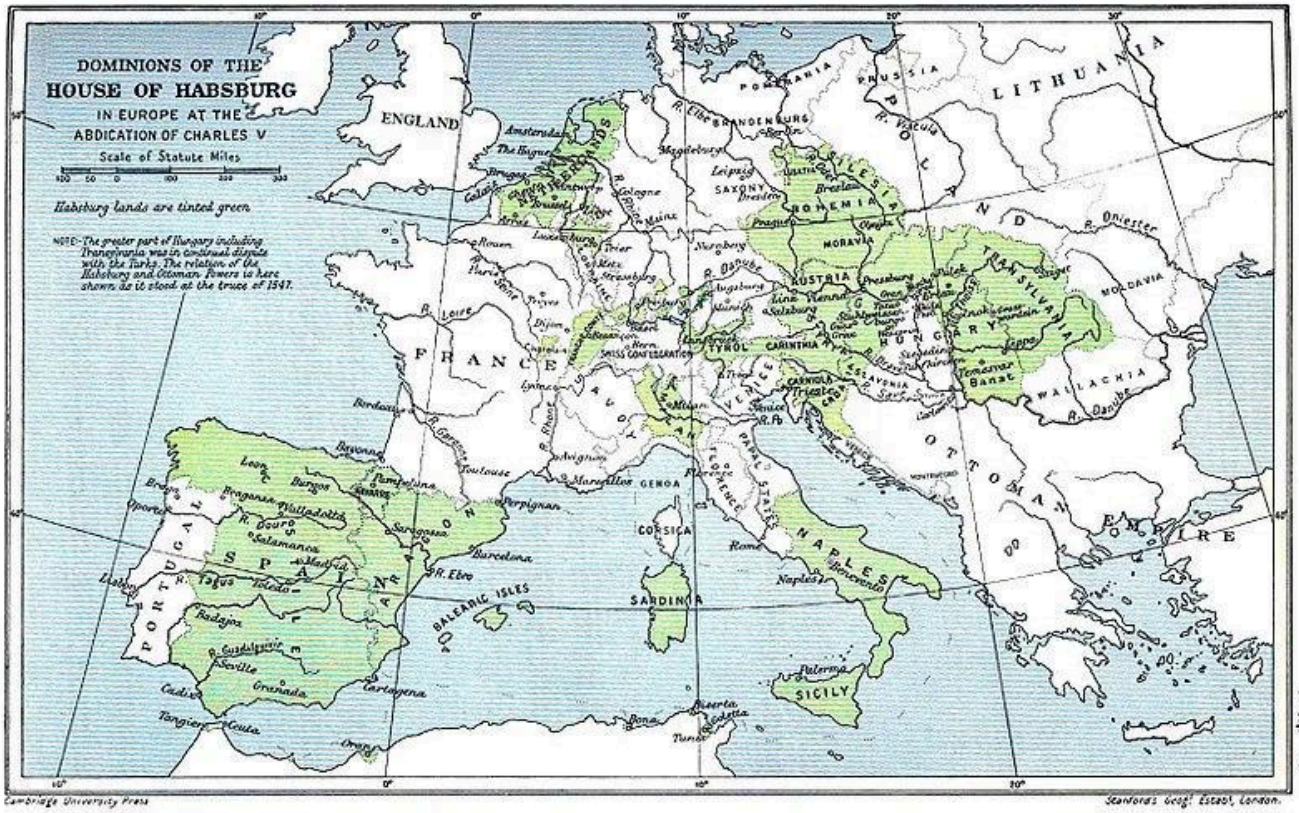
lands under various legal pretenses. He also expelled the Jews of France as heretics, seizing the wealth of Jewish money-lenders in the process, and he even liquidated the old crusading order of the Knights Templar headquartered in France, seizing *their* funds as well. By the time of his death, the French monarchy was well funded and exercised increasing power over the nobility and towns.

The Holy Roman Empire

In contrast to the growth of relatively centralized states in Spain, England, and France, the German lands of central Europe remained fragmented. The very concept of "Germany" was an abstraction during the Renaissance era. Germany was simply a region, a large part of central Europe in which most, but not all, people spoke various dialects of the German language. It was politically divided between hundreds of independent kingdoms, city-states, church lands, and territories. Its only overarching political identity took the form of that most peculiar of early-modern European states: the Holy Roman Empire.

While the Holy Roman Empire was thus a far cry from the increasingly centralized states of Western Europe, the Habsburgs were unquestionably one of the most powerful royal lines, and their own territories stretched from Hungary to the New World by the sixteenth century. The greatest emperor (in terms of the sheer amount of territory he ruled) was Charles V, who ruled from 1519 – 1558. A grandson of Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain, Charles inherited a gargantuan amount of territory.

The sheer number and variety of Charles V's territorial possessions and related titles strikes almost comical levels from a contemporary perspective. He was emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and king of Spain, Grand Duke of various territories in Poland and Romania, princely count of southern German lands, duke of others, and even claimed sovereignty over Jerusalem (although of course he did not actually control the Holy Land). Most of these titles were not the result of military conquests – they were places he had inherited from his ancestors. The unofficial Habsburg motto was "Let others wage war. You, happy Austria, marry to prosper." Charles ruled not only the Habsburg possessions in Europe, but the enormous new (Spanish) empire that had emerged in the New World since the late fifteenth century.



Map 10

The European possessions of Charles V. Note how his territories were non-contiguous (i.e. they were not geographically united) because they were primarily the results of lands he inherited from various ancestors.

Ironically, Charles himself had a terrible time managing anything, despite his personal intelligence and competence. He proved unable to contain the explosion of the Protestant Reformation, he was engaged in ongoing defensive wars against both France and the Turks, and his territories were so far-flung that he spent most of his life traveling between them. He eventually abdicated in 1558, and recognizing that the Habsburg lands were almost ungovernable, he handed power over to his brother Ferdinand I in Austria (Ferdinand also became Holy Roman Emperor) and his son Philip II in Spain and its possessions. Henceforth, the two branches of the Habsburgs were united in their Catholicism and their enmity with France, but little else.

Image Citations (Creative Commons):

Habsburg lands: public domain

This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 4: Politics in the Renaissance Era in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

READING: THE EARLY REFORMATION AND MARTIN LUTHER

Christopher Brooks

The Protestant Reformation was the permanent split within the Catholic church that resulted in multiple competing denominations (versions, essentially) of Christian practice and belief. From the perspective of the Catholic hierarchy, these new denominations – lumped together under the category of "Protestant" – were nothing more or less than new heresies, sinful breaks with the correct, orthodox beliefs and practices of the Church. The difference between Protestant churches and earlier heretical movements was that the Church proved unable to stamp them out or re-assimilate them into mainstream Catholic practice. Thus, what began as a protest movement against corruption within the Church very quickly evolved into a number of widespread and increasingly militant branches of Christianity itself.

Ironically, "the" Reformation as the sundering of Christian unity was at least in part the product of prosaic reformations already occurring within the Church. The founding figure of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, used the humanistic education that had become increasingly common for members of the Church in formulating his arguments. Many early adopters of Protestantism were drawn to the new movement because they were already enthusiastic supporters of church reform. In part as a reaction to Protestantism but also in part as an extension of pre-existing reform movements, the Catholic hierarchy would go on to introduce important changes to both practice (e.g. colleges that trained priests) and culture (e.g. a new focus on the spiritual life of the common person) that did amount to meaningful reforms. These changes were long referred to as the "Counter-Reformation," but are now recognized by historians as constituting a Catholic Reformation that was more than just an anti-Protestant reaction.

The Context of the Reformation

The context of the Reformation was the strange state of the Catholic Church as of the late fifteenth century. The Church was omnipresent in early-modern European society. About one person in seventy-five was part of the Church, as a priest, monk, nun, or member of a lay order. Practically every work of art depicted biblical themes. The Church supervised births, marriages, contracts, wills, and deaths – all law was, by implication, the law of God Himself. Furthermore, in Catholic doctrine, spiritual salvation was only accessible through the intervention of the Church; without the rituals (sacraments) performed by priests, the soul was doomed to go to hell. Finally, popes fought to claim the right to intervene in secular affairs as they saw fit,

although this was a fight they rarely won, losing even more ground as the new more powerful and centralized monarchies rose to power in the fifteenth century.

Simply put, as of the Renaissance era, all was not well with the Church. The Babylonian Captivity and the Great Western Schism both undermined the Church's authority. The stronger states of the period claimed the right to appoint bishops and priests within their kingdoms, something that the monarchs of England and France were very successful in doing. This led both laypeople and some priests themselves to look to monarchs, rather than the pope, for patronage and authority.

At the same time, elite churchmen (including the popes themselves) continued to live like princes. The papacy not only set a bad example, but attempts to reform the lifestyles and relative piety of priests generally failed; the papacy was simply too remote from the everyday life of the priesthood across Europe, and since elite churchmen were all nobles, they usually continued to live like nobles. In many cases, they openly lived with concubines, had children, and worked to ensure that their children receive lucrative positions in the Church. Laypeople were well aware of the slack morality that pervaded the Church. Medieval and early-modern literature is absolutely shot through with satirical tracts mocking immoral priests, and depictions of hell almost always featured priests, monks, and nuns burning alongside nobles and merchants.

