CHAPTER 9

Civilization in Eastern Europe: Byzantium and Orthodox Europe

The Byzantine Empire

- Constantine built Constantinople as his capital in the 4th century, and the city became the capital of the Byzantine Empire when the Roman Empire split. Complex administration around a remote emperor, who was surrounded by elaborate ceremonies, increasingly defined the empire's political style. Eventually Greek became the empire's official language.

- Justinian's positive contributions to the Byzantine Empire lay in rebuilding Constantinople, including the remarkable Hagia Sophia, and systematizing the Roman legal code. His 6th-century military gains (made with the help of his general, Belisarius) were accomplished at great cost.

- Justinian's successors were able to hold off Arab invaders from the east ("Greek fire" was instrumental in this process), but the empire's size and strength was greatly reduced. The empire also successfully defeated challenges from Bulgaria.

- The Byzantine political system had remarkable similarities to the earlier patterns in China. The emperor was held to be ordained by God, head of church as well as state. Women could (and did) serve as emperor. An elaborate bureaucracy organized the empire militarily, socially, and economically, while cultural life blended Hellenism and Orthodox Christianity.

- In 1054 longstanding disagreements came to a head, and the church split into two traditions: one Western (or Roman Catholic), and one Eastern (or Orthodox).

- The Byzantine Empire entered a long period of decline following the church schism. It was able to survive by careful diplomacy until Turks overran Constantinople in 1453.

The Spread of Civilization in Eastern Europe

- Christian missionaries like Cyril and Methodius helped bring Orthodoxy northward into Russia and the Balkans, and created a new alphabet, Cyrillic.

- Roman Catholicism also competed for converts in eastern Europe. Jews, who valued education and literacy, migrated into the region in large numbers, gaining strength in local commerce.
Kievan Rus', which began along the trade route between Scandinavia and Constantinople, gained influence and power after Vladimir converted to Orthodox Christianity around 1000. The state soon developed its own Russian Orthodox Church, and Yaroslav issued a unifying code of laws.

- Russian culture borrowed much from Byzantium, though the bureaucracy and education system were not as developed. Boyars, the Russian nobility, were less powerful than their western counterparts.

- Mongol invasions (the Tartars), aided by rival princes and the fall of the Byzantine Empire, ended this period of Russian history.

- This cut the region off from western contacts, stifling economic, political, and cultural sophistication.

**Multiple-Choice Questions**
A New Civilization Emerges in Western Europe

Stages of Postclassical Development

- The postclassical West suffered from several key problems, including the political fragmentation of Italy, the Muslim conquest of Spain, Viking raids, and a decline in intellectual life.
- Effective political organization was usually local, and manorialism created an oppressive system of political and economic organization between landlords and peasants, many of whom were serfs. The moldboard and three-field system gradually improved agriculture.
- The Christian church was the most organized institution in western Europe. It had a relatively clear hierarchy and established a chain of monasteries. Clovis’s conversion to Christianity helped him gain power over the Franks.
- Charlemagne established a substantial empire in France and Germany around the year 800, but his empire did not survive his death as Europe split increasingly into regional monarchies.
- Agricultural advances, population increases, and growing towns helped breathe economic and cultural vitality into Europe after 900.
- The key military and political system in the Middle Ages was feudalism, a system in which greater lords provided protection and aid to lesser lords, called vassals; vassals, in turn, owed their lords military service, some goods or payments, and advice. The introduction of feudal monarchy generally took time, though William the Conqueror introduced feudal monarchy to England following his invasion in 1066.
- Feudal lords cut into aristocratic power. In 1215 noblemen forced King John to sign the Magna Carta, and parliaments served as further checks on royal authority.
- Western Europe’s expansionist impulse led to the conquest of Spain, the first European steps in the Americas, and (spurred on by pope Urban II) the Crusades. Though the Crusades ultimately ended in defeat, they opened western Europe’s eyes to new possibilities, particularly for trade.
- Several important reforms impacted the church, including those advocated by the Franciscans, the Order of Saint Clare, and pope Gregory VII. The investiture controversy helped give the church power over monarchies.
- Several key creative tensions characterized the High Middle Ages.
Western Culture in the Post-Classic Era

- Theologians like Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas helped to assimilate Greek philosophical ideas into the Catholic religious tradition. Bernard of Clairvaux opposed this process, but ultimately scholasticism prevailed.
- Though some pagan traditions continued, Christian devotion among lay people increased.
- Medieval architecture, literature, and art reflected religious themes. Gothic cathedrals rose up around western Europe.

Changing Economic and Social Forms in the Post-Classic Centuries

- Economic activity and social structure developed innovative common features around western Europe, and the region became a growing commercial zone.
- Peasants gained more freedom with agricultural advances.
- Urban growth allowed more specialized manufacturing and commercial activities, which, in turn, promoted still greater trade. The Hanseatic League is perhaps the best example of cities working together for mutual economic benefit. Guilds grouped people in the same business or trade in a single city, stressing security and mutual control.
- Men placed new limits on the condition of women, and patriarchal structures seemed to be taking deeper root.

