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THE WORLD OF ISLAM

THE RISE OF A NEW CIVILIZATION

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The Arabian peninsula is one of the harshest environments in the world. Yet states have existed in the relatively temperate southeast corner since the kingdom of Saba was formed around 600 BCE. These early kingdoms relied on seaborne trade with peoples of the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, and even India. Camels—the “ships of the desert”—helped establish land caravans across the peninsula in the early centuries of the first millennium CE. They also made the nomadic herders of the region, a Semitic people called Arabs, far more mobile and militarily fearsome. Some Arab nomads, called Bedouins, made a living by herding, trading, and plundering caravans. Others settled down in the Arab cities that began to grow up in the mountainous corridor along the Red Sea coast. One of the most prominent of these towns was Mecca, an oasis with an excellent well, at a crossroads of two caravan routes. Near Mecca’s well was a square building called the Ka’ba, or “cube”, which contained an unusual black stone, probably a meteorite that had landed in the desert, which the Arabs considered sacred. They were polytheistic animists, and for centuries they had been making pilgrimages to the Ka’ba, where they would touch the sacred stone, make sacrifices, and set up shrines to their many gods. Mecca, then, was a religious center which was well-connected by caravan with the Byzantine and Sassanian empires, making it a wealthy, rather cosmopolitan city.

The Arabs, even the urban ones, grouped themselves into tribes based on kinship. One of these tribes, the *Quraysh*, had come to dominate Mecca by 600 CE. The prophet Muhammad was a member of the Quraysh tribe, but was orphaned at an early age. Muhammed worked in the caravan trade, and became a prominent man after marrying a wealthy widow named Kalija, whose caravans he often accompanied to Syria. Muhammad was a deeply spiritual man with a reputation for honesty and wisdom. He would often retreat into the desert for contemplation. On one such trip, Muhammad heard a voice, which commanded him to: “Recite, in the name of your Lord who created all things”. Terrified at first, Muhammad came to believe that he was receiving revelations from *Allah*, (the God), the single, universal God worshiped by Jews and

Christians. So Muhammad recited his revelations, which he continued to receive for many years. These are collected in the *Qur'an*, (*recitation* in Arabic), which is the most sacred book among Muslims.

Muhammad related his revelations to the people of Mecca, urging them to reject their many false gods and turn to Allah, the only true god; who demands righteous behavior, undivided faith, and submission to his will (*Islam*, in fact, means “submission”, and *Muslim* means “submitter”). Muhammad converted his wife and uncle, and a few other Meccans, early on, but his message was strongly opposed by the leaders of the Quraysh tribe, who persecuted Muhammad and his followers. Seeing that his life was in danger, Muhammad fled to the city of Yathrib, now called Medina, in 622. This flight from Mecca is known as the *Hijra*, and its date marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. Muhammad’s message was well-accepted in Medina, and his followers grew more numerous. They set out to convert as many people as they could to Islam, and in 624 they began military operations to do so. They won a decisive battle against a larger Meccan force, an event they regarded as a miracle—confirming that Allah was with them. Muhammad’s forces went on to take control of most of Arabia, converting the people they conquered to the new faith. In 630 Muhammad returned to Mecca, stripped the earlier icons from the Ka’ba, and rededicated it and the sacred stone to Allah. Upon his death in 632, most of Arabia had been converted to Islam and consolidated into an Islamic state.

THE ISLAMIC WAY OF LIFE

Muslims consider Muhammad to have been the last of many prophets sent by Allah to instruct humankind (others include Judeo-Christian figures like Abraham and Jesus). Muhammad’s message, however, is considered definitive. Muslims believe it provides a perfect model for life in all spheres; from the individual, to the family, to the state. This is an important feature of Islam—for many Muslims, to separate Islam from government is to deny the very nature of Islam, which is meant to be a comprehensive way of life. This is why a western-style separation of church and state (however imperfectly achieved in the west) is almost inconceivable to many Muslims, and why attempts to build secular states in predominantly Muslim countries have met with major opposition.

The community of Muslims, called the *Umma*, is united by one fundamental belief—that Allah is the one and only God. The declaration of this belief is called *Shahada*, or “bearing witness”, an act which is made up of two statements: “I bear witness that there is no God but Allah”, and “I bear witness that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah”. *Shahada* is the first of the *Five Pillars of Islam*, the five core duties of every Muslim. The others are: **Prayer:** All Muslims must pray five times a day. Five times a day, millions of Muslims stop what they are doing, turn in the direction of Mecca, and bow and fall on their knees praising Allah. The psychological unity this bestows on the Muslim community is, of course, enormous.

Almsgiving: Muslims are required to give a percentage of their wealth, usually 2.5 percent, to the poor. **Fasting:** All Muslims must fast during daylight hours in the month of *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. **Pilgrimage:** Muslims are expected to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at some time in their life, if they are physically and financially able to do so.

The Five Pillars are the core of the Islamic way of life. Of course, more complex prescriptions are needed to deal with life in all its complexity, and Islam provides these as well. Islamic law, called the *Shari'a*, is based on four sources, in order of decreasing authority. First is the Qur'an, the word of Allah as revealed to Muhammad. Second is the *Sunna*, the example of Muhammad's words and deeds, recorded in a text called the *Hadith*. Third is the extension of precedents from the Qur'an to new situations. Fourth are the views of the community of Muslim scholars, called the *Ulama*. *Shari'a* law assigns actions into five categories: *required* (as are the Five Pillars), *recommended*, *neutral*, *disapproved*, and *forbidden* (as are gambling, usury, and the consumption of pork or alcohol).

The prescriptions of Islam are obviously quite straightforward and systematic. Whether one believes that Muhammad's message was divinely inspired or not, what is undeniable is that it was extremely well thought out. With its clear ethical prescriptions, enormous spiritual power, and its drive to convert all peoples to its tenets, it is no wonder that Islam has been so successful. Today, there are over 1.1 billion Muslims, living in every country in the world.

THE GROWTH OF AN ISLAMIC EMPIRE

Muhammad had no sons that lived to adulthood, and he did not name a successor. After he died, his inner circle of followers chose Abu Bakr, one of his earliest and most trustworthy

converts, as Muhammad's **caliph**, or successor. Many of the Arabian tribes had been converted to Islam in name only, and after Muhammad's death they began to withdraw from the Islamic community. Abu Bakr re-conquered these tribes, and united Arabia once again before his death in 634, only two years after Muhammad's. The next two caliphs, Umar and Uthman, set about extending the domain of Islam outside of Arabia. They attacked the Byzantine and Sassanian empires, which had fought each other to near exhaustion. The Byzantine Empire lost Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean to the Muslims, while the Sassanian Empire collapsed entirely. At Uthman's death in 656, the Muslim empire stretched from Tripoli almost to the Indus River.

When Uthman died, however, a civil war broke out over who would be the next caliph. Some supported Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son in law. Others supported Muawiya, a member of Uthman's Umayyad family. Ali was murdered, and his son Husayn was defeated, thus allowing the Umayyads to establish a dynasty—the Umayyad Caliphate. But the unity of Islam was forever destroyed. Some Muslims never accepted the Umayyad caliphs, claiming that only descendants of Muhammad could be his true successors. This group came to be called **Shi'ites**. The majority of Muslims accepted the Umayyad caliphs. These came to be called **Sunnites**, or **Sunnis**. These remain the two major divisions in Islam to this day.