These patterns affected monasticism as well. The idea behind monastic orders had been imitating the life of Christ, yet by the early modern period, many monasteries (especially urban ones) ran successful industries, and monks often lived in relative luxury compared to townspeople. Furthermore, the monasteries had been very successful in buying up or receiving land as gifts; by the late fifteenth century a full 20% of the land of the western kingdoms was owned by monasteries. The contrast between the required vow of poverty taken by monks and nuns and the wealth and luxury many monks and nuns enjoyed was obvious to laypeople.

The result of this widespread concern with corruption was a new focus on the inner spiritual life of the individual, not the focus on and respect for the priest, monk, or nun. New movements sprung up around Europe, including one called Modern Devotion in the Netherlands, that focused on moral and spiritual life of laypeople outside of the auspices of the Church. The handbook of the Modern Devotion was called *The Imitation of Christ*, written in the mid-fifteenth century and published in various editions after that, which was so popular that its sales matched those of the Bible at the time. It promoted the idea of salvation without needing the Church as an intermediary at all.

Within the Church, there were widespread and persistent calls for reform to better address the needs of the laity and to better live up to the Church's own moral standards. Numerous devout priests, monks, and nuns abhorred the corruption of their peers and superiors in the Church and called for change – the Spanish branch of the Church enjoyed a strong period of reform during the fifteenth century, for example. Despite this reforming zeal within the Church and the growing popularity of lay movements outside of it, however, almost no one anticipated a permanent break from the Church's hierarchy itself.

Lutheranism

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) was a German monk who endured a difficult childhood and a fraught relationship with his father. He suffered from bouts of depression and anxiety that led him to become a monk, the traditional solution to an identity crisis as of the early modern period. Luther received both a scholastic and a humanistic education, eventually becoming a professor at the small university in the city of Wittenberg in the Holy Roman Empire. There, far from the centers of both spiritual and secular power, he contemplated the Bible, the Church, and his own spiritual salvation.

Luther struggled with his spiritual identity. He was obsessively afraid of being damned to hell, feeling totally unworthy of divine forgiveness and plagued with doubt as to his ability to achieve salvation. The key issue for Luther was the concept of good works, an essential element of salvation in the early-modern church. In Catholic doctrine, salvation is achieved through a combination of the sacraments, faith in God, and good works, which are good deeds that merit a person's admission into heaven. Those good works could be acts of kindness and charity, or they could be gifts of money to the Church – a common "good work" at the time was leaving money or land to the Church is one's will. Luther felt that the very idea of good works was ambiguous, especially because works seemed so inadequate when compared to the wretched spiritual state of humankind. He could not understand how *anyone* merited admittance to heaven no matter how many good works they carried out while alive – the very idea seemed petty and base compared to the awesome responsibility of living up to Christianity's moral standards.

A 1528 portrait of Luther.

In about 1510 Luther began to explore a possible answer to this quandary: the idea that salvation did not come from works, but from grace, the limitless love and forgiveness of God, which is achievable through faith alone. Over time, Luther developed the idea that it takes an act of God to merit a person's salvation, and the reflection of that act is in the heartfelt faith of the individual. A person's willed attempts to do good things to get into heaven were always inadequate; what mattered was that the heartfelt faith of a believer might inspire an infinite act of mercy on the part of God. This idea – salvation through faith alone – was a major break with Catholic belief.

This concept was potentially revolutionary because in one stroke it did away with the entire edifice of church ritual. If salvation could be earned through faith alone, the sacraments were at best symbolic rituals and at worst distractions – over time, Luther argued that only baptism and communion were relevant since they were very clearly inspired by Christ's actions as described in the New Testament. In Luther's vision, the priest

was nothing more than a guide rather than a gatekeeper who could grant or withhold the essential rituals, and a believer should be able to read the Bible directly rather than be forced to defer to the priesthood.

Having developed the essential points of his theology, Luther then confronted what he regarded as the most blatant abuse of the Church's authority: indulgences. In 1517, Pope Leo X issued a new indulgence to fund the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Luther was incensed at how crass the sale of indulgences was (it was as bad as a carnival barker's act in nearby Wittenberg) and at the fact that this new indulgence promised to absolve the purchaser of all sins, all at once. Furthermore, the indulgence could be purchased on behalf of those who were already dead and "spring" them from purgatory in one fell swoop. Luther responded by posting a list of ninety-five attacks against indulgences to the door of the Wittenberg cathedral. These "95 Theses" are considered by historians to be the first official act of the Protestant Reformation.

The 95 Theses were relatively moderate in tone. They attacked indulgences for leading to greed instead of piety, for leading the laity to distrust the Church, and for simply not working – they did not, Luther argued, absolve the sins of those who purchased them. Written in Latin, the 95 Theses were intended to spark debate and discussion within the Church. And, while he criticized the pope's wealth and (implied) greed, Luther did not attack the office of the papacy itself. It should be emphasized that calls for reform within the Church were nothing new, and Luther certainly saw himself as a would-be reformer at this stage, not a revolutionary. Soon, however, the 95 Theses were translated into German and reprinted, which led to an unexpected and, at least initially, unwanted celebrity.

Luther's position continued to radicalize after 1521. He claimed that the pope was, in fact, the Anti-Christ foretold in the Book of Revelations, and he came to believe that he was living in the End Times. He also personally translated the Bible into German and he happily met with his ever-growing group of followers. Initially a slur against heretics, the term "Protestant" was soon embraced by those followers, who used it as a defiant badge of honor.

Very quickly, Protestantism caught on across the empire, especially among elites, churchmen, and the educated urban classes. In the 1520s most Lutherans were reform-minded clerics, regarding Luther's movement as an effective and radical protest against all of the problems that had plagued the Church for centuries. Part of the appeal of Lutheranism to priests was that it legitimized the lifestyle many of them were already living; they could get married to their concubines and acknowledge their children if they left the Church, which droves of them did starting in the 1520s. Thanks both to the perceived purity of its doctrine and the support of rulers, nobles, and converted priests, Lutheranism started spreading in earnest among the general population starting in the 1530s.

Charles V was in an unenviable position. As Holy Roman Emperor, he felt bound to defend the Church, but he could not do so through force of arms. He spent most of his reign fighting against both France and the Ottoman Empire, which were among the greatest powers of the era. Thus, in 1526 he allowed the German princes to choose whether or not to enforce his ban on Lutheranism as they saw fit, in hopes that they would continue to offer him their military assistance – he tried unsuccessfully to repeal this reluctant tolerance

in 1529, but it was too late. Practically speaking, the German states ended up being divided roughly evenly, with a concentration of Lutheranism in the north and Catholicism in the south.

Luther was elated by the success of his message; he happily accepted the use of the term "Lutheranism" to describe the new religious movement he had started, and he felt certain that the correctness of his position was so appealing that even the Jews would abandon their traditional beliefs and convert (they did not, and Luther swiftly launched a vituperative anti-Semitic attack entitled *Against the Jews and their Lies*). Much to his chagrin, however, Luther watched as some groups who considered themselves to be Lutherans took his message in directions of which he completely disapproved.

Luther himself was a deeply conservative man. His attack on Catholic doctrine was fundamentally based on what he saw as a "return" to the original message of the Bible. Many Protestants interpreted his message as indicating that true Christians were only accountable to the Bible and could therefore reject the existing social hierarchy as well. In 1524, an enormous peasant uprising occurred across Germany, inspired by this interpretation of Lutheranism and demanding a reduction in feudal dues and duties, the end of serfdom, and greater justice from feudal lords. In 1525, Luther penned a venomous attack against the rebels entitled *Against the Thieving, Murderous Hordes of Peasants* which encouraged the lords to slaughter the peasants like dogs. The revolt was put down brutally, with over 100,000 killed, and Lutheranism was able to keep the support of the elites like Frederick the Wise who sheltered it.

Still, the uprising indicated that the movement Luther had begun was not something he could control, despite his best efforts. The very nature of breaking with a single authoritarian institution brought about a number of competing movements, some of which were directly inspired by and connected to Luther, but many of which, soon, were not.

Calvinism

The most important Protestant denomination to emerge after the establishment of Lutheranism was Calvinism. Jean Calvin, a French lawyer exiled for his sympathy with Protestantism, settled in Geneva, Switzerland in 1536. Calvin was a generation younger than Luther, and hence was born into a world in which religious unity had already been fragmented; in that sense, the fact that he had Protestant views is not as surprising as Luther's break with the Church had been. In Geneva, Calvin began work on Christian theology and soon formed close ties with the city council. The result of his work was Calvinism, a distinct Protestant denomination that differed in many ways from Lutheranism.

Calvin accepted Luther's insistence on the role of faith in salvation, but he went further. If God was all-powerful and all-knowing, and he chose to extend his grace to some people but not to others, Calvin reasoned, it was folly to imagine that humans could somehow influence Him. Not only was the Catholic insistence on good works wrong, the very idea of free will in the face of the divine intelligence could not be correct. Calvin noted that only some parishioners in church services seemed to be able to grasp the importance and complexities of scripture, whereas most were indifferent or ignorant. He concluded that God, who transcended both

time and space, chose some people as the "elect," those who will be saved, before they are even born. Free will is merely an illusion born of human ignorance, since the fate of a person's soul was determined before time itself began. This doctrine is called "predestination," and while the idea of the absence of free will and predetermined salvation may seem absurd at first sight, in fact it was simply the logical extension of the very concept of divine omnipotence according to Calvin.