The Decline of the Medieval Synthesis

- The devastation and antifeudal innovations of the 14th century's Hundred Years War suggested that change was at hand. Agricultural resources could no longer sustain increasing population, and devastating plagues like the Black Death swept Europe. The growth of professional armies shook the authority of feudal lords, who turned to a ceremonial style of life. A series of controversies over papal authority distanced the church from everyday devotion. Intellectual and artistic life gradually moved out from under Church influence.
- The legacy of the Medieval period includes academic institutions, political ideas, and a marked change in the relationship between the West and the regions around it.
CHAPTER 11

The Americas on the Eve of Invasion

Postclassical Mesoamerica, 1000–1500 C.E.

- After the collapse of Teotihuacán, the Toltecs moved into the political power vacuum and established a culture with a strong military ethic and a cult of human sacrifice and war.
- Toltec influence spread over much of central Mexico. The legend of Topiltzin/Quetzalcoatl, which claimed that a Toltec faction would one day return and claim the throne, was well known to the Aztecs (successors to the Toltecs) and may have influenced their response when the Europeans arrived.
- The Aztecs gained control of the important Lake Texcoco region in the post-Toltec era, and made their capital at Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs had a reputation as tough warriors and fanatical followers of their gods.
- By the time of Moctezuma II, the Aztec state was dominated by a king who represented civil power and served as a representative of the gods on earth. The cult of human sacrifice and conquest was united with the political power of the ruler and the nobility.
- Aztec religion, which incorporated many traditional Mesoamerican elements, was a vast, uniting, and sometimes, oppressive force in which little distinction was made between the world of the gods and the natural world. Major deities included Tlaloc, god of rain, and Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec tribal god. Nezahualcoyotl, an Aztec king and poet, promoted a kind of monotheism, but the idea did not last. Human sacrifice increased considerably.
- To feed their people, the Aztecs used an ingenious and successful system of irrigated agriculture highlighted by chinampas (beds of aquatic weeds, mud, and earth that had been placed in frames made of cane and rooted to the lake floor). A special merchant class, the pochteca, regulated markets, and the state oversaw a vast tribute network.

Aztec Society in Transition

- As the empire grew, a new social hierarchy replaced the old calpulli (kinship-based clan) system of social organization.
- The rights of Aztec women seem to have been fully recognized, but in political and social life their role, though complementary to that of men, remained subordinate. Lack of technology meant women were required to spend significant time hand-grinding maize, a staple crop. The area controlled by the Aztecs may have included 20 million people.
Each city-state was ruled by a speaker chosen from the nobility. In many ways, the Aztec Empire was not unlike the subject city-states over which it gained control. These city-states, in turn, were often left unchanged if they recognized Aztec supremacy and met their obligations.

**Twantinsuyu: World of the Incas**

- With a genius for state organization and bureaucratic control over peoples of different cultures and languages, the Incas achieved a level of integration and domination previously unknown in the Americas.
- The coastal empire of Chimor preceded the Incas. With the help of their leader, Pachacuti, and his successors, Twantinsuyu (the Incan Empire) spread from modern-day Columbia to northern Argentina.
- The Incas adopted the practice of royal split inheritance, which required new land and wealth. This may have caused the empire’s growth. The Temple of the Sun at Cuzco was the center of Incan religious life.
- The Incas developed a state bureaucracy, headed by an inca and four regional governors (who, in turn, divided their realms). They spread their language, Quechua, used colonists, and built extensive road networks (dotted with tambos, or way stations) to encourage unity. The empire also demanded mita, mandatory labor on church and state lands. Andean people practiced parallel descent. In addition to local ayllus (clans), a class of yanas (people living outside their ayllu) provided important service. Though the empire was a masterpiece of statecraft, a system of royal multiple marriages as a way of forging alliances created rival claimants for power and the possibility of civil war on the eve of the Spanish invasion.
- Incan cultural achievements included beautiful pottery, art, and metalworking, the quipu (a system of knotted strings for recording numerical information), land and water management, extensive road system, statecraft, and architecture.
- The Incan and Aztec empires are best viewed as variations of similar patterns and processes, of which sedentary agriculture is the most important. Basic similarities underlying the variations can also be seen in systems of belief and cosmology and in social structure.

**The Other Indians**

- The diversity of ancient America forces us to reconsider ideas of human development based on Old World examples.
- Population figures are difficult to pin down, but in 1500 the Americas may have had roughly the same number of inhabitants as Europe (between 57–72 million people).
- Chieftainships based on sedentary agriculture could be found outside the major American empires. Cultural diversity was particularly great in North America. Most American societies (outside the Incas and Aztecs) were strongly kin-based, unlike in Europe and Asia.
- The Americas contained a broad range of societies, from great civilizations with millions of people to small bands of hunters. In many of these societies, religion played a dominant role in defining the relationship between people and their environment and between the individual and society.