Unified or not, the realm of Islam continued to expand under the Umayyad Caliphate. North Africa was conquered by 702, and Visigothic Spain by 718. In the east, the empire was extended as far as the Indus River and the Caucasus mountains. By this time, though, the Muslims were reaching barriers they could not cross (not yet). They besieged Constantinople twice, but they were not able to take it, or Anatolia. In the west, they were turned back by the Franks in what is now France. Muslims were never able to extend their territory past the Pyrenees, though it must be said that they never tried to very hard.

Along with these first defeats, the Muslim world was also grappling with continued internal disunity. Non-Arab Muslims had begun to resent the Arabs, who treated them as second class citizens even though they were often more educated. In addition, the Shi'ites had never accepted Umayyad rule. In 750, the Abbasid family, who claimed descent from Muhammad's uncle, and were thus supported by the Shi'ites, rebelled against the Umayyads, using mostly Persian troops. They defeated the Umayyads and established the Abbasid Caliphate. Some of the Umayyads fled to Spain, and maintained power there.

Under the Abbasid Caliphate, non-Arab Muslims gained status relative to Arabs, and the empire grew much more cosmopolitan. The Abbasid caliphs ruled in the grand style of Persian emperors, with enormous palaces, elaborate court rituals, and harems. A new capital was founded at Baghdad, which soon became one of the world's great cities. Islamic merchants moved freely through the huge empire, and traded as far away as northern Europe, China, Southeast Asia, and the fringes of sub-Saharan Africa. As time went on, however, the original Abbasid realm became fragmented, and the Abbasid dynasty grew weak. North Africa was completely lost to other dynasties by 973, when the Fatimid dynasty founded Cairo. In the meantime, Turkish peoples had been migrating into Abbasid lands from the central Asian steppes, and gradually began to convert to Islam. Since the mid-800's, Abbasid caliphs had used the formidable Turks as soldiers, but the Turks eventually came to be the real power behind the throne. Between the mid-1000's and the mid-1200's, most of the Middle East was actually ruled by the Seljuk Turks, although they maintained the Abbasids as figureheads. The Abbasid line finally ended when the last Abbasid Caliph was killed by new and devastating invaders from the steppes—the Mongols.

MUSLIM CULTURE

Muslim arts and learning blossomed under the Abbasid caliphs, often by combining and elaborating on the ancient traditions of the lands now encompassed by Islam. The Qur'an was the basis of Islamic scholarship, but classical writings were also translated into Arabic. Muslim mathematicians combined the geometry of Euclid with algebra, and imported "Arabic" numerals and the concept of zero from the Hindus, to make great advances in mathematics (the words algebra and algorithm, for example, are derived from Arabic). Islamic astronomers improved on the astronomy of Ptolemy, and gave many of the stars, such as Betelgeuse and Aldebaran, the names by which they are still known. Alchemy (another Arabic word) was based on Aristotle's flawed theories of matter, but its practitioners helped develop techniques vital to the true science of chemistry. Muslim physicians were the greatest of their day, and their writings were standard textbooks for medical students in Europe for hundreds of years. The great scholar Avicenna, who wrote one of these medical texts, also tried to synthesize the philosophy of Plato and

Aristotle with Islam. His work would greatly influence Thomas Aquinas, who would try to reconcile Greek philosophy with Christianity.

Another great Muslim genius was Omar Khayyám who, in addition to making advances in algebra, wrote the famous poem *Rubáiyát*. Like the equally-famous *Arabian Nights*, the *Rubáiyát* exemplifies the richness and sensuality of Islamic literature. Islamic visual arts were strongly constrained by Muhammad's prohibition of idol worship, which was at first interpreted as forbidding representation of human or animal figures. Thus constrained, Muslim artists developed in other directions, creating gorgeous geometrical designs. Later artists abandoned the prohibition against representation, and developing beautiful styles such as the bright and exquisite Persian miniature paintings. Islamic architecture is among of the world's most distinctive, with its domes and arched entryways, stunning geometrical decorations, and slender minarets, from which the faithful are called to pray.

ISLAM IN INDIA

In 712, less than 100 years after the death of Muhammad, Muslim armies captured Sind, in northwestern India. For the next few hundred years, India would encounter Muslims; not just as a new wave of northern invaders, but also as traders, often arriving with the monsoon winds at Indian ports. In 999, the Turkish Muslim Mahmud of Ghazni established the Ghaznavid Emirate in what is now Afghanistan. Mahmud set up a great center of Muslim learning at his capital, but he also launched a series of devastating attacks on northern India. Mahmud was more interested in plunder than in conquest, however. The first Muslim to rule a large part of India was Qutb ud-Din Aibak, who captured Delhi in 1206 and established the Delhi Sultanate, which covered most of northern India. Islam got its first real foothold in India under the Delhi Sultans. It was especially successful among the lower-caste Indians, who were understandably attracted to Islam's relative egalitarianism. Still, the majority of Indians remained Hindu. The two religions differed sharply over things like polytheism and image worship, and tensions between Hindus and Muslims have periodically flared into violence ever since (Buddhism vanished from the land of its birth just as Islam was on the rise). The Delhi Sultanate was strikingly successful in one respect—it was able to hold off the Mongols at a time when they were conquering almost everybody else. In 1398, however, Delhi was viciously sacked by the armies of the Turko-

Mongol Tamerlane, and the Delhi Sultanate began to fall apart. Islam, however, had come to India to stay.

AFRICA: RISING STATES, ISLAMIC AND OTHERWISE

WEST AFRICA

For hundreds of years before the time of Christ, traders had crossed the western Sahara Desert, linking the Mediterranean with sub-Saharan West Africa. The natural southern destination for these traders (mostly nomadic Berbers) was along the Niger River, where it extends an elbow northward into the dry savanna at the edge of the desert. Here, the Berbers would trade goods from the Mediterranean and the Sahara (mainly salt, a vital nutrient which was scarce in the south) to black Africans from the south. In return, they received slaves, kola nuts, and most important, gold. To the salt-starved Africans, gold was worth its weight in salt.

After the camel revolutionized the trans-Saharan trade in the first century C.E, powerful trading kingdoms began to arise along the Niger River. The earliest of these was Ghana, which arose in the 300's among an African people called the Soninke. By 800, the rulers of Ghana were powerful enough to extract tribute from smaller states nearby. By this time, many of the Berber traders had converted to Islam, so Ghana became linked with the Muslim world. Literate Muslims were vital in the Ghanan government, but the Ghanan rulers did not convert until the 1100's. Ghana was an impressive, powerful kingdom, with an army of over 200,000 men, and two cities with more than 15,000 people. In 1076, however, Ghana was briefly conquered by Berbers called Almoravids. This weakened the kingdom greatly, and in the early 1200's Ghana fell in an uprising of the Sosso people.