Sixteenth-century portrait of Calvin. Austere black clothing became associated with Calvinists, who rejected ostentatious dress and decoration.

While Lutheranism spread to northern Germany and the Scandinavian countries, Calvinism caught on not just in Switzerland, but in France (where Calvinists were known as Huguenots) and Scotland, where the Scottish Calvinists became known as Presbyterians. Everywhere, Calvinists set themselves apart by their plain dress and their dour outlook on merriment, celebrations, and the pleasures of the flesh. The best known

Calvinists in the American context were the Puritans, English Calvinists who left Europe (initially fleeing persecution) to try to create a perfect Christian community in the New World.

It should be emphasized that Lutherans and Calvinists quickly came to regard one another as rivals, even enemies, rather than as "fellow" Protestants. Luther and Calvin came to detest one another, finding each other's respective theology as flawed and misleading as that of Catholicism. While some pragmatic alliances between Protestant groups would eventually emerge because of persecution or war, for the most part each Protestant denomination claimed to have exclusive access to religious truth, regarding all others as hopelessly ignorant and, in fact, damned to hell.

The Catholic Reaction

Initially, most members of the Church hierarchy were overwhelmed and bewildered by the emergence of Protestantism. All of the past heresies had remained limited in scope as compared with the incredible rapidity with which Lutheranism spread. For practical political reasons, the pope and various rulers were either unwilling or unable to use force to crack down on Protestantism at first, as witnessed with Charles V's failed attempts to curtail Lutheranism's spread. Lutheranism also spread much more quickly than had earlier heresies, which tended to be limited to certain regions; here, the fact that Luther and his followers readily embraced the printing press to spread their message made a major impact, with word of the new movement spreading across Europe over the course of the 1520s.

In historical hindsight, the shocking aspect of the Catholic Church's initial reaction to the emergence of Protestantism is that there *was* no reaction. For decades, popes remained focused on the politics of central Italy or simply continued beautifying Rome and enjoying a life of luxury; this was the era of the "Renaissance popes," men from elite families who regarded the papal office as little more than a political position that happened to be at the head of the Church. Likewise, there was no widespread awareness among most Church officials that anything out of the ordinary was taking place with Luther; despite the radicalism of his position, most of the clergy assumed that Lutheranism was a "flash in the pan," doomed to fade back into obscurity in the end. By the 1540s, however, church officials began to take the threat posed by Protestantism more seriously.

The initial period of Catholic Reformation, from about 1540 – 1550, was a fairly moderate one that aimed to bring Protestants back into the fold. In a sense, the very notion of a permanent break from Rome was difficult for many people, certainly many priests, to conceive of. After about 1550, however, when it became clear that the split was permanent, the Church itself became much more hardline and intolerant. The subsequent reforms were as much about imposing a new internal discipline as they were in making membership appealing to lay Catholics.

The same factors that had made the Church difficult to reform before the Protestant break made it strong as an institution that opposed the new Protestant denominations: habit, ritual, organization, discipline, hierarchy, and wealth all worked to preserve the Church's power and influence. Likewise, many princes realized that Protestantism often led to political problems in their territories; even though many of the German princes

had originally supported Luther in order to protect their own political independence, many others came to realize that the last thing they wanted were independent-minded denominations in their territories, some of which might reject their worldly authority completely (as had the German peasants who rose up in 1524).

Among Catholics at all levels of social hierarchy, Catholic rituals were comforting, and even though rejecting the excesses in Catholic ritual had been part of the appeal of Protestantism to some, to many others it was precisely those familiar rituals that made Catholicism appealing. The Catholic Reformation is often associated with the "baroque" style of art and music which encouraged an emotional connection with Catholic ritual and, potentially, with the experience of faith itself. The Church continued to fund huge building projects and lavish artwork, much of which was aimed to appeal to laypeople, not just serve as pretty decorations for high-ranking churchmen.

Likewise, there was a wave of Protestant conversions that spread very rapidly by the 1530s, but then as the Protestant denominations splintered off and turned on one another, the "purity" of the appeal of Protestantism faded. In other words, when Protestants began fighting each other with the same vigor as their attacks on Rome, they no longer seemed like a clear and simple alternative to Roman corruption.

Conclusion

The battle lines between Protestantism and Catholicism were firmly set by the 1560s. The Catholic Reformation established Catholic orthodoxy and launched a massive, and largely successful, campaign to reaffirm the loyalty and enthusiasm of Catholic laypeople. Meanwhile, Protestant leaders were equally hardened in their beliefs and actively inculcated devotion and loyalty in their followers. Nowhere was there the slightest notion of "religious tolerance" in the modern sense – both sides were convinced that anyone and everyone who disagreed with their spiritual outlook was damned to an eternity of suffering. The wars of propaganda and evangelism gave way to wars of muskets and pikes soon enough.

Image Citations (Wikimedia Commons):

Luther – Public Domain

Diet of Worms – Public Domain

Calvin – Public Domain

This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 6: Reformations in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: THE BOOK OF THE CITY OF LADIES

This text is available online through the Hanover College History Department.

Christine de Pisan: *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405)

One day as I was sitting alone in my study surrounded by books on all kinds of subjects, devoting myself to literary studies, my usual habit, my mind dwelt at length on the weighty opinions of various authors whom I had studied for a long time. I looked up from my book, having decided to leave such subtle questions in peace and to relax by reading some small book. By chance a strange volume came into my hands, not one of my own, but one which had been given to me along with some others. When I held it open and saw its title page that it was by Matheolus, I smiled, for though I had never seen it before, I had often heard that like books it discussed respect for women. I thought I would browse through it to amuse myself. . . . [A]fter browsing here and there and reading the end, I put it down in order to turn my attention to more elevated and useful study. But just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many different men – and learned men among them – have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior. Not only one or two and not even just this Matheolus (for this book had a bad name anyways and was intended as a satire) but, more generally, from the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators – it would take too long to mention their names – it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. Thinking deeply about these matters, I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes, who had graciously told me of their most private and intimate thoughts, hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience whether the testimony of so many notable men could be true. To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women. Yet I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men – such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed – could have spoken falsely on so many occasions . . . This reason alone, in short, made me conclude that, although my intellect did not perceive my own great faults and, likewise, those of other women because of its simpleness and ignorance, it was however truly fitting that such was the case. And so I relied more on the judgment of others than on what I myself felt

and knew. . . . And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when He made woman, and I wondered how such a worthy artisan could have designed to make such an abominable work which, from what they say, is the vessel as well as the refuge and abode of every evil and vice. As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature and in my lament I spoke these words:

> Oh, God, how can this be? For unless I stray from my faith, I must never doubt that your infinite wisdom and most perfect goodness ever created anything which was not good. Did You yourself not create woman in a very special way and since that time did You not give her all those inclinations which it please You for her to have? And how could it be that You could go wrong in anything? Yet look at all these accusations which have been judged, decided, and concluded against women. I do not know how to understand this repugnance. If it is so, fair Lord God, that in fact so many abominations abound in the female sex, for You Yourself say that the testimony of two or three witnesses lends credence, why shall I not doubt that this is true? Alas, God, why did You not let me be born in the world as a man, so that all my inclinations would be to serve You better, and so that I would not stray in anything and would be as perfect as a man is said to be? But since Your kindness has not been extended to me, then forgive my negligence in Your service, most fair Lord God, and may it not displease You, for the servant who receives fewer gifts from his lord is less obliged in his service.

I spoke these words to God in my lament and a great deal more for a very long time in sad reflections, and in my folly considered myself most unfortunate because God had made me inhabit a female body in this world.

The story continues in the form of allegory, as three women (Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude, and Lady Justice) come to instruct Christine and to show her how to build a city for virtuous women. As Lady Reason explains:

There is another greater and even more special reason for our coming which you will learn from our speeches: in fact we have come to vanquish from the world the same error into which you had fallen, so that from now on, ladies and all valiant women may have a refuge and defense against the various assailants, those ladies who have been abandoned for so long, exposed like a field without a surrounding hedge, without finding a champion to afford them an adequate defense, notwithstanding those noble men who are required by order of law to protect them, who by negligence and apathy have allowed them to be mistreated. . . . Now it is time for their just cause to be taken from Pharaoh's hands, and for this reason, we three ladies who you see here, moved by pity, have come to you to announce a particular edifice built like a city wall, strongly constructed and well founded, which has been predestined and established by our aid and counsel for you to build, where no one will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy of praise, for the walls of the city will be closed to those women who lack virtue.. . . .{3}"My lady, according to what I understand from you, woman is a most noble creature. But even so, Cicero says that a man should never serve any woman and that he who does so debases himself, for no man should ever serve anyone lower than him." She replied, "The man or the woman in whom

resides greater virtue is the higher; neither the loftiness nor the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues. And surely he is happy who serves the Virgin, who is above all the angels." "My lady, one of the Catos — who was such a great orator– said, nevertheless, that if this world were without woman, we would converse with the gods." She replied, "You can now see the foolishness of the man who is considered wise, because, thanks to a woman, man reigns with God. And if anyone would say that man was banished because of Lady Eve, I tell you that he gained more through Mary than he lost through Eve when humanity was conjoined to the Godhead, which would never have taken place if Eve's misdeed had not occurred. Thus man and woman should be glad for this sin, through which such an honor has come about. For as low as human nature fell through this creature woman, was human nature lifted higher by this same creature. And as for conversing with the gods, as this Cato has said, if there had been no woman, he spoke truer than he knew, for he was a pagan, and among those of this belief, gods were thought to reside in Hell as well as in Heaven, that is, the devils whom they called the gods of Hell – so that it is no lie that these gods would have conversed with men, if Mary had not lived."

. . . .

Christine and Lady Reason discuss women's education.

Christine, spoke, "My lady, I realize that women have accomplished many good things and that even if evil women have done evil, it seems to me, nevertheless, that the benefits accrued and still accruing because of good women-particularly the wise and literary ones and those educated in the natural sciences whom I mentioned above-outweigh the evil. Therefore, I am amazed by the opinion of some men who claim that they do not want their daughters, wives, or kinswomen to be educated because their mores would be ruined as a result." She responded, Here you can clearly see that not all opinions of men are based on reason and that these men are wrong. For it must not be presumed that mores necessarily grow worse from knowing the moral sciences, which teach the virtues, indeed, there is not the slightest doubt that moral education amends and ennobles them. How could anyone think or believe that whoever follows good teaching or doctrine is the worse for it? Such an opinion cannot be expressed or maintained. . . .

To speak of more recent times, without searching for examples in ancient history, Giovanni Andrea, a solenm law professor in Bologna not quite sixty years ago, was not of the opinion that it was bad for women to be educated. He had a fair and good daughter, named Novella, who was educated in the law to such an advanced degree that when he was occupied by some task and not at leisure to present his lectures to his students, he would send Novella, his daughter, in his place to lecture to the students from his chair. And to prevent her beauty from distracting the concentration of her audience, she had a little curtain drawn in front of her. In this manner she could on occasion supplement and lighten her father's occupation. He loved her so much that, to commemorate her name, he wrote a book of remarkable lectures on the law which he entitled Novella super Decretalium, after his daughter's name.. . . .

Thus, not all men (and especially the wisest) share the opinion that it is bad for women to be educated. But it is very true that many foolish men have claimed this because it displeased them that women knew more than they did. Your father, who was a great scientist and philosopher, did not believe that women were worth less by

knowing science; rather, as you know, he took great pleasure from seeing your inclination to learning. The feminine opinion of your mother, however, who wished to keep you busy with spinning and silly girlishness, following the common custom of women, was the major obstacle to your being more involved in the sciences. But just as the proverb already mentioned above says, No one can take away what Nature has given,'your mother could not hinder in you the feeling for the sciences which you, through natural inclination, had nevertheless gathered together in little droplets. I am sure that, on account of these things, you do not think you are worth less but rather that you consider it a great treasure for yourself; and you doubtless have reason to. " And Christine, replied to all of this, "Indeed, my lady, what you say is as true as the Lord's Prayer.". . . .

Lady Reason explains the causes of misogyny.

Lady Reason explains that some men who blame women do it with good intentions, though good intentions are no excuse for error. Others blame them because of their own vices, others because of the infirmity of their own bodies, others by pure jealousy, others still because they like to slander. Some, finally, eager to show that they have read a lot, take their stand on what they find in books and simply quote familiar authors, repeating what has been said before.

By those who do it because of their own vices I mean those men who dissipated their youth in debauchery and dedicated themselves to promiscuity. The great number of their adventures has made them rogues. Grown old in sin, they spend their time regretting the transgressions of their youth — the more so since Nature prevents them from slaking their impotent desires. They purge their bile by denigrating women, thinking thus to disgust others from enjoying what they cannot enjoy.

Those motivated by the infirmity of their bodies are cripples with misshapen bodies and crooked limbs. Their minds are malicious and sharp, and they have no other means of vengeance for the misery of their impotence than to blame those [women] who bring gladness to others...

Those who blame women by jealousy are unworthy men who, having known or met many women of greater intelligence or nobler heart than theirs, have conceived bitterness and rancor...

As for those who are scandal-mongers by nature, it is not surprising that they slander women, when they speak ill of everyone. Yet I assure you that every man who takes pleasure in vilifying women has an abject heart, for he acts against Reason and against Nature because there is no bird or beast that does not naturally seek out its other half, that is to say the female. It is thus unnatural for a reasonable man to do the contrary. . . .

Source:

Excerpts from one text provided by Anne Kelsch at the University of North Dakota and another provided by S. Spishak at George Mason University.

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT LINKS ARE POSTED ON BLACKBOARD IN THE MODULE FOLDER

Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *The City of Ladies.*

Reading Journal

All the primary source texts we have read so far have been written by men. *The Book of the City of Ladies* was written by and woman and is about women. Considering the selections you have read, what challenges or dangers that women faced did Christine de Pizan want to emphasize? Use specific examples (quotes) to support your analysis.

Study Guide Collaboration

Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module.

PART XIV

MODULE THIRTEEN: EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST

READING: EUROPEAN EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST

Christopher Brooks

Europe was not a particularly important place, in the context of global empires, economies, or cultural influence during the medieval period. While it invaded the Middle East during the crusades and the European states themselves warred against one another almost constantly, on balance Europe was quite weak and poor compared to other regions farther east. China and India are both outstanding examples of regions that produced far greater wealth, had far larger populations, and were far more militarily powerful than any European kingdom was; in the case of China under the Ming dynasty of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, China was probably more powerful than all of Europe put together. Likewise, China's cultural influence on its neighbors was profound.

Nevertheless, the long expansion of European power to the rest of the world began in the fifteenth century. One of the great world-historical conundrums is why European states expanded so rapidly and aggressively, in the long run, while other powers like that of China, the Ottoman Empire, or the Indian kingdoms did not. Why was it *Europe* that took over the Americas (and, much later, much of the rest of the world) rather than Persia, the Ottoman Empire, India, or China?

Ironically, one of the most likely answers to that question is that it was Europe's relative poverty as compared to the states of the Middle East and Asia that led Europeans to seek out new sources of wealth. Whereas the intra-Asian trade routes linking China, Korea, Japan, the islands of the western Pacific, Southeast Asia, and India ensured that Asian states enjoyed access to wealth and luxury goods, Europeans had to rely on the hugely expensive long-distance trade between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe to access goods like spices and porcelain that Europeans desperately wanted (so we can conclude based on the prices elite Europeans were willing to pay for them) but could not produce themselves. One of the major motivations for European explorers was the pursuit of direct access to luxury goods that bypassed the eastern mercantile networks that had traditionally profited off of the long-distance East – West trade routes.

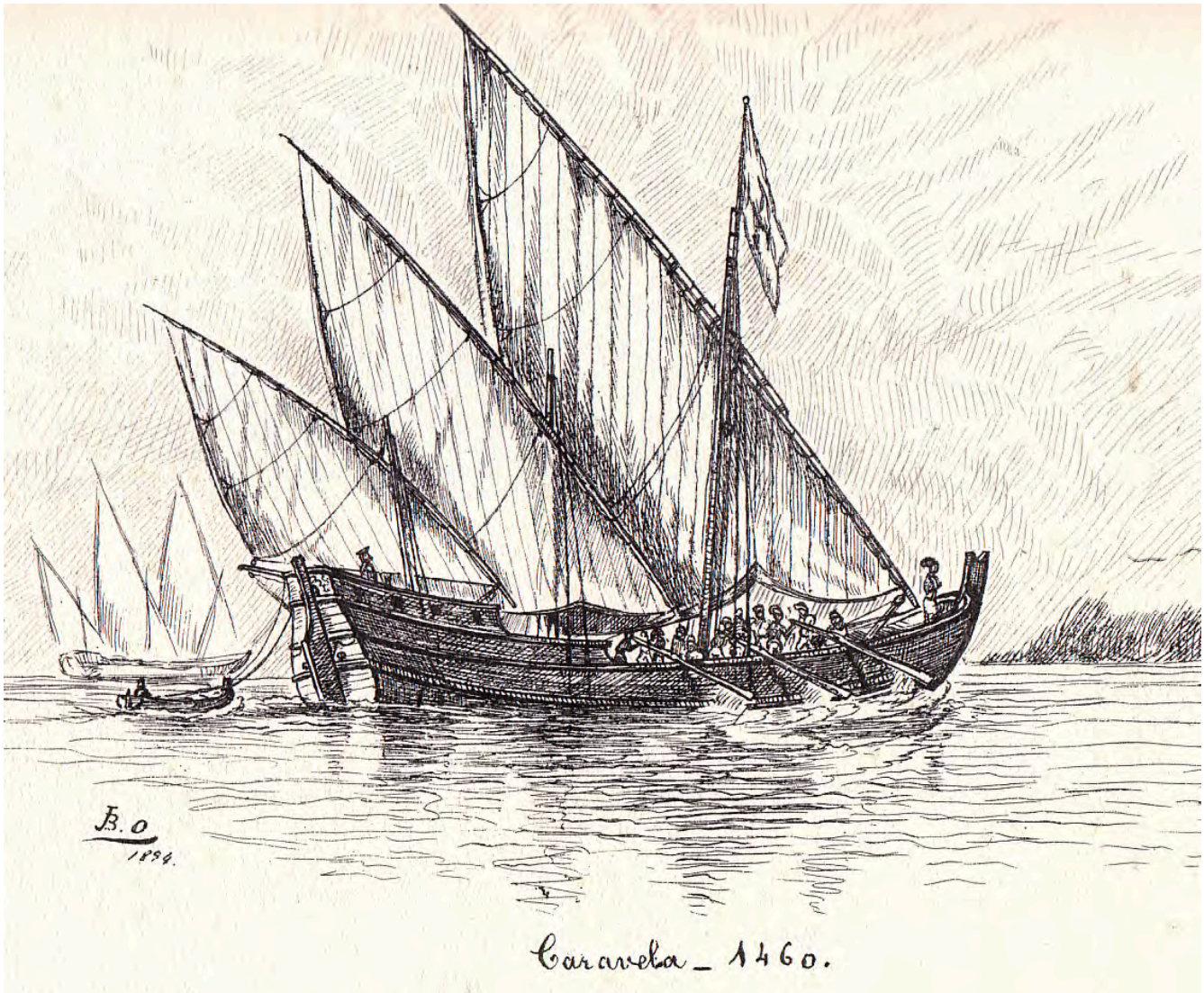
The demand for trade with the east was limitless in European society. Luxury goods from South and East Asia were always among the most sought-after commodities in Europe, stretching all the way back to Roman times. Spices were worth far more than their weight in gold, and Chinese goods like porcelain were also highly prized. Enterprising merchants who were able to position themselves somewhere along the Indian Ocean trade routes or the famous Silk Road between Europe and China stood to make a fortune, but the distances covered were so vast that it was very difficult and perilous to take part in mercantile ventures. Thus,