In 1235, the Sosso fell to the Malinke, led by a man named Sundiata, who established the large empire of Mali. When Europe began to switch from silver to gold coins, Mali prospered. Though many of the common people kept their tribal religions, the rulers were Muslim. Sundiata's nephew, Mansa Musa, even made a pilgrimage to Mecca. On his way through Egypt, he spent enough gold to flood the Egyptian markets for a generation. He returned with Islamic architects and scholars, who built mosques and set up a great center of learning at Timbuktu.

Mansa Musa's successors were less effective rulers, and Mali grew weaker in the face of attacks by desert nomads and uprisings by vassal states. The outlying regions of the empire started falling away, and by 1500 Mali was swiftly being overrun by one of its former vassal states; called Songhai. Songhai became the largest of the West African trading kingdoms under the powerful kings Sunni Ali and Askia Muhammed. The empire lasted until 1591, when it fell to a ragtag army from Morocco. The armies of Songhai were large and well trained, but they were armed with spears and bows. The Moroccans had guns.

Ghana, Mali, and Songhai were the largest of the West African states, but others existed as well. To the east was the kingdom of Kanem-Bornu, which traded ivory and slaves to the Mediterranean coasts. One of the things Kanem-Bornu received in return was horses for its cavalry-based armies, which they used to extract tribute from other peoples. Kanem-Bornu was one of the longest lived states in history; ruled by a single family from the 800's to the 1800's. Between Kanem-Bornu and the larger western states were the Hausa city states, which emerged among cattle herding peoples. In all these trading states at the southern border of the Sahara, the ruling classes were Muslim. This was not true in the tropical forests to the south, where states such as Benin, Ife, and Oyo emerged. Cattle could not live in this tsetse fly ridden region, so people lived by clearing forests and growing yams and cassava, and by fishing. These societies were the chief sources of ivory and kola nuts for the large states to the north. They developed unique art forms, and today their gorgeous cast-bronze figures are considered some of the finest African artworks.

EAST AFRICA

Since classical times, Bantu peoples along the East African coasts had participated in the monsoon-based trade that linked them with the Red Sea, Arabia, and India. After about 1000 CE, Muslims from the Middle East began to settle along the East African coasts and intermarry with the native Bantu, as the entire Indian Ocean trading sphere was integrated by Islam. Trade based city-states, such as Kilwa, Mombasa, Sofala, and Mogadishu, began to spring up along the East African coasts. Their leaders were Bantu Muslims who spoke Swahili, a Bantu language which incorporated many Arabic, and even Indian, words. The Swahili city-states traded ivory, gold, iron, and slaves for goods from the Middle East, India, and even China. Expertly crafted

walls, often made of coral blocks, surrounded many of the city-states. The trading elite lived inside, served by slaves who came into the city every day. As in West Africa, not all complex societies were Islamic. Many inland Bantu societies, who lived by farming and herding cattle, grew more complex after about 1000 CE, in part through trade with the Swahili city states. The elite accumulated large herds of cattle, took control of trade, and erected large walled enclosures and ceremonial centers. The walls of Great Zimbabwe, the most powerful of these societies, are still standing today—20 feet high and 12 feet thick.

THE EMERGENCE OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE

WESTERN EUROPE

THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Of the Germanic kingdoms that arose after the fall of Rome, the most important and enduring would be that of the Franks, who had settled in Gaul (what is now France). The Franks had two things going for them. Their leader, Clovis, who united the Franks and founded the Merovingian line of rulers, had converted, along with his armies, to the Christianity of Rome. The other Germanic peoples had mostly converted to Arianism, a form of Christianity considered heretical by church leaders. This gave the Franks a close relationship with the church, the most powerful entity remaining in Europe. The second advantage was that the Frankish kingdoms were nestled deep in Europe, where they were relatively safe from outside invaders. The Visigoths of Spain were not so lucky. Their kingdom fell to the Muslims in the early 700's.

Muslims never campaigned very hard north of the Pyrenees, though a raiding party was defeated by the Frankish leader Charles Martel (Charles the Hammer) in 732. Charles was not king, however. He was a Mayor of the Palace, a position which had gained power at the expense of the Merovingian kings. Martel's son, Pepin the Short, deposed the last Merovingian, and established the Carolingian dynasty. In return for the pope's blessing, Pepin's armies took northern Italian lands from the Lombards, and gave them to the pope, establishing the so-called Papal States.

Pepin's son Charles came to be called Charles the Great, or Charlemagne. Charlemagne established a firm border with Muslim Spain, and extended his kingdom to the east and into Italy, conquering the Lombards once and for all. On Christmas day in the year 800, Charlemagne was crowned "Emperor of the Romans" by the pope. He seems to have thought he was truly restoring the Roman Empire. He wasn't, but he did build a unified Frankish empire, and law and scholarship revived briefly under his rule. The Carolingian empire broke up when Charlemagne's kingdom was divided between his three grandsons. The eastern province included much of what is now France, while the western province included most of what is now Germany. The middle province soon fell apart, and would be a zone of contention for centuries.

As the Carolingian empire was falling apart, Europe came under attack from new waves of invaders. A nomadic people called Magyars appeared from the east, and the Scandinavian Vikings began to raid along the coasts and far up the larger rivers. The Vikings devastated the Celtic Christian monasteries of Ireland, and generally terrorized any part of Europe that their boats could reach. They were not just plunderers, however. They were also settlers and traders. One group, the Rus, settled along the Dnieper river and established the core of what would later become the Slavic state of Russia. Others, the Normans, or "Northmen" settled Normandy, where they were soon incorporated into the emerging French culture. Other Vikings settled in Greenland, and even ventured as far as Newfoundland and Labrador, making them the first Europeans to encounter the New World. Meanwhile, the Muslims had gained control of the Mediterranean, and were raiding southern Europe.

In the face of these invasions, what Europeans needed above all was security; but states were not strong enough to provide it. This was the stimulus for the development of **feudalism**. The feudal system was a great hierarchy of noble warriors, or knights. Less powerful knights, or **vassals**, pledged their loyalty and military to a more powerful knight, their **lord**. In return, the lord would provide protection and government, as well as a piece of land, called a **fief**. At the top of the hierarchy was the king, and at the bottom were knights with a fief large enough to support them and to outfit them with the armor, lance, and horse needed to go to battle. In the middle, many knights were simultaneously vassals to higher lords, and lords to lower vassals. The economic system that paralleled feudalism was called **manorialism**. In this system the countryside was divided into agricultural plots called *manors*, which were ruled by a lord. The land was worked by **serfs**, who were bound to a plot of land for life, and sometimes **freemen**,

who were free to move. In return for their labor, the serfs were promised security and good governance from the lord.

Needless to say, neither manorialism nor feudalism always worked the way they were supposed to work. Many serfs led miserable lives toiling under cruel lords. Knights were an unruly lot who quite often refused to support their lords. In many areas, especially France, kings ruled in name only, while real power was distributed among many of the great lords. England was an exception, having united under Alfred of Wessex against Danish invaders (who were soon assimilated into Anglo-Saxon culture). A powerful kingdom emerged for a while in Germany under Otto I of Saxony. Otto defeated the nomadic Magyars, who then converted to Christianity and settled in Hungary. Otto maintained a close relationship with the church by granting land and appointing bishops. When the pope was threatened by rebellions, Otto invaded Italy and proclaimed himself king (leaving the Papal States to the pope.) In return, the pope crowned Otto emperor in 962, in yet another attempt to restore Roman-style unity. Otto's realm, which came to be called the Holy Roman Empire, lasted in name until 1806. The region itself would long be the center of gravity in Europe, but its emperors usually fared badly in conflicts with rebellious nobles and increasingly powerful, and independent, popes.

THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES

The feudal order did succeed in its basic purpose, which was to provide security from outside invaders. Between about 1000 and 1300, a time known as the High Middle Ages, medieval society achieved its fullest expression. The knights had stabilized many areas, and trade began to revive, towns grew, and prosperity generally increased. The greatest source of stability was the church, which achieved its greatest influence during this time. In the early middle ages, the church had usually been under the control of kings and nobles, who had the power to appoint many church officials--a practice called **lay investiture**. A reform movement denouncing lay investiture beginning began to sweep Europe in the 1000's. In 1075, Pope Gregory VII prohibited the practice, thus enraging the secular rulers of Europe. In a conflict between Gregory and Emperor Henry IV, Henry was excommunicated and had to publicly beg for the pope's forgiveness. Thereafter, the Holy Roman Emperor lost control to nobles and

popes for many years. This would keep lands from Germany through Italy disunited for centuries.

With the threat from Vikings and other invaders mostly over, Europe's knightly nobility had nobody to fight but each other. In the east, the Byzantine Empire was besieged by the Seljuk Turks, who, unlike the Abbasids before them, were preventing pilgrimages to the Christian Holy Land around Jerusalem. When the Byzantine emperor asked Pope Urban II for help, Urban saw an opportunity to unite the unruly knights of Europe in a common cause. In 1095, he called for a crusade to help the Byzantines and to retake Jerusalem from the Muslims. The result was the first of eight major crusades over the next two hundred years. The first crusade was by far the most successful. The crusaders took Jerusalem and set up small crusader states along the eastern Mediterranean. Jerusalem was finally retaken by the forces of the great Muslim leader Saladin in 1187, and the crusader states began to dwindle away. It was downhill from there. In the fourth Crusade, western armies under the influence of Venetian merchants turned on Constantinople, conquering the Byzantine Empire. Their rule lasted from 1204 to 1261, when the Byzantines took Constantinople back. In the Children's Crusade of 1212, thousands of children marched south to the Mediterranean, expecting God to part the waters and guide them to Jerusalem as conquerors. The waters did not part, and many died on the way home, while others were sold into slavery.

Crusades were not just declared against Muslims. They were also proclaimed periodically against Christian heretics, pagan Slavs, European Jews, and anyone else not in line with official Church doctrine. Significant gains were made against the Slavs during these crusades, and Spain was mostly wrested from the control of Muslims by the early 1200's. Muslims were allowed to remain in Spain... at least for a while. The crusades were mostly a failure from a military (not to mention a spiritual) perspective. But they did have some benefits, at least for the European side. Renewed contact with the more sophisticated culture of the Muslims, who had preserved and elaborated on classical learning, was a great stimulus to European knowledge, while contact with the east helped renew trade.

The papacy was steadily gaining power, but so were the kings of England and France, whose rival nations were beginning a long struggle. In 1066, William, Duke of Normandy, claimed the English throne. His claim was fairly dubious, but he backed it by invading and conquering England, establishing tight control over his realms on both sides of the English Channel. The French kings, meanwhile, had only been nominal rulers over powerful dukes such

as William. At the beginning of the High Middle Ages they truly ruled only in the area around Paris. But they had become much more powerful by the time Louis VII married the remarkable Eleanor, of the province of Aquitaine, in 1137. This added Aquitaine to the king's domains, but only until the marriage broke up in 1152. Eleanor then married Henry II of England, the grandson of William the Conqueror. Henry thus obtained a wide strip of France running from Normandy to the western Pyrenees.

Henry was a powerful king, whose reign saw the beginnings of the English system of precedent-based common law (which would one day spread far beyond the bounds of England). Henry's sons, Richard the Lionhearted and John, were not nearly as effective. Richard was an adventurer who stayed away on crusades through most of his reign. He was succeeded by John, a vicious but weak ruler. John lost many of his French possessions to Phillip II of France (this greatly boosted the authority of the French monarchy). John also lost major battles with history's most powerful pope, Innocent III, and with the English nobility, who forced him to sign the Magna Carta, a groundbreaking document committing the king to obey English law. Both England and France would grow more unified in later years, and add more territory to their realms. However, the later years of the High Middle Ages also saw the rise of popular assemblies—the Estates-General in France and Parliament in England—that would one day challenge the monarchies and establish far reaching precedents in representative government.

A major factor in the movement toward unified monarchies was the upsurge of towns and trade in the High Middle Ages. Muslim control of the Mediterranean had been broken in the 1000's, and the Crusades had reopened trade with the east. Soon silk, spices, and other exotic goods were arriving in flourishing Italian ports like Venice and Genoa. These goods were traded for wool, honey, and timber from the north. Towns began to grow with the trade, and European life slowly moved away from its rural, feudal character. Many serfs escaped the manors for towns, thus gaining freedom, if not prosperity. The rising class of townspeople, called **burghers**, was a natural ally with the monarchs against the nobility, because they wanted uniform taxation and law enforcement, as well as independence from the rule of feudal lords. Since many townspeople were growing richer than the landed nobility, the monarchs found them powerful allies indeed.

Learning and culture progressed during the High Middle Ages, though it was tightly constrained within the context of Christianity as seen by the church. The rediscovery of classical

writers, whose work had been preserved by the Muslims and Byzantines, prompted a new interest in their ideas. While early Christianity had been influenced by Plato, now scholars became enamored with the newly-discovered writings of Aristotle. In the church schools, and at the newly emerging universities in places like Paris, Oxford, and Bologna, scholars tried to reconcile medieval Christianity with ancient philosophy. This tradition, called **Scholasticism**, relied on a logical, deductive approach, based on the assumption that all that really needed to be known could be found in the Bible or in ancient texts.

This attempt culminated with the work of Thomas Aquinas, who produced an authoritative synthesis of church doctrine and ancient philosophy. Aquinas concluded that, while reason was important, faith was the final arbiter in the search for truth. Observation and induction were not considered necessary, and this prevented medieval thought from going beyond the level of Aquinas. In literature, writers such as Dante and Chaucer began to write in the vernacular language of their region instead of Latin, thus bringing literature to a much wider audience just as more Europeans were learning to read. Medieval architecture reached its greatest expression when the dimly lit Romanesque cathedrals gave way to soaring Gothic cathedrals. With their stained glass windows, the cathedral interiors were glorious places, glowing with the light of the sun (filtered, like most things in the High Middle Ages, through the tinted glass of medieval Christianity).

THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

Medieval society began to unravel in the 1300's. Church dominance began to falter, as monarchs became more powerful than popes. The first sign of change came in 1294, when Phillip IV of France demanded taxes from the clergy. When the pope opposed him, Phillip simply had the pope kidnaped. In 1309, Phillip helped get a French pope elected, who then moved the papacy from Rome to Avignon, in France. For almost 70 years, the popes in Avignon were puppets of French kings. Beginning in 1378, competing popes ruled in Avignon and Rome, until the papacy finally returned to Rome. During all this time, the church became more concerned with collecting money and maintaining the splendor of the papacy. Such worldliness, combined with the decline of papal power and the scandal of competing popes, greatly weakened the church. Demands for reform grew louder and louder. Many reformers were declared

heretics, and large numbers were burned or tortured. But the heresies continued, and the church would not be able to suppress them forever.

Other cataclysms also rocked Europe in the 1300's. A period of cold weather called the Little Ice Age began early in the century, and would last until the late 1800's. This led to crop failures and terrible famines that killed a great many people. In 1348, the bubonic plague spread from Asia to Europe. Known as the Black Death, this outbreak killed a third of the European population. War also claimed many lives. Since the Norman invasion and the marriage of Henry II to Eleanor of Aquitaine, English kings had controlled large tracts of the French countryside. These lands became a source of conflict between the increasingly powerful kings of the two countries.

In 1337, Edward III of England tried to claim the French throne, resulting in the outbreak of the Hundred Years War (which actually lasted over 100 years, until 1453). Newly invented cannons and longbows helped the English win most battles during the first decades, but the tide began to turn in 1429, when the 17 year old Joan of Arc convinced the French king that God had chosen her to lead his armies. Lead them she did, and the French began to defeat the English. Joan was captured and burned by the English in 1431, but she had helped unite the French people, and they continued to drive the English away. The Hundred Years War further increased the power of kings, because it inspired the people of France and England to transfer their loyalty from local regions to entire kingdoms. The nobility, which had been depopulated by the war, were becoming less effective in battle. Mounted knights were vulnerable to longbows, and later, guns, while castle walls could be knocked down by royal cannonballs. The feudal order was fading, as popes, nobles, and whole nations fell under the control of increasingly powerful kings.

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

Western Europe in the middle ages seems important now, because the culture that was incubating there went on to dominate much of the world in the modern era. At the time, though, it was a disorganized, illiterate, and rural backwater compared to most of the rest of the world. The Byzantine Empire—the eastern Roman empire as transformed by Heraclius—was much more sophisticated. Constantinople was far larger and more cosmopolitan than any western city for many centuries. The Byzantine heritage is not as pervasive as the western European one today,

mostly because the Byzantines were far more exposed to outside invasions. The empire was under siege for most of its long history. Heraclius, for example, had to fight off Avars, Bulgars, Slavs, and Sassanian Persians in order to restore stability to his empire. Then he had to face an even more formidable enemy—the Muslims, who took North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean between 636 and 640. They besieged Constantinople twice in the late 600's and early 700's, but they were not able to take it.

In 726 the emperor Leo the Isaurian, perhaps influenced by Islam, ordered the destruction of religious icons, which he thought were being worshiped instead of God. This sparked a major fight between *iconoclasts*, like Leo, and *iconophiles*, who were against destroying icons. The iconoclasm controversy almost tore the empire apart, and deepened the rift between the churches in Constantinople and in Rome. The western church denounced iconoclasm, and western popes began to ally themselves with the Franks instead of the Byzantines. Though the iconoclast policy was finally abandoned in 842, the two halves of Europe would continue to drift apart. The split between the churches deepened as each struggled to convert the Slavs and Bulgarians to their brand of Christianity. The northeastern Slavs were eventually converted to the Roman church, while the Balkan and Russian Slavs and the Bulgarians were converted to the eastern church. Finally, in 1054, a dispute over the authority of the pope led to the formal split between the two churches, into what can henceforth be called the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox branches.

The Byzantine Empire flourished between the mid-800's and the mid-1000's. Under the effective emperors of the Macedonian Dynasty, arts and learning were strongly supported, legal codes were revised, and borders expanded. In the late 1000's however, the empire lost the support of free peasants, who served as soldiers as well as farmers, and were thus the backbone of the empire. Inflation and increasing tax burdens caused many of the peasants to escape taxation by selling themselves into serfdom or by joining monasteries. This left the empire without an effective army. In 1071, Normans took southern Italy, while Seljuk Turks began expanding into Anatolia. The first crusade beat back the Turks to some extent, but in the fourth crusade the crusaders captured Constantinople. It was retaken in 1261, but by then the Balkans had been lost to the Serbs, while Anatolia was mostly lost to the Ottoman Turks. The Byzantine Empire had been reduced to a small region around the capital. Constantinople itself finally fell

to the Ottomans in 1453. Renamed Istanbul, it became the capital of the powerful Ottoman Empire.

THE SLAVS

Besides the Greek, Romance, Germanic, and Celtic language families, the other Indo-European language groups in Europe are Albanian, Baltic, and Slavic. Of these last three, Slavic is the most widespread. This is because the Slavic peoples, in great migrations of the late 400's, spread from their homeland, around what is now the border of Poland and Ukraine, throughout Eastern Europe. As time went by, they divided into three main groups: the Western Slavs, including Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles; the Southern Slavs, including Macedonians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and Bulgarians (who are also descended from the nomadic Asian Bulgars who migrated into Europe in the 600's); and the East Slavs, including Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians. Many Slavs united to form the Great Moravian Empire in the 800's, but this empire fell to the Magyars in 907. Afterward, Slavic peoples were influenced or dominated by a succession of other peoples. The Byzantine brothers Cyril and Methodius influenced the Slavs by converting many to Christianity, and by developing an alphabet for writing Slavic languages, which came to be called Cyrillic. Eventually, the West Slavs came under the influence of Germanic states, and most converted to Catholicism. The Southern Slavs converted to Eastern Orthodoxy. After the Balkans were conquered by the Ottoman Empire, beginning in the 1300's, some South Slavs converted to Islam.

The East Slavs, particularly the Russians, would have the greatest impact on world history. According to the Primary Chronicle, a record of early Russian history, Slavic peoples established trading towns in northeastern Europe, east of the Baltic Sea. The Chronicle states that the feuding Slavs asked a group of Vikings, called Varangian Russes, to rule them, and that this is the origin of the name Russia. Many historians think it more likely that the Vikings invaded without being asked. In any case, they did rule over the East Slavs until, like the Normans in France and the Danes in England, they were assimilated into the local culture. The Varangian ruler Oleg established his capital at Kiev, on the Dnieper River, a strategic point on the river routes between the Baltic regions, the Black Sea, and the Byzantine empire. The state that formed around Kiev was called Kievan Rus. This was a loose association of principalities governed by princes, who recognized the ruler in Kiev as the Grand Prince. In the late 900's

grand prince Vladimir, after sending emissaries to research organized religions, converted to the eastern Christian church and married the sister of the Byzantine Empire. Thereafter, Russian history was strongly influenced by Byzantine culture. The Byzantine Empire began to decline soon after, however. This weakened the Kievan economy, and Kievan Rus was fragmenting into independent principalities by the late 1000's. In 1240, Kiev was destroyed by the Mongols, and the Russian states became Mongol tributaries.