Isabella of Spain was not alone in funding explorers who sought to reach the east via easier routes when she supplied Columbus with his ships and sailors.

The situation became even more difficult for Europeans thanks to the rise of the Ottoman Empire. When Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453, the traditional trade routes to Asia were disrupted, particularly as the Turks started taking over the Venetian maritime empire. Likewise, Europeans had long traded with Muslim merchants in North Africa for gold, ivory, and spices, and they longed to cut out the middlemen and get to the sources farther south. Some of this was doubtless born of anti-Muslim prejudice, but there was also the simple fact that the Ottomans now directly controlled a major link in the East – West trade axis, deriving profits that Europeans desired for their own.

In addition, the crusading tradition, especially that inspired by the Reconquest of Spain and Portugal, served as an inspiration for European explorers. The Reconquest was only completed in 1492, the same year that Columbus sailed in search of a western route to Asia, and many of the Spanish *conquistadors* (conquerors) who invaded South and Central America afterwards had acquired their military experience from what they considered to be the holy wars against the Muslim inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula. That crusading ideology was easily adapted for the purposes of conquering vast American territories and forcibly converting the Native American inhabitants to Christianity.

There were thus economic and cultural reasons that Europeans *wanted* to reach African and Asian commodities and wealth. They were *able* to access that wealth thanks to technological advances. Until about 1400, Europeans had no ships capable of sailing across an entire ocean (the Viking longboats of the Middle Ages were an exception, but they were no longer in use by the Renaissance era), and the European understanding of geography and navigation was extremely primitive. From about 1420 on, however, maritime technology improved dramatically and it became feasible to launch voyages that could cross the entire Atlantic Ocean with a reasonable degree of certainty that they would succeed. The key here was the invention of the caravel, a new kind of ship that was able to sail both with the wind and against lateral winds; as long as the wind was not blowing in the opposite direction one wanted to travel in, it was possible to keep moving in the right direction. Reasonably effective compasses and a device to measure latitude called the astrolabe came into European hands from the Middle East around 1400 as well. Thus, by 1400 Europeans had both a number of reasons to want to explore and for the first time had the technological means to do so.



Nineteenth-century drawing of a Portuguese caravel, based on the designs used during the early Portuguese expeditions of the fifteenth century.

Despite those advances, the European grasp of geography remained very shaky. As of 1400, Europeans had terribly imprecise knowledge about the rest of the world. They did not, of course, know anything about the Americas. They tended to confuse "India," "Cathay," and "Japan" with Asia itself. They had a vague notion that all of Asia was ruled by khans, in part because of the popularity of the Venetian merchant Marco Polo's famous account of his travels undertaken in the latter part of the thirteenth century. Polo was a Venetian merchant who had traveled to the court of the Mongol Khan Kublai and eventually returned to Europe, but his account merely reinforced just how far away, and difficult to reach, Asia was taking the usual eastern routes. Many sincerely believed that monsters occupied the interiors of Africa and Asia, and besides Polo, no Europeans had ever made the trek to the far east and returned to tell the tale.

Africa and India

Europeans did, of course, know about North Africa. The Mediterranean had served as the crossroads of the civilized Western World since ancient times, and despite North Africa being ruled by Muslim kingdoms, Europeans regularly traded with Muslim merchants. As noted above, there were many lucrative commodities (like gold and ivory) that Europeans coveted and were only available from North African merchants. Europeans knew that these commodities originated somewhere across the Sahara desert, but were unable to access their sources directly.

During the European Middle Ages, Sub-Saharan Africa was dominated by various medium-sized kingdoms, most of which had converted to Islam. The largest was that of Mali, which oversaw a lucrative trade in gold and various luxury goods north via caravan to North Africa and the rest of the Mediterranean. Likewise, other kingdoms traded with one another and, via caravans, the Middle East and Europe. These kingdoms also engaged in frequent warfare against one another (just as the states of Europe did).

Drawn by the gold they were able to acquire via merchants in North Africa, Europeans had tried in the late Middle Ages to sail down the west coast of the continent, but their naval technology was insufficient. In the fifteenth century that changed with the introduction of the caravel; the same thing that made it possible for Europeans to reach the Americas allowed them to make reliable journeys along the African coast. Along with new compasses and the astrolabe, Europeans were able to make long-distance trips by the mid-fifteenth century that far exceeded their earlier maximum ranges.

The beginning of the ongoing contact between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe happened under the auspices of Prince Henry the Navigator (1394 – 1460), the governor of the southernmost province of Portugal. He sponsored numerous Portuguese expeditions along the west coast of Africa, hoping to somehow seize lands or at least find routes to lucrative sources of gold and spices. In 1497, Vasco Da Gama, a Portuguese nobleman, was sponsored by the Portuguese crown and sailed around Africa and as far as India, in the process claiming various territories for Portugal. Following Da Gama, Portuguese fleets established a lucrative monopoly on trade between Europe and West African kingdoms, East African kingdoms, and Indian merchants. This amounted to a royally-controlled, militarily-enforced monopoly of waterborne trade between Europe and India and Africa that lasted well into the sixteenth century. Thus, tiny Portugal was, for a time, one of the wealthiest states in Europe.

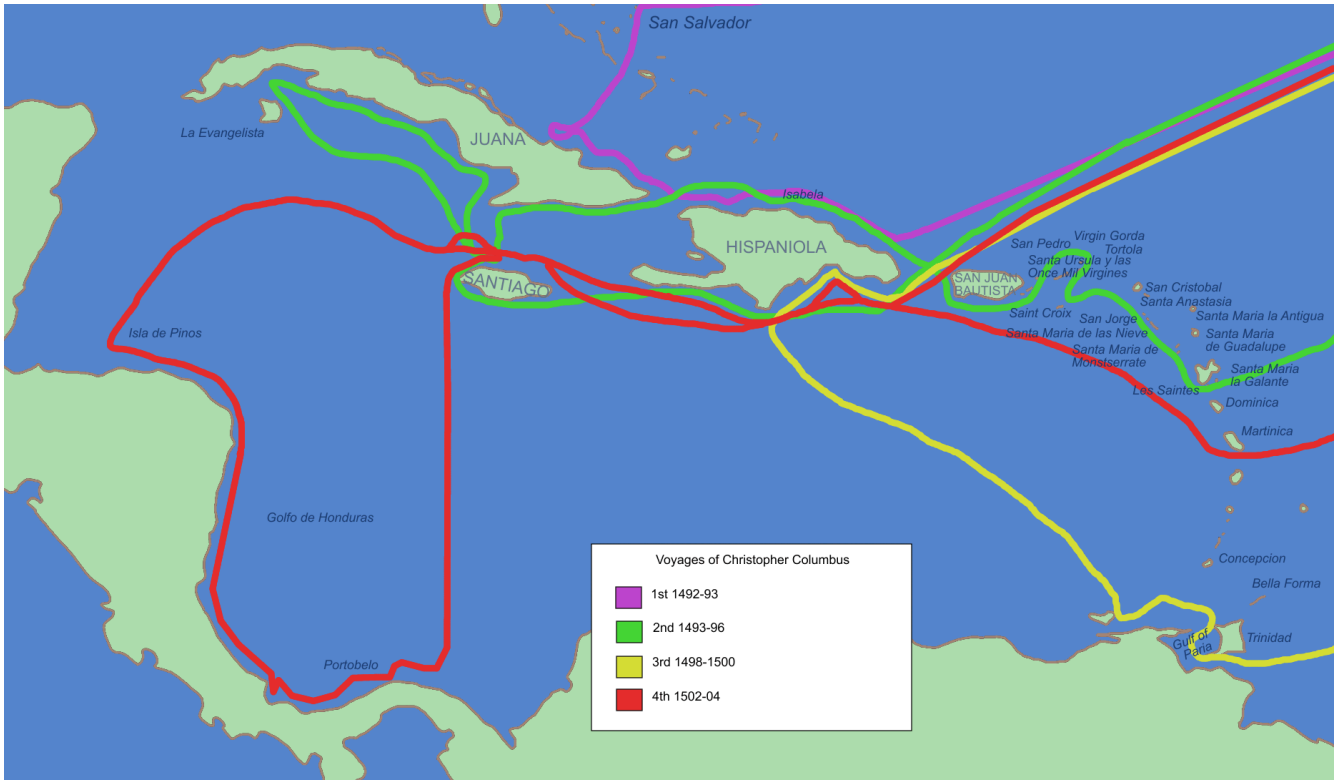
It should be emphasized that this Portuguese "monopoly" was first and foremost a monopoly between the Indian Ocean trade and Europe, *not* a monopoly of trade within the Indian Ocean itself (despite the best efforts of the Portuguese, who desperately tried to impose control through force of arms). Indian, African, and Middle Eastern merchants continued to exchange goods and wealth whose value greatly exceeded that of the trade between Europe and the Indian Ocean region. What changed, however, was that Europeans were for the first time able to directly access the sources of luxury commodities like spices, indigo, ivory, and gold, and Portugal was in the forefront of the European states that sought to reach those sources. Other states were quick to

follow once the sheer extent of African and Indian wealth was revealed through Portuguese trade, and soon the Dutch and then the English started taking over the oceanic trade routes from the Portuguese.

Spain, Columbus, the Great Dying, and the Columbian Exchange

The most important voyages of discovery of the early modern period were undertaken by agents of the Spanish monarchy, starting with that of Christopher Columbus in 1492. They were inspired by religious fervor as much as a practical desire for riches – fresh off the successful Reconquest, Queen Isabella agreed with Columbus's vision of flanking the Muslim forces of the Middle East and recapturing the Holy Land as much as she also wanted new trade routes to Asia. The voyage was thought to be feasible both because all educated people already accepted that the world was round (common knowledge since the days of ancient Greece) and because the circumference of the globe was not really clear to them: it simply was not known how long one would have to sail west to reach the far east.

Columbus himself had totally inaccurate beliefs about the distance between Europe and Asia – he based his geography on an ancient (and completely inaccurate) account by the Greek philosopher Ptolemy and he thought that Asia was not far west of Europe. Despite being disliked and distrusted by most of the rulers he had approached in the past, Columbus succeeded in winning Isabella over to his vision, and she paid to outfit him with a tiny fleet (she sent him with letters of introduction to the Great Khan, who she presumed still ruled in Asia). Columbus departed in August of 1492 with three small boats – the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria – and 90 men. They arrived in the Bahamas in October.



The four voyages of Columbus between 1492 and 1504. 'Juana' is present-day Cuba, and 'Hispaniola' is present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Columbus ended up spearheading everything the Spanish empire was to represent in the Americas: brutality against the native "Indians," attempts to convert Indians by force, intense greed for precious metals, and the introduction of pathogens against which the native people had no resistance. With Columbus, the traffic in goods and commodities between the two hemispheres began. While Europeans at the time were obsessed with the vast mineral wealth found in the Americas, it is clear in historical hindsight that far more important than precious metals were the living things exchanged between the western and eastern hemispheres of the globe starting in 1492. Historians now refer to that enormous distribution of plant and animal species, as well as bacteria and viruses, as the Columbian Exchange.

From the New World, Europeans brought back corn, potatoes, tobacco, chocolate, and tomatoes, just to name the most important of the crops that soon flourished across Africa and Eurasia. From the Old World, Europeans imported all of the large domesticated animals – horses, cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and sheep – as well as numerous crops like rice, wheat, sugarcane, and coffee. Potatoes alone would go on to reshape the demographics of all of northern Europe and various other regions in the world because they provide a great deal of nutrition and calories and can grow in poor, rocky soils. The poor of many European regions (Ireland, most famously) became largely dependent on potatoes for nourishment by the eighteenth century.

That noted, the single most significant biological entity to be exchanged between the hemispheres was the smallpox virus, which was at the heart of the worst epidemic in world history. Isolated from the western hemisphere for thousands of years, Native Americans had no resistance to Eurasian diseases. Because almost all diseases that affect humans are mutated strains of diseases affecting domestic animals, referred to as zoonotic

diseases, and all of the large animal species that can be domesticated were Eurasian in origin except llamas, Eurasians and Africans had spent thousands of years both suffering from and building up resistance to epidemics while Native Americans had not. Those epidemic pathogens arrived all at once with the European invasion of the New World that began with Columbus.

Historians refer to the demographic catastrophe that accompanied the European encounter with the Americas as the Great Dying. As much as 90% of the native people of the Americas died within a few generations of Columbus's arrival. While the Spanish and Portuguese did win some noteworthy military engagements, due largely to their use of horses, gunpowder, and steel, their true military advantage lay in germ warfare, something they certainly did not anticipate unleashing on their arrival. Spanish explorers in the early sixteenth century encountered whole regions with abundant evidence of sophisticated cultures that were already abandoned, their former inhabitants wiped out by disease. Put simply, the conquest of the Americas by Europeans was shockingly swift not because Europeans were significantly more militarily powerful than were Native Americans, but because most of the latter were already dead thanks to disease.

The Columbian Exchange, and the Great Dying that was part of it, began with Columbus's initial voyage. Almost immediately after Columbus's return to Spain after his expedition, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain grasped the significance of his discovery and actively funded more expeditions and, soon, colonists. The Spanish crown also quickly tried to cement its hold on the New World, petitioning the pope to grant them everything across the Atlantic. After papal intervention and negotiations between the Spanish and Portuguese, the Spanish were to receive everything west of an arbitrary line on the map 1,100 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands, with everything to the east granted to the Portuguese. Practically speaking, this meant that the Portuguese concentrated their colonization efforts on Brazil, Africa, and India, while the Spanish concentrated on the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Needless to say, the other European powers were not about to honor this agreement, called the Treaty of Tordesillas and dating to 1494, but it gave the Spanish and Portuguese a considerable head start.

By the 1520s, Europeans recognized that Columbus had been completely wrong about the New World being part of Asia. The term "America" was invented by another Italian, Amerigo Vespucci, who was another early explorer (he led two expeditions between 1497 and 1503) and was the first to grasp the immensity of the western hemisphere. Vespucci coined the phrase "New World" in the first place, hence "America" rather than "Columbia" – Vespucci's accounts were printed first. He was also a relentless self-promoter, whereas Columbus did not attempt to publicize his discoveries with the same focus.

Even though Europeans quickly realized that the Americas were whole new continents, they persisted in their quest to find a western route to Asia. The Spanish dispatched explorers and sailors who sought Asia by going around the Americas, even as they were also busy conquering the great empires of the Aztecs and Incas. This led to the voyage of Ferdinand Magellan (1480 – 1521), who commanded a small fleet of five ships funded by the Spanish crown and who tried to find a western route to Asia in 1519. He succeeded in rounding South America and crossing the Pacific, but was then killed by natives of the Philippines in 1521. There, his Basque navigator Juan Sebastián Elcano took over and managed to guide one ship all the way back to Spain, arriving