THE FAR EAST

CHINA

THE SUI AND TANG DYNASTIES

After the fall of the Han Dynasty in 220 CE, China was a patchwork of small states for three centuries. The south stayed fairly stable and prosperous, but the north was constantly roiled by steppe conquerors, many of whom created small states run by Chinese bureaucrats. Eventually, these peoples were assimilated into Chinese culture. So was Buddhism, which spread widely during this period. China was eventually united again under the emperor Wen, who established the Sui dynasty. In the tradition of Shi Huangdi, Wen was a tough frontier warrior who imposed strict order on the newly united empire. He redistributed land to peasants, built granaries to guard against famine, and started work on the Grand Canal, which would connect the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. Also like Shihuangdi, Wen's dynasty would be short-lived. His successor, Yang, squandered state funds, while a losing war with the Koguryo kingdom of Korea resulted in a peasant revolt. .

Yang was overthrown by Li Yuan, who established the Tang dynasty in 618. From 618 to 756, the Tang Dynasty expanded its borders enormously, organized its administration into a well-run hierarchy, and presided over a period of prosperity and creativity. This period saw the remarkable rise of Empress Wu, the only woman to rule China. Wu had been a concubine of the second and third Tang emperors. She was the real ruler of China during the last two decades of the third emperor's life, and in 690, at the age of 65, she took the throne herself, and then continued to rule for 15 years. Under Empress Wu, Korea was conquered, and the examination-

based civil service was greatly expanded. However, later Chinese historians held her in low esteem. It's true that she gained power by poisoning, torturing, and otherwise disposing of her rivals, and, as male historians like to emphasize, she was sexually voracious. But these things are also true of many of the more ruthless male rulers in history, whose excesses are usually passed over with little comment. In any case, Tang China reached its peak during the reign of Hsuan-tsung, which lasted from 713 to 756. This period ended with a rebellion under An Lu-shan. Though the rebellion was put down, the effective government of Tang China never recovered. Land began to accumulate in the hands of the wealthy, revenues fell, and administration fell apart. Buddhists and foreigners became scapegoats, and were persecuted. The steadily weakening Tang dynasty was finally overthrown in 907, bringing on a half-century of chaos.

During the early Tang Dynasty, China was arguably the most powerful and sophisticated society in the world. Agricultural productivity was rising, as were populations. Chinese control of most of the Silk Road facilitated trade. New goods from China included paper, tea, and porcelain. Block printing and moveable type emerged during this period, though moveable type was not terribly useful without an alphabet (it would revolutionize Europe). These innovations did foster widespread literacy and scholarship. Historians achieved great things, as did poets such as Li Po, perhaps the greatest Chinese poet. The arts combined a humanistic emphasis on earthly pleasures with an intense reverence for nature, which is most visible in the gorgeous landscape paintings of the time.

THE SONG DYNASTY

The Song Dynasty was established by northern military leaders in 960. Strangely, however, the military men of the early Song dynasty soon gave way to traditional scholar-bureaucrats, and the focus of government turned to internal order and growth. Defense was de-emphasized. Considering that nomads from the steppes were always on the *offensive*, this was a mistake. The Song Dynasty was made to pay tribute to the Khitan Mongols, until they were defeated by the Jurchens, from Manchuria, in the early 1100's. The Jurchens went on to take the northern half of China, establishing the Chin Empire. The Jurchens liked the Mongol policy of demanding tribute and subordination from the Song emperors, and reinstated it in 1141.

Meanwhile, improvements in rice agriculture and seafaring in the South Seas had made southern China more prosperous than northern China. Many in the south grew wealthy, and found ways avoid taxes. A combination of tax evasion, heavy tribute to the Chin Empire, and ineffective rulers sent Song China into a decline (which seems to eventually beset all Chinese dynasties after their early success). In 1279, Song China became part of the vast Mongol empire.

The Song period was a creative one, however, supplying many innovations that would one day transform the world (for better and for worse) such as the stern post rudder for oceangoing ships, the magnetic compass, paper money (which later astounded Marco Polo), and gunpowder projectiles. Since the late Tang dynasty, the dominant Confucianism ideology had been at odds with Taoism and Buddhism. This tension was alleviated when all three traditions were synthesized in the philosophy of *Neo-Confucianism*. The most important Neo-Confucian, Chu Hsi, incorporated Taoist ideas of spontaneous order and Buddhist forms of contemplation, into a Confucian framework which still emphasized the need for tradition and decorum. Like Aquinas in the west, Chu Hsi offered a synthesis of separate worldviews that was found acceptable by many. Unlike Aquinas, however, Chu Hsi's synthesis would inform state policy until the twentieth century. Also unlike Aquinas, Chu Hsi emphasized careful observation of the world. This attitude advanced science and technology, and gave the arts a secular, realistic feel very different from contemporary art in the west.

NEW STATES IN EAST ASIA

KOREA

Independent states (or perhaps large chiefdoms) had developed in the Korean peninsula in the first millennium BCE, but little is known about them. Korean history becomes clearer after 108 BCE, when the Chinese under the Han emperor Wu Ti conquered the northern part of the peninsula. Most of this territory was won back by 75 BCE. Afterward, three independent kingdoms arose in Korea—Koguryo in the north, Paekche in the southwest, and Silla in the southeast. These are called, straightforwardly enough, the Three Kingdoms. Buddhism entered Korea and became the dominant religion in the 300's and 400's. Buddhist or not, the Three Kingdoms fought amongst themselves until the 660's, when Silla, with the help of the Tang

Dynasty in China, conquered Paekche and southern Koguryo. Northern Koguryo soon reconsolidated into a state called Parhae. Both Silla and Parhae modeled themselves on Tang China, and Confucian ideas became influential. While China was moving away from Buddhism to some extent, Korea embraced it. This, and the distinctive Korean language and style of writing, helped maintain Korea's cultural independence from China. Silla broke up in the 800's, but was reunited in the early 900's under Wang Kon, who established the Koryo dynasty (which is where the name Korea comes from). Parhae was overrun by the Khitans in the early 900's, though Koreans won back some territory by the 1100's. The Koryo kingdom flourished until 1259, when it fell to, you guessed it, the Mongols.

JAPAN

Like Korea, Japan was strongly influenced by Tang China. Being an island chain, however, Japan was always sheltered from outside influences. It was close enough to accept what it wanted from the older societies of the mainland, but relatively free from the constant threat of invasion. The origins of the Japanese people are a bit mysterious. People have been living in Japan for at least 30,000 years. The hunter-gatherers of the so-called Jomon period of Japanese prehistory produced some of the world's first pottery, around 10,000 BCE. Rice arrived in Japan around 1500 BCE, and intensive rice paddy cultivation was introduced by immigrants from Korea around 400 BCE, which marks the transition from the Jomon period to the Yayoi period. The immigrants mixed with the original inhabitants to produce Japan's predominant ethnic group, with its Altaic language (related to Korean and Mongolian). They also displaced the original inhabitants, whose descendants are the Ainu of the northern island of Hokkaido. The Ainu are a mysterious people whose language and genetics are not clearly related to other peoples. They have the epicanthic folds of other East Asian peoples, but the men have thick beards, more like westerners.