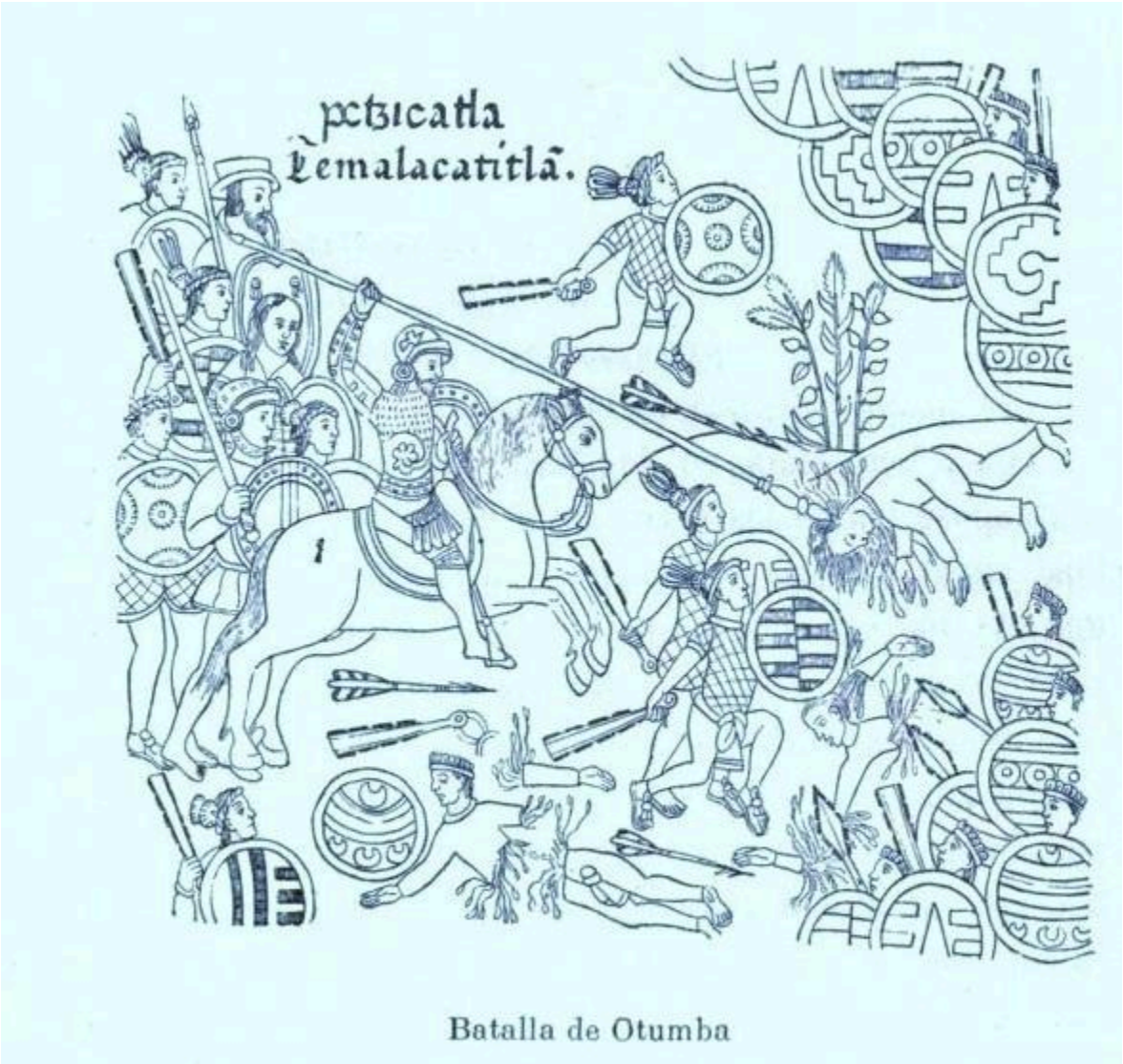
in 1522 (Magellan is much better remembered than Elcano, but it was Elcano who actually made it back). The voyage proved definitively that it was possible to sail around the world. The Spanish would subsequently use the Philippines as the basis of their Pacific trade network, ultimately linking together Europe, the Americas, and Asia and fulfilling the original vision of a western route to Asia that had inspired Columbus's expedition in the first place.

The Conquistadors

The Conquistadors were the military explorers sent by the Spanish crown to the Americas to claim land, convert "heathens," and enrich both themselves and the crown. They were usually poor noblemen with few prospects back in Spain; in the first generation of explorers many were essentially unemployed knights. Some conquistadors simply launched expeditions to the New World without royal authorization, hoping to seize enough plunder to receive retroactive royal approval. Officially, all conquistadors were obliged to turn over the "royal fifth" – 20% of all precious metals discovered or mined – of all loot to the crown.

The most significant conquistador was Hernan Cortes (1485 – 1547). A poor knight who had fought in the aftermath of the Reconquest as a young man, he jumped at the chance to travel to the New World. Cortes proved brilliant at manipulating the native groups he encountered in Mexico, where he arrived in 1519 with 450 Spanish troops and 15 horses. There, a powerful empire under the Aztecs had recently seized control of a large swath of territory. The Aztecs did not directly rule their subjects but instead demanded a constant flow of tribute, including captives who were destined for human sacrifice. Needless to say, the Aztecs were not popular with their subjects.

Working through a native translator, Malinche, who had already learned Spanish, Cortes was able to convince native groups resentful of the Aztecs to fight alongside the Spanish. Practically speaking, this meant that the native groups suffered most of the casualties. He fought his way to the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, where he was initially welcomed by the emperor Montezuma II. Once the Aztecs realized the extent of the rapacious designs of the Spanish they chased them from the city, but then an epidemic of smallpox undermined their ability to fight. Cortes was able to achieve the surrender of the surviving Aztec forces by 1522 and founded the Spanish colony of New Spain in the center of Mexico.



A later Spanish illustration of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire. Note the allied Native Mexican troops both behind and in front of the charging Spanish soldier.

The other noteworthy conquistador of the first generation following Columbus was Francisco Pizarro (1478 – 1541). Inspired by Cortes' success in Mexico, Pizarro set off (with 180 Spanish troops and 30 horses) for an empire the Spanish had learned of in the Andes of western South America in 1531. This was the Incan empire, also a relatively young state that encompassed territory along the Andes through present-day Chile, Ecuador and Peru. Pizarro ambushed the Inca emperor Atahualpa and captured him, demanding a building full of gold for his release. Instead, once the ransom was paid, Pizarro had the emperor killed and then marched on the Inca capital of Cuzco. By 1533, Spanish forces were in control of the empire and began sending enormous quantities of bullion back to Spain.

Thus, less than fifty years after Columbus's initial landing, the two greatest empires of Central and South America had already fallen to the Spanish. By 1600, practically every part of Central and South America was at least nominally under Spanish (or, in the case of Brazil, Portuguese), control. Spain and Portugal would go on to retain their respective American colonies until the early nineteenth century.

New World Wealth

The Spanish discovered huge sources of wealth in South and Central America. The most important source of wealth in all of the Americas for the Spanish crown was discovered in 1545: the mountain of Potosi in present-day Bolivia. Potosi had the most enormous silver deposits in the world at the time, producing thousands of tons of silver for the crown. It also represented a horrific site of slave labor for the native people of the entire extended area. Imposing a system of forced labor known as the *mita*, Spanish officials forced thousands of the native inhabitants of the region to toil in atrocious conditions, often until they died from exhaustion. Whereas the Great Dying might be the most iconic aspect of the Columbian Exchange, Potosi is probably the greatest symbol of the humongous influx of mineral wealth that flooded into Spanish coffers for over a century, as well as the site of the greatest human misery caused by that lust for bullion.

The irony of the wealth generated by American mines is that it undermined the vitality of the Spanish state itself in the long run – Spain did not have to cultivate trade or pursue technological or bureaucratic innovation in the same manner as the rest of the European powers because it had such an enormous surplus of precious metals. Thus, even though Spain was the most powerful state in Europe in the sixteenth century, its longer-term trajectory was one of decline, in large part because of its commercial stagnation. In addition, so much bullion was shipped back to Europe that inflation undermined its value, another factor that weakened Spanish power over time.

Much of the story of Spanish conquest is one of the abuse of the native peoples of the Americas. Part of that abuse grew out of the crusading tradition, but part of it also came out of the discomfort many of the Spanish felt in discovering people who had quite obviously never been in contact with the Christian world. The Bible did not explain their origins, so the Spanish invented various hypotheses: Native Americans were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel described in the Old Testament of the Bible, they were somehow created and ruled by the Devil, they simply were not human beings but strange, human-like animals, and so on. The consensus by the 1530s was that, wherever they were from, Native Americans were blank slates who had to be conquered for their own good. The pope recognized the humanity of the Native Americans in 1537, but the Church continued to support forcible conversion. Native Americans were referred to as the "justly conquered" and either enslaved outright or conscripted as serfs in service to Spanish colonial masters.

Back in Europe, funded by the incredible wealth of the New World, the still recently-united Spain became the greatest European power in the sixteenth century. In the New World, royal authority was enforced by two viceroys, royal officials who ruled over the northern and southern parts of the territory. Under them, rich nobles (often originally successful conquistadors) ran *encomiendas*, feudal estates with the legal right to exploit native labor. Those often evolved into the even larger *haciendas*, the size of whole states back in Europe.

Because the vast majority of Spanish immigrants were men, even a formal ban of marriage between Spanish men and native women did not prevent the growth of a large "mixed" class of *mestizos*, the children of Spanish – American unions who were often recognized as the legitimate children of the former. There was still

a racialized hierarchy in New World society, but more ethnic mixing occurred in Central and South America than in North America.

Conclusion

The Spanish and Portuguese invasions of the Americas were nothing less than a catastrophe for the native peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Whole cultures were obliterated, empires fell, and the survivors found themselves at the mercy of conquerors whose major priorities were the extraction of mineral wealth and the exploitation of labor. To those ends, the native peoples were frequently enslaved outright to work on plantations or mines. The use of slave labor only grew over time, although by the middle of the sixteenth century Europeans were increasingly turning to African slaves, spawning one of the most horrendous injustices in history: the Transatlantic Slave Trade (considered in a following chapter). European states in the Americas were thus built on the backs and with the blood of both the native inhabitants and enslaved Africans.

The impact of the conquests on Europe took longer to become entirely evident, but in the long run the conquest of the Americas sparked the beginning of the process by which Europe became one of the dominant global regions. Europeans now had access to not only enormous quantities of precious metal, but vast new natural resources (from huge stocks of fish to millions of acres of fertile land) that were to bolster European power for centuries to come. It is no coincidence that the year 1492 is often used as the starting point of what historians refer to as the early modern period: when both global hemispheres came into sustained contact for the first time, it was the starting point of massive change for the human species as a whole.

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This chapter has been derived with modifications from Chapter 5: European Exploration and Conquest in *Western Civilization: A Concise History.*

PRIMARY SOURCE: CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, JOURNAL EXCERPTS

This text is available online at the Medieval Sourcebook.

Christopher Columbus: Excerpts from his Journal (1492)

This document is the from the journal of Columbus in his voyage of 1492. The meaning of this voyage is highly contested. On the one hand, it is witness to the tremendous vitality and verve of late medieval and early modern Europe – which was on the verge of acquiring a world hegemony. On the other hand, the direct result of this and later voyages was the virtual extermination, by ill-treatment and disease, of the vast majority of the Native inhabitants, and the enormous growth of the transatlantic slave trade. It might not be fair to lay all the blame at Columbus' feet, but since all sides treat him as a symbol, such questions cannot be avoided.

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Whereas, Most Christian, High, Excellent, and Powerful Princes, King and Queen of Spain and of the Islands of the Sea, our Sovereigns, this present year 1492, after your Highnesses had terminated the war with the Moors reigning in Europe, the same having been brought to an end in the great city of Granada, where on the second day of January, this present year, I saw the royal banners of your Highnesses planted by force of arms upon the towers of the Alhambra, which is the fortress of that city, and saw the Moorish king come out at the gate of the city and kiss the hands of your Highnesses, and of the Prince my Sovereign; and in the present month, in consequence of the information which I had given your Highnesses respecting the countries of India and of a Prince, called Great Can [Khan], which in our language signifies King of Kings, how, at many times he, and his predecessors had sent to Rome soliciting instructors who might teach him our holy faith, and the holy Father had never granted his request, whereby great numbers of people were lost, believing in idolatry and doctrines of perdition. Your Highnesses, as Catholic Christians, and princes who love and promote the holy Christian faith, and are enemies of the doctrine of Mahomet, and of all idolatry and heresy, determined to send me, Christopher Columbus, to the above-mentioned countries of India, to see the said princes, people, and territories, and to learn their disposition and the proper method of converting them to our holy faith; and furthermore directed that I should not proceed by land to the East, as is customary, but by a Westerly route, in which direction we have hitherto no certain evidence that any one has gone. So after having expelled the Jews from your dominions, your Highnesses, in the same month of January, ordered me to proceed with a suf-

ficient armament to the said regions of India, and for that purpose granted me great favors, and ennobled me that thenceforth I might call myself Don, and be High Admiral of the Sea, and perpetual Viceroy and Governor in all the islands and continents which I might discover and acquire, or which may hereafter he discovered and acquired in the ocean; and that this dignity should be inherited by my eldest son, and thus descend from degree to degree forever. Hereupon I left the city of Granada, on Saturday, the twelfth day of May, 1492, and proceeded to Palos, a seaport, where I armed three vessels, very fit for such an enterprise, and having provided myself with abundance of stores and seamen, I set sail from the port, on Friday, the third of August, half an hour before sunrise, and steered for the Canary Islands of your Highnesses which are in the said ocean, thence to take my departure and proceed till I arrived at the Indies, and perform the embassy of your Highnesses to the Princes there, and discharge the orders given me. For this purpose I determined to keep an account of the voyage, and to write down punctually every thing we performed or saw from day to day, as will hereafter appear. Moreover, Sovereign Princes, besides describing every night the occurrences of the day, and every day those of the preceding night, I intend to draw up a nautical chart, which shall contain the several parts of the ocean and land in their proper situations; and also to compose a book to represent the whole by picture with latitudes and longitudes, on all which accounts it behooves me to abstain from my sleep, and make many trials in navigation, which things will demand much labor. . . .

Wednesday, 10 October. Steered west-southwest and sailed at times ten miles an hour, at others twelve, and at others, seven; day and night made fifty-nine leagues' progress; reckoned to the crew but forty-four. Here the men lost all patience, and complained of the length of the voyage, but the Admiral encouraged them in the best manner he could, representing the profits they were about to acquire, and adding that it was to no purpose to complain, having come so far, they had nothing to do but continue on to the Indies, till with the help of our Lord, they should arrive there.

Thursday, 11 October . . . . At two o'clock in the morning the land was discovered, at two leagues' distance; they took in sail and remained under the square-sail lying to till day, which was Friday, when they found themselves near a small island, one of the Lucayos, called in the Indian language Guanahani. Presently they descried people, naked, and the Admiral landed in the boat, which was armed, along with Martin Alonzo Pinzon, and Vincent Yanez his brother, captain of the Nina. The Admiral bore the royal standard, and the two captains each a banner of the Green Cross, which all the ships had carried; this contained the initials of the names of the King and Queen each side of the cross, and a crown over each letter Arrived on shore, they saw trees very green many streams of water, and diverse sorts of fruits. The Admiral called upon the two Captains, and the rest of the crew who landed, as also to Rodrigo de Escovedo notary of the fleet, and Rodrigo Sanchez, of Segovia, to bear witness that he before all others took possession (as in fact he did) of that island for the King and Queen his sovereigns, making the requisite declarations, which are more at large set down here in writing. Numbers of the people of the island straightway collected together. Here follow the precise words of the Admiral: "As I saw that they were very friendly to us, and perceived that they could be much more easily converted to our holy faith by gentle means than by force, I presented them with some red caps, and strings of beads to wear upon the neck, and many other trifles of small value, wherewith they were much delighted, and became won-

derfully attached to us. Afterwards they came swimming to the boats, bringing parrots, balls of cotton thread, javelins, and many other things which they exchanged for articles we gave them, such as glass beads, and hawk's bells; which trade was carried on with the utmost good will. But they seemed on the whole to me, to be a very poor people. They all go completely naked, even the women, though I saw but one girl. All whom I saw were young, not above thirty years of age, well made, with fine shapes and faces. . . . Weapons they have none, nor are acquainted with them, for I showed them swords which they grasped by the blades, and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron, their javelins being without it, and nothing more than sticks, though some have fish-bones or other things at the ends. They are all of a good size and stature, and handsomely formed. I saw some with scars of wounds upon their bodies, and demanded by signs the of them; they answered me in the same way, that there came people from the other islands in the neighborhood who endeavored to make prisoners of them, and they defended themselves. I thought then, and still believe, that these were from the continent. It appears to me, that the people are ingenious, and would be good servants and I am of opinion that they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion. They very quickly learn such words as are spoken to them. If it please our Lord, I intend at my return to carry home six of them to your Highnesses, that they may learn our language. I saw no beasts in the island, nor any sort of animals except parrots." These are the words of the Admiral.

Saturday, 13 October. "At daybreak great multitudes of men came to the shore, all young and of fine shapes, very handsome. . . . They came loaded with balls of cotton, parrots, javelins, and other things too numerous to mention; these they exchanged for whatever we chose to give them. I was very attentive to them, and strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of this metal hanging at their noses, I gathered from them by signs that by going southward or steering round the island in that direction, there would be found a king who possessed large vessels of gold, and in great quantities. I endeavored to procure them to lead the way thither, but found they were unacquainted with the route. I determined to stay here till the evening of the next day, and then sail for the southwest; for according to what I could learn from them, there was land at the south as well as at the southwest and northwest and those from the northwest came many times and fought with them and proceeded on to the southwest in search of gold and precious stones. . . .

Sunday, 14 October. . . . I do not, however, see the necessity of fortifying the place, as the people here are simple in war-like matters, as your Highnesses will see by those seven which I have ordered to be taken and carried to Spain in order to learn our language and return, unless your Highnesses should choose to have them all transported to Castile, or held captive in the island. I could conquer the whole of them with fifty men, and govern them as I pleased. . . .

Tuesday, 16 October. . . . I saw many trees, very dissimilar to those of our country, and many of them had branches of different sorts upon the same trunk; and such a diversity was among them that it was the greatest wonder in the world to behold. Thus, for instance, one branch of a tree bore leaves like those of a cane, another branch of the same tree, leaves similar to those of the lentisk. In this manner a single tree bears five or six different kinds. Nor is this done by grafting, for that is a work of art, whereas these trees grow wild, and the natives

take no care about them. They have no religion, and I believe that they would very readily become Christians, as they have a good understanding.

Friday, 19 October. . . . I am not solicitous to examine particularly everything here, which indeed could not be done in fifty years, because my desire is to make all possible discoveries, and return to your Highnesses, if it please our Lord, in April. But in truth, should I meet with gold or spices in great quantity, I shall remain till I collect as much as possible, and for this purpose I am proceeding solely in quest of them.

Source

This text was floating around the internet in 1996. It is slightly adapted from Julius E, Olson and Edward Gaylord Bourne, *The Northmen, Columbus, and Cabot, 985-1503,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE VOYAGES OF COLUMBUS, edited by Professor Edward G. Bourne, pp. 77 ff

MODULE ASSIGNMENTS

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Reading Annotations

Leave at least TWO substantial comments on *Christopher Columbus, Journal Excerpts*.

Reading Journal

How did Christopher Columbus view the places and people he encountered on his first voyage in relation to Europeans? Does this reflect the general European view of the Americas and/or other non-European places and people? Use specific examples (quotes) from the text selections to support your analysis.

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Access your group folder on Blackboard to view your group's responsibility for this module. This is the final module and so the study guide you have all contributed to will be complete! You can use the finished product to prepare for the final exam.

This is where you can add appendices or other back matter.