Japanese society of the Yayoi period was organized into clans, each of which claimed common descent from a deity. Like many early agricultural societies, the Japanese combined ancestor worship with the worship of nature deities; many of them female. Beginning around 300 CE, various clans in southern Japan began to struggle for power. Leaders came to be treated almost like gods, and were buried in enormous earthen tombs called *kofun*. The largest of these,

the Daisen tomb in Osaka, is almost half a kilometer wide. In time, leaders from the Yamato region, in southern Honshu, gained wide influence and began to refer to themselves as “great kings”. The modern imperial family of Japan traces its lineage back to the Yamato kings, who, in turn, claimed to trace their ancestry to Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. This period, from 300 CE to 710, is called the Kofun, or Yamato, period.

Buddhism and Confucianism began to arrive in Japan, by way of Korea, in the 500's. Both became influential, and their arrival caused the native religion of Japan to coalesce into a distinct tradition known as Shinto. In the mid-600's, in what became known as the Taika reforms, Japanese rulers began to establish a centralized state modeled on China. The Yamato ruler was proclaimed “heavenly emperor”, and new tax and legal codes were initiated. The emulation of China only went so far, though. The power and clannishness of the Japanese landed nobility prevented the establishment of an examination-based bureaucracy. The emperor was also forced to grant tax exempt status to many large estates owned by the nobility, or by Buddhist monasteries. This would greatly weaken the emperor’s power in later times. Still, much of Japan was more or less unified under a single government, and the constant war of earlier times began to diminish. A new capital was constructed at Nara in 710, modeled on the Chinese capital Ch’ang-an.

In 794, the capital was moved to Heian (modern Kyoto), and the period from 794 to 1185 is thus called the Heian Period. During this time, the imperial court developed an extremely refined culture by supporting artists, architects, and writers. Japanese men wrote using Chinese text, which was unwieldy for rendering Japanese (a very different language). Women, on the other hand, wrote in a distinctive Japanese text, which allowed a greater depth of expression. Thus many of the greatest writers were women. *The Tale of Genji*, a portrait of the Heian court written by Lady Murasaki, is considered one of the world’s first novels. As the Heian period progressed, the imperial family increasingly came under the influence of the Fujiwari clan, who began to wield the real power behind the throne. In time the Fujiwari clan’s power began to diminish as well, trickling into the hands of warlords in the provinces.

By the 1100's, a feudal hierarchy had developed among aristocratic warriors called *samurai*. More powerful samurai would grant land to less powerful samurai, in return for pledges of support. As among the knights of Western Europe around the same time, a code of honor developed among the samurai, emphasizing honor, bravery, and loyalty. The Japanese

version, known as Bushido, was strongly influenced by Buddhism, especially the Zen style, which emphasized a blend of asceticism, self-control and effortless power that the Samurai found very appealing. In the 1100's, the Fujiwaras lost all their power to competing nobles. Yoritomo, of the Minamoto clan, rose to power in 1185, taking the title of *Shogun*, or “supreme commander”. This established the so-called Kamakura Shogunate. But Japan was not really a unified state. In fact, it would be an increasingly fragmented, feudal society for the next few hundred years. Centralized power, such as it was, was in the hands of the shoguns, while the emperors remained as revered, but powerless, figureheads.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia (including peninsular Southeast Asia and the islands of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines) has always been one of the world's most diverse regions, with a complex history that is hard to say anything succinct about. The region is home to a wide range of ethnic groups. The original inhabitants of Southeast Asia, as we have seen, may have been small, dark-skinned, curly-haired people, remnant groups of whom include the Negritos of Malaysia and the Phillipines, as well as the Andaman islanders. More recent migrants to Southeast Asia are also a diverse group. The Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and southern Vietnam were colonized by the Austronesian peoples during the first stages of their great oceanic migration. On the mainland, more recent arrivals include Mons, Kmers, Vietnamese, Pyus, Laos, Burmese, and Tais. These diverse groups represent several entirely different language families (though many of them originated in Tibet and south China).

Three great river systems drain Southeast Asia—the Irrawaddy of Myanmar (Burma), the Mekong of Laos, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam, and the Red of northern Vietnam. Rice farming had spread to these river valleys by 2000 BCE. Bronze working developed by 1500 BCE, and iron arrived by 500 BC, probably through emerging trade contacts with India. By the early Iron Age, populations had risen and societies were becoming more complex and competitive. Some grave sites from the time are far more richly appointed than others, and some human remains show clear signs of a violent death. Chiefdoms and small states first arose along the Red river around 1000 BCE. The Dong Son culture of this area is known for its elaborate bronze drums. But its distinctiveness would not last, as the Red river region was conquered by

the Han Dynasty in 111 BCE. Thereafter, Vietnam would always be strongly influenced by Chinese culture.

The rest of Southeast Asia would be more influenced by Indian culture. On the coasts, a multi-ethnic group of maritime traders arose, using the alternating monsoon winds to sail to India. Buddhist and Hindu ideas and images thus spread into Southeast Asia in the first centuries CE. By this time, the region was divided into small kingdoms, whose boundaries were constantly expanding and contracting, as kings claiming to be Buddhist or Hindu deities struggled for territory. Some of these kingdoms grew large. They centered around spectacular temples, combining elements of Buddhism and Hinduism into a distinctive Southeast Asian style. The Khmer kingdom of Angkor was the most impressive. At its capital, in what is now Cambodia, still sits the enormous temple of Angkor Wat. A monument to Vishnu, the temple is an architectural representation of the Khmer view of the Hindu universe. Measuring 1500 meters wide it is the largest religious monument in the world.

The Angkor kingdom lasted from the 800's to the 1400's, when, weakened by costly building projects like Angkor Wat, it fell to Tai peoples. Other Southeast Asian kingdoms of the era included the Burmese kingdom of Pagan, the Austronesian kingdom of Champa in southern Vietnam, and the Dai Viet kingdom of northern Vietnam, which became independent from China in the 900's. In the islands to the south, the empire of Srivajaya controlled the sea trade from the 600's to the 1200's. By the 1400's, most of these early kingdoms had fallen. In mainland Southeast Asia, new kingdoms mostly adopted Theravada Buddhism. In the islands, the Srivajaya Empire gave way to the Malaka Empire of the Malay Peninsula. Under the influence of Muslim seafarers, this area eventually converted to Islam. Today, mainland Southeast Asia is still mainly Theravada Buddhist, while Malaysia and Indonesia are mainly Muslim. Only on the island of Bali does Hinduism still survive, in a beautifully distinctive form.

THE MONGOL EMPIRE

In 1206, the previously scattered and feuding Mongol tribes of the wide grasslands north of China's walls proclaimed a man named Temujin to be *Genghis Khan*—the “universal ruler”. Temujin took this title seriously, and he set out to make it a reality. He had turned the Mongols into a formidable army by disregarding hereditary status and organizing his fighters by ability

and experience. Ambitious men could go far in the Mongol army, and the Mongols were as ambitious as they were ruthless. By Genghis Khan's death in 1227, they had conquered most of the steppe lands of central Asia, from the Caspian Sea to the Sea of Japan. The conquered peoples, mostly Turks, were incorporated into the Mongol armies, until actual Mongols were a ruling minority. Under Genghis Khan's son Ogedai, the growing armies conquered the Chin Empire of northern China and dominated the Russian states. They were invading Eastern Europe when Ogedai died, forcing them to return to Mongolia to choose a new khan. Under Mongke, Genghis' grandson, the Mongol armies conquered Tibet, Korea, Persia, and Mesopotamia, where they killed the last of the Abbasid Caliphs in 1258.

The Mongols were finally turned back by the Mamlukes of Egypt in 1260, just after the end of Mongke's reign. It was their first defeat, but it destroyed their perceived invincibility. Afterward, various factions struggled for the khanate. Another of Genghis' grandsons, Kublai Khan, gained the title of Great Khan in 1260. In 1264, the empire broke up into four parts, which Kublai ruled mostly in name. The Khanate of the Golden Horde ruled the northwestern empire, the Ilkhanate ruled Persia and Mesopotamia, and the Chagatai Khanate ruled central Asia. Kublai's Great Khanate encompassed the Mongolian heartland, but it expanded when Kublai conquered the Song dynasty of southern China in 1279, establishing the Yuan Dynasty. The Burmese kingdom of Pagan was conquered in 1287. Kublai finally reached his limits when he tried to extend his empire past the mainland, launching invasions of Japan and Java which went disastrously. By Kublai's time, the huge Mongol empire, the largest land empire the world had ever seen, was breaking up. The Mongol armies in the west, which were composed mainly of Turks anyway, began to convert to Islam. The Ilkhanate had broken up by 1350 (though it was briefly revived by Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane). The Chagatai Khanate and the Khanate of the Golden Horde lasted into the late 1400's. The Golden Horde fell apart after the expanding Russian principality of Moscow refused to pay tribute in 1478. In the east, the Yuan dynasty of Kublai Khan lasted until 1368, when it was overthrown by the Ming dynasty.

The Mongol conquests, especially in their early days, were among the most vicious ever, and the killing and torturing of entire populations of cities was not uncommon. Under the Mongols, populations declined in China and the Muslim heartlands, while the destruction of the Mesopotamian irrigation system devastated agriculture there for centuries. Kublai Khan was a bit more benevolent than his predecessors, and ran an orderly, if harsh, regime in China.

Eurasian trade, however, was invigorated under the Mongols. Muslim control over the trade routes was broken, and travelers, goods, and ideas crossed the continent more freely than before. Kublai Khan, who did not trust the traditional Chinese bureaucrats to run his empire, relied on a diverse group of literate people (such as Marco Polo) from all over the known world, making his court one of the most cosmopolitan yet known. Not subscribing to any particular religious tradition, he was tolerant of all, and Christianity and Islam gained converts in China during his reign. All in all, however, the most sophisticated societies of the world—China and the Islamic lands—suffered greatly under Mongol rule. Western Europe, on the other hand, which was too distant and forested to be threatened by the Mongols, actually benefitted; both from the decline of more sophisticated societies and from increased contact with them. Printing, gunpowder, and navigational skills all arrived in Europe during the Mongol era, along with stories of the wealthy and fabulous east.

THE NEW WORLD: THE LAST YEARS OF ISOLATION

THE POST-CLASSIC PERIOD IN MESOAMERICA

After the fall of Teotihuacan, people from the north began to migrate into its former lands. One of these groups was the Toltecs, who settled to the north of the valley of Mexico in the city of Tula. After 900, a small Toltec empire was expanding through the valley of Mexico. In the Yucatan peninsula, some groups of Maya had established a dominant city at Chichen-Itza. Around 1000, however, Chichen Itza was conquered by Toltecs from the west. They would rule much of the Yucatan from Chichen Itza until 1221, when they were conquered by the rising Mayan city of Mayopan. The rulers of Mayopan were dominant for 200 years, but the Yucatan fragmented into rival states during the late 1400's. In the west, the Toltec empire fell to rival peoples in 1168, and fragmented into several competing city-states.

Around 1200, a people called the Mexica moved into the valley of Mexico. These warlike folk claimed to be from a mythical place to the northwest called Aztlan, so they also came to be known as Aztecs. The Aztecs settled at Tenochtitlan, on an island in Lake Texcoco. Various city-states around the lake were struggling for dominance, and the Aztecs became mercenaries for the city of Azcapotzalco. Soon they formed an alliance with two other cities,

Texcoco and Tlacopan, and then turned on and defeated Azcapotzalco. The alliance began to expand, and came to dominate the other cities of the valley. By 1500 it controlled an empire, known as the Aztec Empire, which stretched from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico. The Aztecs, some of history's harshest rulers, dominated other peoples through war and terror. Many wars were fought for the sole purpose of capturing prisoners to be sacrificed by having their hearts cut out. Their blood was thought to appease the sun god, although a more measurable effect was that the sacrifices drained rival peoples of their warriors. Needless to say, many subject peoples resented Aztec rule, and were looking for ways to end it.

THE LAST ANDEAN STATES

The Middle Horizon saw the rise of two large empires that together spanned most of the Andean cultural area. The Tiwanaku empire began around Lake Titicaca, at 12,600 feet above sea level, and expanded far to the south between 500 and 600 CE. The Huari Empire also began not far from Lake Titicaca, but it expanded to the north. Both empires had mysteriously collapsed by 1000. The power vacuum that followed marked the beginning of the Late Intermediate period. For 200 years, small states dotted the coasts and mountains. In 1200, the Chimu state began to expand from its home city of Chan Chan in the Moche Valley. By the mid-1400's it controlled an empire stretching for 1000 kilometers along the northern coast. By 1470, it had fallen to a new imperial power—the Incas.

The Inca Empire was huge, well-organized, and short-lived. An Inca state had existed near Cuzco since the early 1200's, but it remained small. Imperial expansion began with the ascent of the ruler Pachacutec in 1438. Under Pachacutec, his son Tupac Yupanqui, and his grandson Huayna Capac, the Inca realm expanded explosively, from a small state north of Lake Titicaca to an empire stretching 4000 miles along the dry coasts and towering mountains of western South America. The Incas had a rather more sophisticated approach than the brute force and terror of the Aztecs. In many ways, they were like the Romans—quite ready to use force to gain and control new lands, but also effective administrators who left many local institutions in place. Like the Romans, they promoted a vision of the empire as a source of unity and order. They also constructed a vast road system and well-designed public buildings. The Inca did not

tax in goods, but in labor. Subject peoples spent a good part of the year working for the state; constructing public works, serving in the army, and tending fields set aside for state use.

Amazingly, this vast territory was run with no transportation faster than human runners, and no system of writing. Record keepers used an ingenious system based on tying knots in bundles of string called *quipu*. The empire was controlled by an administrative hierarchy whose top ranks reported directly to the emperor. This system worked quite well under Pachacutec and his first heirs, simply because they were extremely effective rulers. In 1525, however, Huayna Capac died from a new disease—smallpox—which swept down from Central America. Huayna Capac's sons, Atahualpa and Huascar, fought for the throne, resulting in a terrible civil war that further weakened the empire. Atahualpa finally defeated his brother's forces in 1532. But his victory was short lived. That same year, he would meet a new and devastating enemy, as terrible as the diseases that had heralded their arrival.